

**CHARACTER EDUCATION THROUGH STORIES: AN
EXAMINATION OF PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHERS'
PERCEPTIONS OF, AND APPROACHES TO, STORY-
BASED CHARACTER EDUCATION**

by

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ABSTRACT

Stories have long been used as a vehicle to teach about character and virtue. Insight into the efficacy and potential of stories for this purpose can be gained through reviewing historical and theoretical approaches together with research studies which have explored children's cognitive and behavioural outcomes, virtue literacy development, and the factors that may influence their learning. However, while historical and contemporary theory and research on this topic can be illuminating, there has been a notable absence of research into the perceptions and approaches of those who arguably have the best understanding of children's learning: classroom teachers. This thesis contributes to existing knowledge in the field through filling this void in the research literature and examining how, and the extent to which, primary school teachers in England *value* and *use* stories as a vehicle to teach character education. First, the existing theory and research relating to story-based character education is examined. The rationale, methodology and findings of the research study are then presented, the findings are interpreted, and the implications for the theory and practice of story-based character are discussed.

The research study followed a quasi-mixed design in which there were two strands running sequentially. In strand one, predominantly quantitative data were collected through a survey which was administered to primary school teachers online ($N=220$). In strand two, qualitative data were collected through one-to-one semi-structured interviews with primary school teachers ($n=15$). The research findings offer new insight by indicating how primary school teachers value and use stories as a vehicle for teaching character education, and how teachers' perceptions and approaches align with those documented in the existing literature. As such, the findings highlight areas of current practice that corroborate, but also add qualification to and extend, existing knowledge in the field.

Primary school teachers in this study were found to highly value stories as a vehicle through which to teach character education. Notably, stories were highlighted as the *main* and *most useful* vehicle that primary school teachers have to develop the character of their pupils. The findings also reveal that primary school teachers seek to facilitate pupils' learning from short

stories through questioning, discussion, and other reading-related activities. While some of the approaches used by primary school teachers appear to overlap with those documented in the existing literature, the story types used in primary schools differ from the story types advocated in some research-informed and contemporary approaches. Primary school teachers utilise short, simplistic stories and some appear to refrain from using religious stories and more detailed narratives. As a result, it is contended that opportunities to develop capacities associated with the moral imagination and virtue literacy, such as the ability of pupils to deliberate and reason about competing virtues in story and real-life contexts, may be missed.

The findings also indicate that very few primary school teachers have received training in using stories to teach character education, despite the majority reporting that they use stories for this purpose at least once a week. While the findings indicate that primary school teachers are conscious of some of the factors that have previously been found to influence children's learning from stories, such as the age of story characters and similarity of story contexts to pupils' lives, the potential detrimental effects of fantastical story content are not acknowledged to the same extent. These findings have implications for the future training and development of primary school teachers; there appears to be a need for professional development in the use of stories to teach character education and related areas in schools. There may be potential to enhance practice through engagement with the existing theory and research literature which points to the value of using rich story characters and contexts as a basis for developing virtue reasoning and deliberation.

Furthermore, the findings indicate that despite the high value attributed to stories for teaching character education, primary school teachers have limited time to carry this out in practice due to the perceived demands of the wider curriculum. The potential value of story-based character education as a means through which to help to develop the character and personal development of pupils may be constrained as a result.

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INTRODUCTION

1. Context of the Thesis

A story is a written or oral form of narrative such as a story book, biographical account or oral retelling which depicts events or conveys a message or sentiment. Although stories are often praised for their power to engage and amuse readers, their utility does not lie solely with entertainment. Stories have long been used for the purpose of education. It is generally agreed that one of the most important functions of stories is to influence the behaviour of younger generations by teaching them, or at least conveying to them, the morals and values of their parents and communities that are conducive to living well with others (Larsen, Lee and Ganea, 2017; Palmer *et al.*, 2006; Vitz, 1990; Winston, 2000). In this way, stories play a prominent role in the formation of character – the subset of personality which distinguishes individuals from one another, informs how they think and feel, and can be seen in their reasoning, as well as in their actions (Arthur, 2020; Jubilee Centre, 2022; Kristjánsson, 2015). Children’s stories are also viewed as a practical and potentially powerful vehicle for teaching character education – a means or resource through which character education can be taught. Stories hold much potential for teaching character education as they are considered relevant to the lives of children and are available in abundance (Bennett, 1993; Edgington, 2002). Although stories are not considered a substitute for real life experience, it is held that they ‘have the great capacity to shape our moral constitution’ (Guroian, 1998, p. 38) over and above forms of instruction. Given the historical unanimity in the use of stories for influencing character development, stories are considered to have ‘substantial educational utility’ (Vitz, 1990, p. 717).

In primary schools in England, stories feature in a substantial proportion of the curriculum. For example, the National Curriculum statutory guidance for English in Key Stage One and Two includes the teaching of traditional tales, fairy tales, myths and legends, fiction from our literary heritage, and books from other cultures and traditions (DfE, 2013). However, the time and space given to reading in school appears to be becoming increasingly important; the number of young children in the UK who read outside of the classroom has declined dramatically in recent years, and one in five children report that they do not have their own

book at home (National Literacy Trust, 2019; 2022). Therefore, not only does the emphasis on reading and literature-related activities within the school curriculum have much potential for the integration of character education, but the school context may be an increasingly important place for story-based character education to be delivered.

The impact and efficacy of story-based character education has received increased interest in theory and research over the past twenty-five years (e.g. Arthur *et al.*, 2014; Bohlin, 2005; Carr and Harrison, 2015; Davison *et al.*, 2016; Francis *et al.*, 2018; Hart, Oliveira and Pike, 2020; Jónsson *et al.*, 2019; Leming, 2000), indicating a movement towards better understanding how stories might enhance the teaching of character education. Story-based character education has been advocated within books for teachers such as Karen Bohlin's (2005) *Teaching Character Education through Literature* and Carr and Harrison's (2015), *Educating Character through Stories* – both of which explore the philosophical underpinnings of educating character through stories and set out frameworks for how children are thought to learn by engaging with them. Of these examples, the former draws upon case studies and emphasises the role of the moral imagination, whereas the latter has had its assumptions tested within story-based character education research (e.g. Arthur *et al.*, 2014; Davison *et al.*, 2016). The findings of this research, alongside research studies in developmental psychology (e.g. Larsen, Lee and Ganea, 2017; Lee *et al.*, 2014; Talwar *et al.*, 2017), suggest that story-based approaches to character education have the potential to increase children's knowledge and understanding of character-virtue terms, to develop children's reasoning about moral issues and to influence moral behaviours.

Despite there being a considerable amount of theory and research based on teaching character through stories, there are two areas that have largely failed to be addressed and understood in education research. The first is a lacuna within the character education literature concerning the extent to which teachers value and use stories for teaching character education. While it is suggested by theorists and researchers that stories *can* be a useful vehicle for teaching character education, the *actual* views and practices of primary school teachers are mostly undocumented. The second is a lack of clarity surrounding a *pedagogy* for story-based character education. Although there is clear evidence of teachers

using stories as a vehicle for character education, both historically and in current practice, the approaches and recommendations from the literature often conflict. Furthermore, while some of the factors that may affect the ability of children to learn from stories, and some of the approaches considered effective for character education, have been explored in the literature, it is not known how teachers' perceptions and approaches align with or take note of these.

To this end, this thesis aims to contribute to both the theory and practice of character education by examining how, and the extent to which, stories are valued and used by primary school teachers for teaching character education. A review of the literature in Chapter Two and Chapter Three of this thesis provides insight into how stories have been used historically as a vehicle for teaching character education, factors affecting children's learning, and the perspectives of contemporary theorists and researchers. Although the literature reviewed in Chapter Two and Chapter Three helps to understand how stories *can* be used as a vehicle for teaching character education, it does not provide insight into if and how stories are being used, and why. Therefore, a research study was designed in order to help to fill this void and understand primary school teachers' perceptions of, and approaches to, story-based character education.

2. Research Questions

The research study set out in Chapter Four sought to address the gap outlined above through aiming to answer two overarching research questions which were focused on primary school teachers' perceptions of, and approaches to, story-based character education. Research Question One (RQ1) focused on how teachers *value* stories for this purpose, and Research Question Two (RQ2) focused on how teachers *use* stories for this purpose.

RQ1 – How and to what extent do primary school teachers in England *value* stories as a vehicle for teaching character education?

RQ2 – How and to what extent do primary school teachers in England *use* stories as a vehicle for teaching character education?

In seeking to answer RQ1 and RQ2, the research study aimed to provide insight into the reasons why teachers value and use stories as a vehicle for character education; how primary school teachers approach story-based character education, and why; and to uncover any differences in how teachers of younger pupils and teachers of older pupils perceive and approach story-based character education. It was anticipated that a critical analysis of the perceptions and approaches of primary school teachers would provide greater clarity on how assumptions underpinning the theory and research of story-based character education are realised in practice. Moreover, it was hoped that the research study would uncover perceptions and approaches, previously undocumented by the character education literature, that could a) highlight areas of current practice that could be *enhanced* through engagement with theory and research, and b) highlight areas of current practice that could *inform* theory and research, and helping to shape future pedagogy in primary schools and beyond.

3. Organisation of the Thesis

This thesis comprises seven chapters, organised in two main parts. In Part One (chapters one to three), the key concepts underpinning the thesis are set out, historical and contemporary approaches to story-based character education are reviewed, and the ways in which children are thought to learn through engaging with stories are analysed. In Part Two (chapters four to seven), the methodology, findings, interpretation and discussion, and implications of the research study are described. The research study was designed to help understand teachers' perceptions of, and approaches to, story-based character education, and to understand how perceptions and approaches align with those outlined in Part One. A description of each of the chapters contained within this thesis is provided below.

In Chapter One, the key concepts that are discussed and researched within the subsequent chapters are outlined. An overview of prominent ethical frameworks culminates in a

discussion of how and why virtue ethics is viewed as the preferred theory underpinning concepts of character in this thesis. *Character, character virtues, and character education* are then discussed and defined, and how character education is typically understood and practiced within a school context is explained. Finally, the focus turns to stories and how stories have been defined within the literature. The characteristic features of stories and their various functions are presented, and a definition of a story, as it is to be understood within the remainder of this thesis, is provided.

In Chapter Two, historical and contemporary approaches to story-based character education are described. Drawing predominantly on theory and practice in England, the influence of Christianity on story-based character education between 1700 and 1900 is explored; and it is explained how the often moralising, religious and didactic approaches to character formation were eventually replaced with the introduction of more structured and secular approaches appearing in the early twentieth century. Next, factors leading to a change in the focus of children's literature are introduced and the prioritisation of children's entertainment from around 1920 onwards is discussed. Contemporary approaches to story-based character education are then reviewed, and what is currently known about the perceptions and approaches of contemporary educators is outlined.

In Chapter Three, the focus is on children's learning through stories. The discussion draws on research findings which offer insight into how children learn through interaction with stories, as well as the suggestions of educators and theorists who advocate for story-based character education. The content of this chapter helps to elucidate the assumptions and motivations underlying some of the historical approaches to story-based character education.

Perspectives on how children are thought to learn from stories are critically analysed in light of research findings from studies in developmental psychology and education, which highlight factors that may influence children's potential to learn from stories. How stories might be used to develop virtue literacy is then discussed, drawing on research studies which have predominantly focused on the impact of story-based character education interventions on children's virtue perception, virtue knowledge and understanding, and

virtue reasoning. Finally, the moral imagination and the influence of stories on children's *moral vision, moral identity, moral rehearsal* and *moral judgement* are considered.

The review of the literature in Chapter Two and Chapter Three reveals that although story-based character education approaches feature within theory and research literature, very little is actually known about the perceptions and approaches of primary school teachers. In highlighting the gap within the literature, these chapters provide important context for the research study contained within Part Two (chapters four to seven) of this thesis.

In Chapter Four, the research design and methodology for the research study is described. The research study sought to understand how primary school teachers in England value and use stories as a vehicle for teaching character education. The purpose and aims of the research are stated, and the research questions, which guided the study, are outlined. The mixed methods research approach and other relevant methodological considerations are described, followed by a discussion of research methods conducive to mixed methods research. Overviews of the research design and the sample population are provided. The development, piloting and application of the research instruments is then described, followed by an outline of the approach taken to data analysis, and the ethical considerations which guided the research.

In Chapter Five, the main findings from the research study are presented under two main headings: *primary school teachers' perceptions of stories as a vehicle for teaching character education*, and *primary school teachers' approaches to story-based character education*. Findings presented under the first main heading predominantly relate to how and why primary school teachers *value* stories as a vehicle for teaching character education, including the story types that are considered to be most useful and the story factors that might affect a story's usefulness. Findings presented under the second main heading relate to how and why primary school teachers *use* stories as a vehicle for teaching character education. Under each of the main headings, data from strand one (the teacher survey) and strand two (the teacher interviews) are presented together. Survey data are predominantly presented in table form and qualitative data are summarised. Where appropriate, quotations from the interviews are included to illustrate the main themes and to illuminate trends identified in

the survey. At the end of the chapter, a summary of the main findings that are interpreted and discussed in Chapter Six is provided.

In Chapter Six, the main findings from the research study are interpreted and discussed. The discussion of the main findings is guided by the research questions and the findings are interpreted with the main limitations to the generalisability of data in mind. The discussion of primary school teachers' perceptions centres on the value attributed to stories, and the types and features of stories thought to influence pupils' learning; the discussion of primary school teachers' approaches centres on the teaching and learning strategies employed by primary school teachers when teaching story-based character education. Where relevant, the main findings are related to the core themes identified in Chapter Two and Chapter Three, and how the findings corroborate or contrast with these themes is discussed.

In Chapter Seven, the main implications of the research study are outlined. How the findings might be used to advance the theory and practice of story-based character education is discussed. Key areas include how the findings: contribute to existing knowledge in the field of character education; have the potential to advance story-based character education practice through informing training and government guidance; and, highlight factors which may influence children's learning and which should be investigated in future research.

PART ONE

CHAPTER ONE: KEY CONCEPTS

1. Introduction

Within this chapter the concepts that are central to this thesis are discussed and defined. The chapter begins with an overview of Aristotelian virtue ethics, which is highlighted as an important moral theory underpinning how *character* and *virtue* are understood in contemporary education contexts. Informed by Aristotle's conceptions, contemporary definitions of character and virtue are described, and character, as it is understood and used within this thesis, is defined. Next, the development and cultivation of character virtues is considered; *character education* is introduced, and this concept is defined. Two prominent "varieties" of character education are described, and the perceived advantages of neo-Aristotelian character education, which promotes the development of character virtues, including *phronesis* (or "practical wisdom"), are outlined. Within the final section of the chapter, attention turns to stories and how they are conceptualised and understood. The oral tradition of stories, and the role that stories have played as a means to entertain, educate and pass on information is described. Definitions of stories are then reviewed with a focus on different *types*, *features*, and *functions*. The ways in which existing definitions of stories conflict and converge are discussed, and the term *story*, as it is to be used within the context of this thesis, is then defined.

2. A Virtue Ethics Account of Character and Virtue

It is important to first attend to the ethical framework which underpins considerations of character and character education in this thesis. The development of moral theories such as virtue ethics, deontology and consequentialism reflect the work of moral philosophers who have long sought to understand what it means to be a good person, to do the right thing, live well and lead a good life. The question "what makes one a good person?" was key in the thinking of ancient philosophers such as Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. However, modern moral philosophers such as Kant, Hume, Bentham and Mill began to ask not "what makes

one a good person?”, but “what is the right thing to do?”. The change in focus led to the development of theories focused on rightness and obligation, such as consequentialism and deontology, amongst others (Rachels, 2004). In the mid-twentieth century, Aristotelian virtue ethics re-emerged. There has been evolving interest in virtue ethics in education, and virtue ethics is considered by some to be a prominent moral theory underpinning current accounts of character and approaches to character education (Hursthouse, 1999; Kristjánsson, 2015; Rachels, 2004). In this section, Aristotelian virtue ethics will be introduced and discussed along with deontology and consequentialism, and the reasons for aligning this thesis with a virtue ethics account of character and character education will be explained. The concepts of character and character virtues will then be discussed and defined.

Virtue Ethics, Deontology and Consequentialism

The re-emergence of virtue ethics was prompted by Elizabeth Anscombe’s (1958) essay, *Modern Moral Philosophy*, and assisted by other modern philosophers such as Alasdair MacIntyre (1981) whose writings prompted increasing interest in virtue. Anscombe’s essay is regarded as instrumental in prompting a return to Aristotle (Snow, 2018) and in virtue ethics acquiring “full status” as a viable moral theory (Kristjánsson, 2015). While the return to ancient thinkers might be perceived as a peculiar direction for modern moral philosophy to take, especially considering Aristotle’s parochial view of slavery and women for whom he ultimately considered the practice of prudence impossible given their subservient societal standings (Devettere, 2002), contemporary virtue ethicists have modernised Aristotle’s moral theory, taking a neo-Aristotelian approach which is regarded as more applicable within, and reflective of, modern society (Hursthouse, 1999).

Virtue ethics views an action as right if it ‘enhances virtue and contributes to a flourishing life’ (Kristjánsson, 2015, p. 18). Virtue ethics focuses on the agent’s *character* and disposition, paying attention to internal states. Aristotle ultimately ‘acknowledges a distinction in value between doing the right thing and doing it as a virtuous person would do it’ (Richardson Lear, 2013, p. 349): an action is right if it is something a virtuous person – a person with good character – would do (Russell, 2009). Hursthouse (1999), acknowledging

that individuals do occasionally act “out of character” (not all actions of a virtuous individual are virtuous (Driver, 2013)), adds qualification to Aristotle’s perspective: an action is only right if it is something the virtuous person would do *characteristically*. A virtue ethics account of right action differs from that of deontology, which deems an action right and good if it follows a universalised rule, and consequentialism which determines moral worth based on overall consequences of actions (Snow, 2018). However, before describing how and why virtue ethics is the preferred moral theory underpinning how character is defined within this thesis, it is necessary to first understand the core principles of deontology and consequentialism, two other prominent moral theories, in more depth.

Deontology is arguably best described as an approach to moral theory which emphasises duties, rules or principles. Deontology regards actions as ethical or unethical in themselves, independent of the circumstances surrounding them (Devettere, 2002). The most prominent form of deontological theory is Kantianism; Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) held that the moral worth of an action comes not from its consequences, but from the motive or intention behind it. Deontology holds that an act is only right if it has been chosen, willed and acted upon with good intentions – outcomes have no bearing (Hurley, 2013). For Kant, the motive or intention should be considered prior to the action and be based on obligation: doing the right thing because it is the right thing to do, according to your duty to others, and not because of tendencies, emotions or perceived consequences. Deontology follows two basic premises. The first premise is that an act is right if it abides by a moral rule or principle. Kant believed that there *are* moral rules which are absolute; he called these “universal laws”, arguing, for example, that lying is never right regardless of the circumstances (Rachels, 2004). The second premise outlines what constitutes a correct moral rule or principle; and this provides guidance on how to act. According to the second premise, the rule can be one that is the choice that all rational beings would make, or a categorical imperative (Hursthouse, 1999).

The *categorical imperative* is a central principle of Kant’s theory: act only according to that maxim by which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law. The categorical imperative is not limited by conditions; it is simply the principle that we *ought* to

do something in the absence of reason; we *ought* to do it, not because it will have a particular effect or contribute to one's happiness, we just *ought* to do it (MacIntyre, 1998). Through the categorical imperative, we create maxims which provide guidance on what to do – our duty (Devettere, 2002). This ultimately provides a method for deciding whether an act is morally permissible: making a rule from the bottom up. One must first consider what rule would be followed if they were to carry out the intended act. If this rule is one that they would be happy to see in universalised form, that is, one they would be happy for everyone to follow all of the time, then the act can be considered to be acceptable (Sherman, 2004). Thus, when faced with a choice between lying to a friend and sparing their feelings, or being honest and hurting these, a Kantian would seek to tell the truth, for the rule or principle “it is acceptable to lie to a friend when the truth may hurt their feelings” is not something one would wish to universalise, according to the categorical imperative; there will be instances where the truth is necessary, despite a friend's feelings.

In contrast to deontology, which does not acknowledge consequences in deeming whether an act is right or wrong, and virtue ethics, which holds that the rightness of an action is independent of duty or overall consequences, residing, at least in part, in the character or motivations of the agent (West, 2013), consequentialism holds that the rightness of an action can be evaluated based on consequences. The most prominent form of consequentialism is utilitarianism: utilitarianism can be regarded as a form of consequentialism in that it is the *consequences* of an action, and its intrinsic value, that are ultimately used to determine whether it is right or wrong. Utilitarianism is specifically about maximising happiness. On this view, it is the *principle of utility* – whatever creates happiness and prevents unhappiness for the greatest number of people (Devettere, 2002) – that can be used to guide action.

Utilitarianism was first proposed by David Hume (1711-1776), and formulated by Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832) and John Stuart Mill (1806-1873). For Bentham, morality was conceived in terms of attempting to maximise happiness for the greatest number of people, not following an abstract or inflexible moral rule. Bentham contended that the only rational and consistent means of guiding action was to assess the pleasurable or painful

consequences of the action (MacIntyre, 1998). He argued that the principle of utility is the ultimate moral principle with which rightness can be interpreted, holding that actions are right if they promote happiness or pleasure; they are wrong if they produce the opposite: unhappiness or pain (West, 2013). The principle of utility suggests that when one must make a choice between alternative courses of action, it is the action which has the best overall outcome, maximising happiness for all those involved, which should be chosen (Rachels, 2004). Recognising that this definition of the principle of utility could lead one to justify causing unhappiness or pain to the minority in order to benefit the majority, Bentham later emphasised that the happiness of each individual is equally important (West, 2013). In this regard, utilitarianism advocates that it is our moral duty to act in ways that maximise the overall happiness of everyone concerned, thus requiring impartiality on the part of the moral agent.

Utilitarianism ultimately holds that, in assessing consequences, the amount of happiness or unhappiness created is the only thing that matters; right actions maximise the greatest balance of happiness over unhappiness from an impartial standpoint (Rachels, 2004). Therefore, in the case where the Kantian may be honest to their friend regardless of the context, their feelings or potential consequences, the utilitarian would consider the consequences of both telling the truth and lying. Whichever is deemed to bring the most happiness to all involved would be chosen. For example, if the perceived consequences of lying are that it prevents causing unhappiness or pain for those involved, and the net happiness is higher than if telling the truth, it would be “right” to lie.

Virtue ethics holds that the rightness of an action is not determined solely by rules, principles, duty, or overall consequences; rather, rightness resides, at least in part, in the *character* or motivations of the agent (West, 2013). A virtue ethics account of “right” action can be considered complementary to rules, principles and consequences, as opposed to being independent of these. Virtue ethics emphasises the character and disposition of the agent, and central to the Aristotelian conception of character is the cultivation and education of virtues, especially that of *phronesis* which is also known as “practical wisdom”, “prudence” or “good sense”. While character virtues and their development are discussed in

more detail in the subsequent section, it is important at this point to clarify the vital role attributed to *phronesis* according to virtue ethics. *Phronesis* is a higher-order intellectual virtue which monitors and guides the other virtues which make up one's character and is likened to 'perception' by Aristotle (1142a23-31). Virtuous actions are those which account for the circumstances and are based on the judgement of the prudent individual (MacIntyre, 1998). The possessor of *phronesis* will therefore know what to do given unique circumstances, for example by integrating the demands of competing virtues into an acceptable course of action as a result of deliberation and reasoning (Richardson Lear, 2013). It is important to note that these distinguishing features are not completely independent of other moral theories. When discussing *phronesis*, for example, we must acknowledge its links to utilitarianism. While Aristotle does not go so far as to regard *phronesis* as a 'happiness maximiser', it has to consider consequences in many ways, as Aristotle does not suggest that virtues can be assessed '*without any consideration of overall consequences*', because good consequences *are* usually the point (Kristjánsson, 2015, pp. 102-103). Thus, where a Kantian would act according to a rule or maxim, and a utilitarian would act to maximise happiness, the virtue ethicist would try to do as the virtuous person would in the same situation. When posed with competing virtues, for example between honesty and compassion in the case of lying to a friend, the virtuous person would make a reasoned judgement and take deliberative action, motivated by the right emotions and acting for the right reasons (Kristjánsson, 2015).

Virtue ethics has increasingly been viewed as a more viable alternative to that of deontology or utilitarianism (Kristjánsson, 2015). The resurgence of virtue ethics as a moral theory can be in part attributed to the perceived failure of deontology and utilitarianism to adequately address a number of topics relating to moral action, including: motivational factors, moral character and moral education – areas which are discussed at length by Aristotle, but are found lacking in modern philosophy (Hursthouse, 1999). For example, where utilitarianism struggles to account for the 'love of family and friends', proposing that the agent should make judgements of utility from an impartial standpoint and thus undermining personal relationships, virtue ethics accounts for these, recognising such relationships as 'an

inescapable feature of the morally good life' (Rachels, 2004, p. 186). Carr and Steutel (1999, p. 244) posit that virtue ethics is thus:

...more obviously in tune with (and less distortive of) our ordinary moral intuitions than Kantian deontology or utilitarianism ...[and it] offers a much more robust and lifelike picture of moral life.

According to Carr and Steutel (1999), Aristotle's virtue ethics account of moral motivation may therefore offer a clearer view than deontology for how motivational factors influence our appreciation of principles.

Furthermore, deontology and utilitarianism have both been criticised for having 'lost their root' (Anscombe, 1958, p. 6) and for failing to explain why their accounts of moral rightness should be followed over other accounts. Deontology and utilitarianism appear to place unrealistic expectations on moral agents – such as the calculation of happiness – and may be counterintuitive. For example, it is not clear why one should follow Kant in always telling the truth, even if it results in pain, and why one should seek to abide by the *principle of utility* regardless of personal sacrifice and one's relationships with others. For Rachels (2004), an adequate account of moral life requires a moral theory which emphasises virtues such as friendship and loyalty, because the moral value of an action is lost if it is performed out of nothing more than a duty to do the right thing. It has also been suggested that modern moral philosophy's failure to offer good enough explanations for these questions has left it 'in a state of disarray and distress', which a return to the insights of the ancient Greeks – through virtue ethics – could help to solve (Devettere, 2002, p. 3).

However, despite the perceived strengths of Aristotelian moral theory, virtue ethics is not unanimously accepted as the leading moral theory; virtue ethics has also faced criticisms. For example, one criticism is that virtue ethics fails to provide guidance on "right" action; another is that *character* is a non-existent concept. The first criticism is aimed at virtue ethics as an agent-centred theory and suggests that, due to the focus on the virtuous *agent* as opposed to the *act*, virtue ethics cannot provide guidance on the "right" thing to do (Rachels, 2004). However, virtue ethicists dispute this challenge, arguing that it is *good character* which guides the virtuous agent to know what to do in a given situation

(Richardson Lear, 2013). Right action is what the virtuous person would do, *characteristically*, in the same circumstances: here, each virtue generates an instruction – ‘do what is honest’, ‘do what is charitable’ and so on (Hursthouse, 1999, p. 17) – and, in the case of virtue conflict, it is *phronesis* which guides the virtuous person’s actions.

The second criticism comes in the form of the *situationist* challenge which is based on findings from studies in social psychology (e.g. Darley and Batson, 1973; Milgram, 1974) purporting to show that character traits do not exist by indicating that situational factors – such as available time (Darley and Batson, 1973) – explain behaviour better than the existence of stable character traits. The findings have led some situationists, such as Harman (1999, p. 329), to dismiss the existence of character, arguing that the attribution of behaviour to character traits is ‘wildly incorrect’. However, virtue ethicists typically respond to the situationist challenge by accepting that virtuous behaviour may be affected by situational factors, but also maintaining that this does not undermine the existence of stable traits of character. On this view, having a disposition to give to charity does not necessitate *always* giving to charity and the fact that a person has behaved in a certain way does not necessarily tell us about their character. Driver (2013) gives the example of one whose hands are full with bags – not giving to charity in this case is affected by situational variables; it does not mean that the person is no more likely to give to charity than a person without the disposition. It is suggested that to understand whether someone has ‘robust states of character’ we need to go deeper than observable behaviours; we need to know the ‘spirit in which the action was performed or not performed, its emotional concomitants and the manner in which the action or non-action was conducted’ (Kristjánsson, 2013, p. 282).

Though not without criticism of its own, a virtue ethics account of “right” and “wrong” builds on the perceived weaknesses of deontology and utilitarianism by attributing a central role to character and virtue. A neo-Aristotelian account of virtue ethics, updated to be more applicable to and reflective of modern society, offers a strong case for why this account of moral rightness should be followed. For example, rather than emphasising a duty to follow a rule or principle, virtue ethics accounts for the motivation underpinning moral action, and the integration and adjudication of character virtues through the judgement and reasoning.

The considerations detailed above indicate how and why virtue ethics is a felicitous moral theory underpinning how character is conceptualised within this thesis. Central to an Aristotelian conception of character is the development and cultivation of character virtues – an area that will be discussed in more depth in the following sections.

Character and Character Virtues

Character is generally understood to be ‘a multi-faceted aggregate of ideas and qualities that vary between individuals’ and which consists of a number of ‘essential inter-connected factors’ (Arthur, 2020, p. 10). From an Aristotelian perspective, character is made up of educable traits and dispositions called *virtues*. A virtue is considered to be ‘a mean, with regard to what best and right an extreme’ (Aristotle, 2009, p. 31 [1106b36 – 1107a8]) – each virtue constitutes a schema where virtue is the intermediate condition or ‘medial character state’ of two extremes, or vices: the *excess* and *deficiency* of the virtue. According to this account of ‘virtue architectonics’ (Kristjánsson, 2015, p. 28), ‘there is only one way – the medial way – to be ‘correct’: to be inclined to act in the right way, towards the right people, at the right time’ (Arthur *et al.*, 2017b, p. 28). The intermediacy is relative to us and will vary dependant on the context and situation (Richardson Lear, 2013). In the case of generosity, for example, the virtuous person is not someone who gives excessively to the beggar on the street, nor one who refrains from donating to charity; the mean is expressed in giving what is appropriate in the situation. The virtuous individual is someone who is morally good, acts and reacts rightly and gets things right, acting for the right reasons, at the right time, in the right way and in the right amount given the circumstances (Hursthouse, 1999).

For an act to be virtuous, not only does it have to be motivated by the right emotions and chosen for the right reasons, in a sense being “aimed” by the moral virtues (Richardson Lear, 2013), but it must be guided by reason. In one context or situation an action could be virtuous; in another, the same action could be vicious, thus ‘judgement has an indispensable role in the life of the virtuous man’ (MacIntyre, 1981, p. 144). Aristotle pays much attention to judgement, especially in the case of virtue conflict. Typically, we are faced with conflicting virtues which are not easily balanced and judgement is needed in order to act virtuously (Arthur *et al.*, 2017b). For Aristotle, it is the intellectual virtue of *phronesis* which can provide

the right judgement and result in virtuous action, because the possessor of practical wisdom can reason to determine the intermediate of a virtue's two corresponding vices (Aristotle, 2009, p. 31 [1107a1-5]), and act in the "right" way.

Aristotelian virtue ethics holds that without *phronesis* no virtue could be complete (Brewer, 2013); *phronesis* essentially 'builds a bridge' between the moral virtues and intellectual virtues, and thus assumes an integral position within Aristotle's conception of virtue (Kristjánsson, 2015, p. 17). While the stage at which *phronesis* is thought to develop is contested by some Aristotelians (for example Burnyeat (2012, pp. 259-281) and Sherman (2004, pp. 157-199), who have contrasting views), it is generally acknowledged that *phronesis* develops through habituation, with time, experience and through critical reflection (Hatchimonji *et al.*, 2020; Jubilee Centre, 2022; Kristjánsson, 2015; Russell, 2009). Those acquiring *phronesis* are able to consider the relative weight of different virtues in instances in which they conflict, make reasoned judgements and take deliberative action for the right reasons (Darnell *et al.*, 2019; Kristjánsson, 2015; Sherman, 2004). Through deliberation about the relative weight of the conflicting virtues – for example, kindness and honesty – the virtuous agent is able to arrive at an appropriate course of action: doing the right thing, for the right reasons, at the right time, in the right amount (Cooke and Carr, 2014). *Phronesis* should not therefore be misunderstood merely as a form of 'practical knowledge' (Hansen, 2007, p. 19); *phronesis* is a key virtue which plays a pivotal role as a moral integrator when two or more virtues collide (Darnell *et al.*, 2019; Russell, 2009), and without which other virtues of character would not be able to be exercised (MacIntyre, 1981; MacIntyre, 1998).

Informed by Aristotle's conceptions, contemporary definitions of character virtues describe these as states of character which are developed during one's upbringing, through habituation and interaction with positive role models, then through one's own choices which coalesce into stable patterns (Kristjánsson, 2015; Rachels, 2004; Sanderse, 2012). A number of terms are often used synonymously when describing character *virtues*, such as *habits*, *traits* and *dispositions*. However, the terms habit, trait and disposition are prone to cause confusion due to their 'infelicitous connotations' with psychological terminology

(Kristjánsson, 2015, p. 14), especially when used in academic circles. Trait, for example, is typically used to refer to an inherited attribute; habit carries with it associations with behavioural traits (Kristjánsson, 2015); and disposition, though perhaps more neutral, is also challenged because the idea of 'self-cultivated' dispositions is not common in psychology (Arthur *et al.*, 2017b, p. 28). Virtues, on the other hand, are *hexeis* or states of character (Hursthouse, 1999; Kristjánsson, 2015) which are more than just habits, traits or dispositions to act; virtues are 'strongly entrenched' in their possessor and go 'all the way down' (Hursthouse, 1999, p. 12). In this way, character virtues are strongly linked with conduct, influencing emotions, motivations, attitudes and behaviours (Jubilee Centre, 2022; MacIntyre, 1981; Rachels, 2004).

Within contemporary theory and research, character is regarded as a specific subset of personality. Whereas personality traits are regarded as relatively stable dispositions that are inherited to a large extent, fixed at a young age, and carry no explicit moral connotations, character virtues are considered to be educable, morally evaluable and reason-responsive (Kristjánsson, 2015). Recent work in philosophy and education (see Arthur *et al.*, 2017b; Baehr, 2017; Jubilee Centre, 2022) has culminated in the expansion of conceptual models of personal character from positive psychology (for example, the three-factor models of McGrath (2015), and Park *et al.* (2016)), to include four categories of character virtues that make up one's character: moral virtues, intellectual virtues, civic virtues and performance virtues. These categories constitute 'The Building Blocks of Character' in the *Jubilee Centre Framework for Character Education in Schools* (2022, p. 9):

Intellectual Virtues: character traits necessary for discernment, right action and the pursuit of knowledge, truth and understanding.

Moral Virtues: character traits that enable us to act well in situations that require an ethical response.

Civic Virtues: character traits that are necessary for engaged and responsible citizenship, contributing to the common good.

Performance Virtues: character traits that have an instrumental value in enabling the intellectual, moral and civic virtues.

Elucidating their complexity and depth, virtues have been seen to comprise a number of components:

Virtue Perception – an ability to notice situations in which the virtues are needed;

Virtue Knowledge and Understanding – an understanding of why it is important in a flourishing life;

Virtue Emotion – feeling the right emotions in the right way;

Virtue Identity – being committed to the virtue;

Virtue Motivation – desiring to act;

Virtue Reasoning – the ability to be discerning about virtues, for example when virtues conflict; and

Virtue Action and Practice – acting in the right way, in the right amount.

(adapted from Arthur *et al.*, 2017b, p. 28; Jubilee Centre, 2022, p. 10; and Kristjánsson, 2015, p. 14).

To illustrate the various virtue components with an example, an honest person (a person with the *virtue* of honesty) would be expected to do honest deeds in a certain manner, to be reliable in their actions, to disapprove of or act against dishonesty, and associate with honest people. Their emotions, too, would reflect honesty – we might expect the honest person to feel distress when experiencing dishonesty from loved ones, to be shocked and angered by brazenly dishonest acts and to be pleased when honesty prevails (Hursthouse, 1999). Virtue thus has ‘far-reaching consequences’ with regard to that person’s choices, actions and feelings towards others (Sanderse, 2012, p. 81). While difficult to say which component is most important, from an Aristotelian perspective it is virtue *emotion* which sets the attainment of virtue apart. The virtue of compassion, for example, can be possessed by someone who *feels* compassion but may be physically unable to *act* compassionately.

Conversely, one could *act* compassionately in order to receive praise (Arthur *et al.*, 2017b), acting the right way but for the wrong reasons and therefore not virtuously.

Character as Defined Within this Thesis

This thesis is concerned with the perceptions and approaches of primary school teachers in England – specifically their perceptions of, and approaches to, teaching about *character* through stories. It was therefore important at the outset that the definition of character, while informed by Aristotelian virtue ethics theory and research, also reflected how character is understood by teachers and those working with schools. In addition to the theory covered above, there were two key definitions of character that informed how the term is defined here: the definition offered by the Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues at the University of Birmingham and the definition offered by the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted).

The definition of character offered by the Jubilee Centre (2022, p. 7) has been informed by Aristotelian theory and written specifically for schools and educators:

Character is a set of personal traits or dispositions that produce specific moral emotions, inform motivation, and guide conduct.

While this short definition does not specifically use the term virtues, the expanded definition of character offered in *The Jubilee Centre Framework for Character Education in Schools* (2022, pp. 7-9), uses this term. The *Framework* sets out the four Building Blocks of Character noted above, which are guided and integrated by *phronesis*: intellectual virtues, moral virtues, civic virtues and performance virtues.

The Jubilee Centre's definition of character appears to have informed the definition of character used by Ofsted within their *School Inspection Handbook* (Ofsted, 2019). Ofsted have provided schools with an analogous definition of character, which emphasises the importance of developing pupils' character as part of their personal development:

[Character is] a set of positive personal traits, dispositions and virtues that informs their motivation and guides their conduct so that they reflect wisely, learn eagerly,

behave with integrity and cooperate consistently well with others. This gives pupils the qualities they need to flourish in our society.

The inclusion of terms such as ‘virtues’ and ‘flourishing’ within Ofsted’s definition suggest that an Aristotelian virtue ethics understanding of character and virtue has been used to inform how character has been defined for schools within policy and guidance documents.

The Jubilee Centre’s definition of character, and Ofsted’s adaptation of this, are of considerable importance to this thesis given each organisation’s role in advising and setting standards and expectations for schools in England. The Jubilee Centre, as a thought leader and leading research centre in the field of character and character education, provides schools with a theoretical framework for character education (Jubilee Centre, 2022) as well as support and practical resources. Ofsted, the regulatory body responsible for inspecting the standards of provision in schools, are likely to play a role in shaping how character is understood given that their standards are used as a framework for school evaluation and inspection.

As such, within this thesis, which is informed by a neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics account of character and virtue, character is similarly understood to be:

a set of positive personal qualities and virtues which inform motivation, thoughts, feelings and behaviours.

3. Character Education

Building on the conceptualisation of character and virtue outlined above, within this section, the question of how character develops and might be cultivated – for example through reading and engaging with stories – is considered. Character education is generally used as an *umbrella term* encompassing a wide variety of approaches aimed at developing the character of young people to enhance wellbeing, promote moral development and prepare them for responsible and successful adulthood (Arthur, 2020; Berkowitz and Bier, 2007; DfE, 2019). As such, character education is referred to by Arthur (2020, p. 16) as an ‘overarching

concept' concerned with approaches aimed at enabling young people to become good and to live well. However, given the various terms, approaches, goals, strategies and philosophical orientations – both historically and in contemporary education – conceptualising character education can be challenging (Althof and Berkowitz, 2006). Character education can be understood and used in a narrow sense, referring to specific types of approaches to moral development, such as story-based methods; it can also be used more broadly, referring to a subset of moral education, and by extension as a subset of general values education, which encompasses all attempts to develop character virtues as stable traits of character (Watts and Kristjánsson, 2023).

In recent years, researchers have sought to define and outline key principles and features of character education within frameworks and models for schools and educators (e.g. Berkowitz, Bier and McCauley, 2017; Character.org, 2022; Jubilee Centre, 2022; McGrath, 2018; McGrath *et al.*, 2022). While many of these frameworks share common features – for example asserting that character education is (a) concerned with the promotion of core (positive) strengths/ values/ virtues, and (b) is structured, planned and/or intentional – each have unique features, have been written for different audiences, and have different theoretical underpinnings.

Various terms and phrases are also used to refer to character education *approaches*. In schools especially, teachers are likely to be working with and across various approaches to support pupils' personal, moral and social development, including social and emotional learning, character education and positive psychology (Watts, Fullard and Peterson, 2021). Within each, teachers are likely to be using a mixture of terms such as character strengths, values, virtues, and traits. The lack of semantic guidance has led some educationalists, such as Marvin Berkowitz, to refer to the field of moral education as a 'semantic minefield' (or 'semantic morass') (2016; 2021, p. 12).

Further complicating the creation of a shared definition of character education is the existence of a number of distinct variations and sub-groups, for example US-style character education in the 1980s and 1990s (e.g. Lickona, 1991), Confucian character education, positive education and Aristotelian character education (for a brief overview of each, see

Watts and Kristjánsson, 2023). Of these variations, it is positive education and Aristotelian character education that have received considerable academic attention and gained traction in recent years, and which are important to consider in the context of this thesis.

Positive Education

Positive education can be regarded as ‘the educational incarnation of positive psychology’ (Watts and Kristjánsson, 2023, p. 176) which emphasises approaches to enhance wellbeing and character development (International Positive Education Network, 2022). Much research into positive education (e.g. Khanna, Singh and Proctor, 2021; Oppenheimer *et al.*, 2014; Shankland and Rosset, 2017) has focused on preventative approaches and interventions aimed at improving young people’s mental health and wellbeing (Waters and Loton, 2021). Positive psychology is rooted in the work of Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000), and central to this field is the promotion of a positive mindset, wellbeing and resilience. There are two main – overlapping, yet distinctive – perspectives within the field of positive psychology/ positive education. One perspective is characterised by the work on *Character Strengths and Virtues* by Peterson and Seligman (2004) and overlaps more closely with an Aristotelian approach to character education – for example through recognising the intrinsic worth of virtues and strengths of character. The other perspective (e.g. Duckworth, 2016; Tough, 2012) focuses more narrowly on instrumental performance skills such as grit and resilience.

Positive education interventions in schools and classrooms focus on helping pupils to identify and develop their signature character strengths (Seligman *et al.*, 2009), but non-characterological skills, or capacities, such as “grit” and self-confidence are also targeted. Positive education assumes that further enhancing “signature” character strengths is beneficial in contributing towards positive pupil outcomes (Watts and Kristjánsson, 2023). To illustrate, Tough’s highly popular *How Children Succeed* (2012) sets out a form of character education adopted in the Knowledge is Power Program (KIPP) charter schools, which arguably reduces character education to a focus on increasing grit and resilience. Tough’s focus on character “skills” that are deemed necessary for success assumes an instrumental

view of character education. Similarly, some UK-based approaches adopt a narrow view of character and its development. Popular paid-for programmes such as *Bounce Forward* (no date) and *Commando Joe's* (no date) emphasise resilience “skills” and “capabilities” in the pursuit of advancing academic achievement. Some teacher guides, too, advocate classroom-based strategies to character education in an instrumental way. For example, Lloyd-Rose’s *The Character Conundrum* (2018), aims to help teachers develop pupils’ character, but only focuses on confidence, independence and resilience in the pursuit of pupils’ academic success.

Neo-Aristotelian Character Education

Aristotelian-inspired character education, hereafter referred to as neo-Aristotelian character education is perhaps best understood as ‘the educational incarnation of virtue ethics’ (Watts and Kristjánsson, 2023, p. 174) through which virtues are consciously and deliberately cultivated (Lickona, 1999; Watts, Fullard and Peterson, 2021). While there are different interpretations of Aristotelian ideas about moral education, and therefore different variations, neo-Aristotelian thinking underpins some of the more recent, popular, and prominent approaches applied to character education – for example those that aim to contribute to the cultivation of virtues and development of *phronesis* (Watts and Kristjánsson, 2023).

Character education forms a substantial part of positive education, and there are some overlaps between positive education and an Aristotelian understanding of character; however, there are some distinct differences between neo-Aristotelian character education and positive education. Whereas positive education tends to focus on bolstering skills and strengths indiscriminately, without acknowledgement of virtue “excess”, neo-Aristotelian character education accounts for the mean or medial state of a virtue (Watts and Kristjánsson, 2023). For example, where positive education would seek to develop the character strengths constituting courage (bravery, persistence, integrity and vitality – see Peterson and Seligman, 2004) indiscriminately, neo-Aristotelian character education would acknowledge that the virtue of courage is a medial state and that, in its excess form, courage would become the vice of foolhardiness. Furthermore, positive education has no guiding

quality /meta-virtue, with ‘wisdom and knowledge’ featuring as one of six sub-categories of virtue (Peterson and Seligman, 2004). Conversely, neo-Aristotelian character education is concerned with the cultivation and integration of a range of virtues, from across the four categories (outlined in the section above), which are guided by the meta virtue of *phronesis* to form a ‘mutually supportive whole’ (Jubilee Centre, 2022, p. 10).

Neo-Aristotelian character education can be regarded as an “expansive” form of character education that is resistant to some of the criticisms aimed at non-expansive character education approaches. Non-expansive forms of character education, such as those characterised by US-style character education in the 1980s and 1990s, have been criticised for being indoctrinatory (see Alexander, 2016; Copp, 2016), and concerned with the direct teaching of values and conformity (Alexander, 2016). On the other hand, expansive character education approaches aim to develop moral imagination; embrace intelligence and freedom; are concerned with interpretation; and aim to help individuals to deliberate and reason when making moral judgements (Alexander, 2016). While expansive and non-expansive approaches to character education are not completely independent of one another, as a degree of *training*, or *habituation* through learning from role models is usually considered part of virtue cultivation, it is the overarching aims and outcomes of expansive character education which set it apart. Alexander (2016, p. 319) explains that ‘one needs to acquire the mechanics of a tradition before becoming creative in it, to learn its languages before appreciating and enhancing its literatures’. Whereas non-expansive character education might result in individuals acting through imitation or expectation (i.e. solely learning the languages), expansive character education approaches, such as neo-Aristotelian character education, aim to enable individuals to act autonomously, as a result of deliberation and ultimately with *phronesis* (i.e. learning the languages and developing an appreciation, application and enhancement of the language/literatures).

Neo-Aristotelian Character Education in Schools

The main appeal of a neo-Aristotelian model of character education in schools lies in its down-to-earth and practical stance, its focus on critical reflection and the development of intellectual virtues such as autonomy and critical thinking (Watts and Kristjánsson, 2023, p.

176). Although character education occurs through all forms of education, including through the home and family, schooling, university and the wider community, this thesis is focused specifically on the primary school context and how primary school teachers think about and approach the character development of their pupils through stories. The adoption of a neo-Aristotelian model of character education in contemporary schooling is also considered to be advantageous for a number of reasons, including: its application independent of, yet potentially complementary to, religious beliefs; its focus on deliberation and reasoning; its consideration of what it means to be “good”; the virtue language that it provides; and its view that the end goal of character education is flourishing pupils (Arthur, 2020).

The Jubilee Centre Framework for Character Education in Schools offers an expanded definition of character education from a neo-Aristotelian perspective, which emphasises the development of *phronesis*:

Character education includes all explicit and implicit educational activities that help young people to develop positive personal strengths called virtues... [it] is about helping students grasp what is ethically important in situations and how they act for the right reasons, such that they become more autonomous and reflective in the practice of virtue...the ultimate aim of character education is the development of good sense, or practical wisdom. (Jubilee Centre, 2022, p. 7)

Children’s experiences during their upbringing and education are likely to be influential in shaping their character and form a central part of a neo-Aristotelian model of moral development (see Jubilee Centre, 2022). Character-forming experiences and influences generally fit into two categories: those that occur naturally and unconsciously, and those that are planned for and intentional. Both types can be regarded as forms of character education because of their potential to shape and develop the character virtues of young people. The Jubilee Centre’s *Framework* argues that character education should be planned for and intentional: instead of leaving character education to occur at random, or when the opportunity arises, schools and teachers should form a coherent approach, consisting of both implicit and explicit educational activities.

According to the Jubilee Centre (2022), a coherent (or integrative) approach to character education comprises strategies and activities through which character is ‘caught’, ‘taught’ and ‘sought’. Character is thought to be caught through the influence of a school’s unique ethos, vision and aims which are reflected in the school environment as well as within wider culture and relationships within the school (Arthur *et al.*, 2017a; Watts, Fullard and Peterson, 2021). Character is also thought to be taught through role-modelling and emotional contagion, for example through interaction with parents, adults and peers (Berkowitz and Bier, 2007; Character.org, 2022; Harrison, Morris and Ryan, 2016; Kristjánsson, 2006; Sanderse, 2012). It is contended that the constitutive components of character can be taught, for example through the wider school curriculum: through stories, assemblies, within standalone lessons or through integration within existing curriculum subjects (e.g. Arthur *et al.*, 2017b; Harrison, Bawden and Rogerson, 2016; Harrison, Morris and Ryan, 2016; Watts, Fullard and Peterson, 2021). One area in which schools adopting a taught character education approach have seen particular progress is in regard to the development of pupils’ *virtue literacy* (Arthur *et al.*, 2017a), which broadly relates to the ability to perceive what is morally relevant, and to understand and reason what it is morally appropriate in a given situation. The term is further defined and discussed in Chapter Two. Character is also thought to be sought, whereby pupils internalise virtuous habits and seek character development for themselves. Sought character education can be thought of as one of the ultimate aims of character education. It relates to the varied opportunities provided for students to develop habits, form commitments to character and freely pursue their own character development (Jubilee Centre, 2022).

In addition to Ofsted’s aforementioned alignment with a neo-Aristotelian understanding of character and its development, it is also evident from the way in which character education has been described and promoted in England over the last decade that a neo-Aristotelian model of character education is one that has affinity with educators and policy makers. In England, character education has consistently been made an educational priority since 2017 (see DfE, 2017a; 2017b; 2019). In 2019, the Department for Education (DfE) launched a *Character Education Framework Guidance* document (DfE, 2019) which provides information and support for schools about character education. The *Framework Guidance* outlines six

character benchmarks (provided in Appendix A) which aim to support schools in enhancing pupils' social, moral, cultural and spiritual development.

Although the *Character Education Framework Guidance* does not mention a neo-Aristotelian approach to character education, it is clear that this guidance for schools and teachers in England has been influenced by an Aristotelian understanding of character and its development. The *Framework Guidance* links character education to the 'spiritual, moral, social, and cultural (SMSC) development of pupils' (DfE, 2019, p. 4), and describes character education as a process through which schools can help pupils to overcome and learn from setbacks; learn and habituate virtues; and acquire social confidence, respect and good behaviours (DfE, 2019). When defining character, the DfE (2019, p. 7, emphasis added) refer to 'the learning and *habituation of positive moral attributes*, sometimes known as '*virtues*'...' and therefore use key terms that are used specifically when describing Aristotelian conceptions of character and character education: habituation and virtues.

In addition, the full descriptions of each character benchmark (see Appendix A) link to the Jubilee Centre's (2017; 2022) description of character caught, taught and sought. To illustrate, benchmark A describes the school environment, culture and ethos – for example through reference to school 'identity', 'aims' and 'community' (p. 4); benchmarks C and D make reference to the teaching of character virtues through the curriculum and wider promotion in the school; and, benchmark E refers to the 'varied' opportunities provided for pupils that are 'sustained over time' (p. 5). The Jubilee Centre's 2017 edition of their *Framework* was also referred to as a source of support/guidance for teachers in the DfE document (2019, p. 14).

Character Education as Defined Within this Thesis

Consistent with the definition of character, the definition of *character education* used within this thesis is similarly underpinned by a neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics account of character and virtue and informed by the way in which character education is understood by researchers, teachers and those working with schools. Character education is understood to be:

The implicit and explicit activities through which positive personal qualities and virtues are learned and habituated. Character education is about helping pupils to understand what is ethically important in situations, to be reflective and to act for the right reasons.

4. Stories

Both historically and in the present day, explicit and implicit forms of character education have utilised stories as a vehicle through which to educate children about character virtues: for example, to teach about morals and virtues, “good” character and “good” behaviour. Stories, both oral and written, are an accessible and abundant resource available to parents and teachers. In the primary school, for example, storybooks about honesty, friendship and kindness are read to and by children, especially in their formative years.

Before analysing how stories are used as a vehicle for teaching character education, it is important to define “story” and consider the educational potential of stories more generally. First, the oral tradition of stories will be introduced, and the role that stories have played historically, as a means through which to educate, will be described. Next, the broad *range* and *means* by which stories can be delivered or conveyed to an audience will be described, including the *types*, distinguishing *features*, and the various *functions* of stories. Finally, a definition of story, as it is understood and used within this thesis, will be provided.

The Oral Tradition

The origin of stories can be found at the root of a longstanding oral tradition. The influence of stories on human development, therefore, reaches back much further than the printed or written word (Palmer *et al.*, 2006). Oral storytelling traditions exist in all cultures and are thought to reside in our hunting-and-gathering past, predating early writing systems such as the pictorial representations of hieroglyphics (Mendoza, 2015; Sugiyama, 2001). It is likely that oral storytelling is at least as old as other representations of communication such as cave paintings, rock paintings and engravings (Sugiyama, 2001), which have been shown to date back at least 40,000 years (BBC, 2018).

Throughout history, different cultures have told stories through various means, passing them onto individuals and groups through word of mouth, singing, chanting and poetry (Mendoza, 2015). The purpose of storytelling has also varied. Not only were myths, fables and folklore told to entertain, but stories were told as a means to educate, convey messages and encourage specific social behaviours (Bruchac, 2010; Coe, Aiken and Palmer, 2006; Winston, 2000). For example, hunting-and-gathering societies used, and continue to use, oral storytelling to pass on information which sets societal expectations and facilitates social cooperation, promoting norms in group behaviour concerned with sharing, interactions and conflict resolution (Smith *et al.*, 2017).

Stories have played a prominent role within education through an oral tradition. Here, it is important to emphasise that the absence of schooling does not necessitate a lack of education – children learn about the general culture of their society through the stories they are told orally as young children. In this way, education can occur through culture as well as being a means by which to teach about culture, and this is as relevant today as it was prior to the establishment of formal schooling. In seeking to educate younger generations through depictions of events originating in oral stories, societies preserve their cultural heritage (Stein, 1982). Stories such as traditional stories, myths, legends and fables, preserve and pass on this important historical and social information, conveying important cultural values.

As early writing systems were established, stories that had previously only been told through pictorial representations, memorisation and recital were noted in written script, preserving versions of stories in written form. This process eventually led to the formation of a standardised text for many stories such as Homer's *The Iliad*, which is thought to be one of the first ancient Greek works of literature to be recorded in written form in around 750BC (History of Information, 2018; Mendoza, 2015). The ancient Greeks used stories, poetry and plays as a teaching tool in an attempt to shape the character of society, to motivate individuals to carry out good deeds and to provide standards with which to judge actions (Arthur, 2020). Greek character education is thought to originate from myths and poems such as Homer's epics which highlighted the important virtues within Greek culture at the time, and set the ideal of a good person within a good society to which children were

expected to conform (Arthur, 2020; Beck, 1964). In addition to Homer's poems, Aesop's *Fables* were a core part of early education in morals as well as reading and writing (Lerer, 2008). The fables were used to highlight weaknesses of character and morals to be learned (Tandy, 1998), communicating both familial and societal expectations of manners and behaviours.

Aesop's fables were not only used to educate and influence the character of children in ancient Greek times; they featured within education throughout the Middle Ages, the Renaissance period and beyond (Lerer, 2008). William Caxton's 1483 edition of *Aesop's Fables* is believed to be one of the earliest printed books in England (Palmer *et al.*, 2006), indicating the prominent role that moral stories such as fables played in education throughout the Middle Ages. In more recent history, the Victorians saw the value of using stories to make moral education more meaningful for children, for example by introducing fairy tales in schools (Guroian, 1998). As discussed in more depth within Chapter Two, exposure to, and the teaching of, great authors and poets was used by the Victorians with the intention of teaching common values and refining the minds of schoolboys (Arthur, 2003); nineteenth century educators went so far as to recommend that English literature should be studied as a method to instil a moral culture in schools and to counter the perceived negative effects of "immoral" penny literature on pupils and the lower classes (McCulloch and Mathieson, 1995).

Types of Story

In the modern era, there are multiple genres and types of stories that exist, as well as various means through which stories can be delivered or conveyed to an audience. Stories have a widespread presence within schools and the home, not only featuring in education orally and through the printed word, but through performance art, television, film, video games (Carr and Harrison, 2015), and through personal narratives and historical accounts (Ryan and Bohlin, 1999). The prominence and accessibility of stories means that it is hard to conceive of a child who has not learnt in some way through engagement with story.

The diverse means through which children and adolescents are exposed to and can engage with stories means that even reluctant readers are likely to be influenced by them. As

Popova (2015, pp. 1-2) outlines, story types are wide ranging and may include: plays and performances; traditional tales, fables, fairy tales, myths and legends; narrative poetry; film and television series; cartoons and animations; comics, magazines and newspapers; autobiographical and biographical accounts; retellings of personal experiences and events, including those told through digital platforms; and art and visual artworks.

This thesis focuses on stories which are utilised within children's upbringing and education. Yet, even within the parameters of education, there are multiple views on what a story is and consists of. While there are a myriad of story types and means through which stories are conveyed, the disagreement and conflict within the literature centres on the defining features of stories, their structure and function. For the purpose of this thesis, it is necessary to present some of the diverse views on what constitutes a story before explaining how the term is to be used hereafter.

Story Features

There are multiple definitions of what constitutes a story, yet there is no consensus on the core features of a story. Livingston (2013) and Stein (1982) helpfully summarise some of the more prominent ideas surrounding necessary story features which exist within the literature. Stein's (1982) review of story definitions that originate from psychological studies, linguistic and anthropological analyses, predominantly from the 1970s and 1980s, identifies that there is a common assumption underlying story definitions that stories have a 'unique identifiable structure' (pp. 497-498), such as involving a state-event-state change in the case of the minimal story structure (Prince, 1973), or a clear motive or direction towards achieving a goal (Mandler and Johnson, 1977). However, many story definitions offer conflicting views on what this structure consists of and some even assert that, to be considered a story, a story must have certain effect on readers, such as triggering an emotional, or affective, response (see Brewer and Lichtenstein, 1981; Stein, 1982).

Livingston (2013) builds on Stein's work (1982) by identifying some of the more specific features of stories outlined in the literature, such as the view that stories require at least one protagonist, a *narratee*, and that there are specific types of *connection* that hold at least two depicted events or actions together. However, Livingston (2013) undermines the need for

specific features by highlighting contradictory and conflicting claims contained within the literature with examples that satisfy different combinations of the outlined criteria. In the same vein, Stein (1982) goes as far as to challenge the view that it is possible to define a story based on one set of criteria. Stein (1982) asserts that although there are multiple, yet often contradictory, definitions of a story, the issue does not revolve around choosing the correct definition; rather, the issue is whether there is, or can be, just one set of features that can be used to define a story, given the multidimensional nature of the concept.

There are multiple points of contention regarding the definitive features of a story. For example, it is contested by some proponents of goal-based story definitions that there needs to be the development and resolution of a personal or social problem, and that an ending or resolution is a necessary component of even the simplest story's structure (Mandler and Johnson, 1977). It is suggested that an emphatic goal-based ending is especially relevant to myths and fables as they seek to convey a moral or illustrate consequences of a protagonist's attempts to achieve a goal as an appendage to the story's events (Mandler and Johnson, 1977). However, a goal-based definition of a story is limiting in not accounting for stories which do not have a goal or plan contained within them, such as some cultural stories which function to describe and explain events and phenomena.

Others assert that there must be an affective element to a goal-based story for it to be considered as such. Brewer and Lichtenstein (1981; 1982) argue that the reader of a story must either experience an affective response such as surprise, suspense, or curiosity, or acknowledge that it would be possible for another reader to feel this way. Whereas others (e.g. Mandler and Johnson, 1977) suggest that the affective response does not necessarily have to be felt by the reader and can occur instead on the part of the protagonist, either explicitly within the text, or implicitly, inferred by the reader. However, this factor relies on individuals' subjective readings, engagement with and understanding of the stories they read, as well as the quality of the story – perhaps relating more to the subjective understanding of a “good” story as opposed to being a defining factor of a goal-based story.

Broader conceptions hold that a story is something which conveys or has the potential to convey *meaning*. Popova (2015, p. 1) describes stories as more than mere descriptions of

events; stories are ‘compelling and irreplaceable human ways of thinking and communicating knowledge’ which consist of *coherent* and *causal* sequences of events. The distinctive features that Popova (2015, p. 1) describes relate more to the overall aim or effects of the story: they are those which give the story *meaning* such as ‘coherence, closure, purpose and some evaluative consequence’. It is these distinctive features, Popova argues, that enable stories to last long in the memory and to be impactful, positively influencing the reader. In this way, Popova (2015) assumes a broader view of a story that does not go so far as to prescribe a set structure or distinctive set of components and focuses more on the story’s function and effects.

Story Function

Some story definitions attempt to clarify the purpose, or wider goals and aims of stories – their effect on the audience, or intended effect on the part of the author – referred to by Stein (1982) as the story’s overall *function*. Popova’s (2015) definition suggests that a story’s *meaning* can lead to the personal enhancement of the reader. While Popova (2015) does not elaborate on how reading stories may lead to personal enhancement, the way in which story meaning is defined offers insight into this idea. Popova’s (2015, p. 1) inclusion of ‘coherence’ and ‘purpose’ suggests that personal enhancement might include the gaining of new knowledge and understanding; whereas the inclusion of ‘some evaluative consequence’ suggests that meaning might also result from the reflective insight that stories enable – for example (and within the context of this thesis) through imaginative insight into the moral consequences of characters’ actions, and the motivations and desires underpinning them.

However, there is also a perception that a story’s primary function is to entertain. Brewer and Lichtenstein (1982) define stories as a sub-class of narrative which function primarily to entertain readers, citing specific western genres, such as romantic and adventure stories, as evidence for this assertion. While Brewer and Lichtenstein (1982) acknowledge that some stories are designed to have multiple functions, for example fables which they suggest both entertain and persuade, there is no acknowledgement of the potential educational value and function of stories. The view that stories function primarily to entertain and distract somewhat echoes the view of the ancient Greek philosopher, Plato. Plato believed that

knowledge about the world could not be gained through the work of untrustworthy, fictional accounts and ultimately dismissed stories as a vehicle for education. While Brewer and Lichtenstein (1981; 1982) do not dismiss the educative potential of stories outrightly, their considerations ultimately fall short in not considering education as a primary function.

Of course, not all stories are perceived to have an educational value, nor is this a requirement of stories – stories, especially those emerging from the popular culture, can function to engage, distract and entertain as a form of light relief or enjoyment (Carr and Harrison, 2015). However, the existence and prominence of stories written for entertainment, which commonly feature in the home and on school bookshelves, does not mean that all stories are or should be characterised this way. Ultimately, while some stories will have been written purposively to entertain, this is not characteristic of *all* stories.

The wider literature and research ultimately contradicts a narrow view of story function, suggesting that stories can function in a number of ways, including:

- To entertain (Brewer and Lichtenstein, 1981; 1982)
- To recount human experience (Livingston, 2013)
- To instruct others (Livingston, 2013; Stein, 1982)
- To preserve the cultural heritage of societies (De Young and Monroe, 1996; Stein, 1982)
- To explain events and phenomena (De Young and Monroe, 1996; Livingston 2013; Stein, 1982)
- To convey social and moral codes (De Young and Monroe, 1996; Stein, 1982)
- To introduce new ways of thinking and points of view about values (Stein, 1982)
- To resolve social problems, for example by re-telling experiences as personal stories (Stein, 1982)
- To develop or stimulate the moral imagination and hone moral judgement (Bohlin, 2005; Guroian, 1998; 1996; Kidd and Castano, 2013; Nussbaum, 1992; 2001; Popova, 2015; Willows, 2017; Winston, 2000)
- To teach about moral values and virtues (Guroian, 1996; 1998; Winston, 2000)

- To help children to understand the social world, character and their own identity (Bettelheim, 1991; Carr and Harrison, 2015; Cochrane, 2014; Ryan and Bohlin, 1999).

Not only does the review of the literature show that the nature and function of stories are multifaceted, but it indicates that one of main functions of many stories is concerned with the *education* of the reader or listener. The overwhelming majority of the functions listed above relate in some way to the education or instruction of individuals. Furthermore, a substantial number apply to the context in which this thesis is situated: character education.

Aristotle viewed stories and narratives from Greek poetry and literature as morally educational, believing stories could provide understanding and insight into ‘human purpose, motive and agency’ (Carr and Harrison, 2015, p. 53), as well as providing moral examples and warnings of the consequences of harmful actions. Echoing Aristotle’s view, there is a common perception within the character education literature that a story can function as a vehicle for character education (e.g. Bohlin, 2005; Guroian, 1998; Nussbaum, 1992; Carr and Harrison, 2015). Stories are considered the ideal vehicle to teach valuable life lessons to children (Lee *et al.*, 2014) and it is believed that stories, including personal accounts and those from history, can function to guide children to see both human flourishing, resulting in the “good life”, and human failure (Carr and Harrison, 2015; Ryan and Bohlin, 1999). For Guroian (1996; 1998) the function of stories such as fairy tales and fantasy stories is to instruct the moral imagination of children and to teach virtues. It is held that, through stories, character and virtue are depicted in an attractive way and provide children with a means to look at life, exploring and understanding the virtuous actions of others and, in turn, encouraging them to reflect on themselves and who they want to be (Carr and Harrison, 2015; Guroian, 1996). Ultimately, stories can help us to understand the social world, carry moral values and are morally significant through the models of action and ‘frameworks for moral thinking and ethical judgement [that] they provide’ (Winston, 2000, p. ix).

It is also believed that stories serve as an effective substitute for first-hand experience when attempting to transfer information and influence cognition about issues and behaviours (De Young and Monroe, 1996). Stories can enable readers to socially interact with characters,

actions and events, vicariously experiencing or simulating the lives and experiences of fictional characters in a space that is separate from the real world (Popova, 2015) and in a way that enables the reader to hone their moral judgement (Guroian, 1998; Kidd and Castano, 2013; Nussbaum, 2001; Willows, 2017). While a more detailed analysis of how it is thought stories can and should be used as a vehicle for teaching character education are discussed in Chapter Two and Chapter Three, the agreement that it is the function of many stories to *educate* is central to how *story* is conceptualised within this thesis.

“Story” as Defined within this Thesis

This thesis is situated within the context of children’s schooling, specifically within the field of primary education in England. In the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), Key Stage One (KS1) and Key Stage Two (KS2), the term *story* is often used to refer to story/picture books, short stories told orally or short novels, read to and by children. In this way, story is used in a more specific manner than it is within general discussions of literature: outside of education, story is used more broadly and also encapsulates life and events, extending to personal narratives, news stories and stories conveyed through other means such as plays, television series and films.

The term *story* is used within this thesis to refer to written and oral narratives such as story books, biographical accounts and oral retellings, which are used within the home or school for the purpose of education or entertainment. Unlike the definitions of Brewer and Lichtenstein (1981; 1982), Prince (1973), and Mandler and Johnson (1977), this understanding does not necessitate a set plot structure, or set of criteria which are focused on the effects experienced by readers or protagonists. Instead, the inclusive criteria focuses more on the meaning, function or effect of the story and aligns more with Popova’s (2015, p. 1) story definition which suggests that: story meaning can be provided through ‘coherence, closure, purpose and some evaluative consequence’ and can lead to the ‘personal enhancement’ of the reader. As this thesis is concerned with character education, it will centre on stories which have the potential to teach or educate the reader, for example through conveying an underlying message, meaning, or providing insight into the character of protagonists through describing their thoughts, motivations and behaviours.

With these criteria in mind, this thesis will include a focus on a range of stories utilised in the primary classroom, including short stories, with relatively limited plot and character development, such as picture books and fables which seek to convey an underlying moral or behaviour; and more complex and detailed stories which arguably enable insight into characters' thoughts, feelings and motivations. Stories which have the *potential* to convey meaning in this way will also be considered. For example, even if the story was written purely to entertain, the story would still be considered here if teachers believe that the story has the potential to be used to teach character education.

CHAPTER TWO: HISTORICAL AND CONTEMPORARY APPROACHES TO STORY-BASED CHARACTER EDUCATION IN ENGLAND

1. Introduction

In Chapter One, the longstanding oral tradition of stories and the use of stories as a vehicle for character education in ancient Greek times was briefly introduced. In this chapter, the focus is on how stories have been used as a vehicle for teaching character education in more recent history, and within the context of education in England. Historical and contemporary literature, dating from as far back as the eighteenth century and from as recently as the twenty-first century, is reviewed. The reasons for drawing on approaches evident in both historical and contemporary literature are twofold. One, it is important to understand the foundations on which modern interpretations of, and approaches to, story-based character education rest. Two, an understanding of how story-based character education has been approached, and how and why stories are perceived to be a valuable vehicle for this purpose was necessary to inform the methodology for the research study at the heart of this thesis. This understanding helped to ensure that prominent themes could be investigated with practising teachers.

A review of historical and contemporary approaches follows a note which first clarifies how the term “moral” has historically been used when discussing story-based character education. The subsequent sections are organised according to the typical characteristics of approaches evident during different time periods. In the penultimate section, some prominent twenty-first century approaches to story-based character education are discussed alongside what is known about the approaches of primary school teachers in England. In the final section, a summary of the main themes emerging from this chapter is provided.

2. A Note on Moral Stories and Moral Education

To avoid confusion or conflation of terms, it is important to first note how *moral* is used to describe stories and approaches within this chapter. As a noun, *moral* is used to refer to an underlying message or lesson which can be taught, and to a principle concerned with what is considered to be right, honest and fair. A moral or principle might be conveyed or demonstrated to a reader or listener through the plot and motivations, choices and actions of characters described within stories – for example through the “thin” detail provided within fables, or the “thick” detail provided within imaginative fictional narrative (Carr, 2022). As an adjective, *moral* is used to distinguish between what are considered right or wrong actions, desires and motivations.

A *moral story* is considered to be one which contains one or more underlying moral that can be understood and learnt by the reader. A *moralising story*, on the other hand, can be thought of as one which overtly comments on what is considered right and wrong, with the intention of shifting the focus onto, and “improving” the reader. It is important to note that not all stories referred to within this thesis are *moral* stories – for example, a story might not have a clear moral at its heart but might still be used to teach character education because of some of the motivations, choices and actions of characters contained within the story. The stories discussed within this thesis therefore include moral stories, moralising stories and stories that were not necessarily written to teach about character virtues, but which could be used for this purpose by parents or educators.

It is also important to define and distinguish between *moral education* and *moral instruction*. Although sometimes used interchangeably, the two terms in fact refer to two distinct, albeit related, processes. *Moral instruction* is used in this chapter specifically in reference to some of the twentieth century approaches used to teach morals through stories; it can be thought of as a method which contributes to, but is not necessarily constitutive of, moral education. In Chapter One, it was explained how *moral education* is broadly understood as an educational aim concerning ‘socio-moral, psycho-moral (especially emotional) and political development’ of individuals, especially children (Kristjánsson, 2015, p. 8), and character education is considered to be a specific subset of moral education. As is illustrated by the aforementioned adoption of the term “character education” by the DfE (2019) in England,

character education is used more prominently than “moral education” within contemporary education circles.

While the term moral education is generally used to refer to approaches aimed at character formation, the meaning of the term and considerations of what constitutes moral education has varied. For example, in the mid-eighteenth century, moral education in England was less concerned with the development of critical thinking in children, and more concerned with teaching compliance and conformity rooted in religious beliefs or class-based control. Whereas, in the early and mid-to-late twentieth century, there were attempts to move moral education in Britain away from its attachment to religion, and, in the twenty-first century, approaches appear to be aligned more closely with a neo-Aristotelian understanding of character development. The following sections will address these examples and set out the typical characteristics of story-based approaches to moral education from the eighteenth century to twenty-first century.

3. Christianity and Moral Education through Stories from the Eighteenth Century Onwards

Many of the books written for children that were published in the early-to-mid-eighteenth century are now viewed as highly moralising and didactic; the stories used were often written with the intent of teaching a moral and were often moralising or patronising in nature. The deeply religious and didactic nature of children’s stories in the early-eighteenth century is illustrated by books such as James Janeway’s *A Token for Children* (1709). Janeway’s stories reflected the high child mortality rate of the time, providing accounts of the sins commonly committed by children from the perspective of those lying on their deathbeds. Through this approach, Janeway intended to instruct children in good moral behaviours from a religious perspective; if children wanted to reach heaven, they would take note of the child characters’ accounts and learn from their repented sins. This approach is rooted in a Christian model of character formation (Arthur, 2020); moral instruction was essentially provided through a Christian culture in and around this time. Morals were evident everywhere in society – in paintings and carvings, as well as in Church buildings;

stories of saints were used to illustrate virtues, and stories about punishment were used to illustrate consequences that awaited sinners (Arthur, 2020).

Although reading as a form of entertainment and enjoyment was not a primary concern of most authors in the eighteenth century, there is evidence of attempts to make moral instruction more enjoyable for children in the 1740s. The teaching of morals and expected behaviours remained the principal aim of children's stories throughout the 1740s and 1750s, yet some authors and publishers recognised the importance of children's enjoyment and entertainment, believing that this would make moral stories more effective as a teaching tool. Some authors adopted an approach which combined didacticism and entertainment (Grenby, 2014b). This approach was embodied by John Newbery's *A Little Pretty Pocket-Book, Intended for the Instruction and Amusement of Little Master Tommy, and Pretty Miss Polly* (1770), with its motto: "instruction with delight". First printed in 1744, Newbery's pocket-book is regarded as one of the first books aimed specifically at children. It aimed to teach through amusement. As well as including illustrated rhymes, riddles, letters and rules of behaviour, many pages also presented a "moral" or "rule of life" to be learnt; it originally came with a free gift designed to help children keep track of their good and bad deeds, illustrating the behaviourist nature of moral education at the time: there was an expectation that morals and behaviours encouraged within stories would be abided by in real life.

Moral stories incorporating children's entertainment had become more diverse by the late eighteenth century. Like Newbery, many authors selected to keep stories simple, but based these within fantasy or mythical contexts. For example, stories contained within Thomas Day's *The History of Sanford and Merton* (originally published in three parts: 1783, 1786, 1788) included moral stories such as fables and stories based on classical myths. Within the book, the main protagonists, Harry and Tommy, read the stories guided by their mentor, Mr Barlow, concurrently exposing the reader to a variety of morals and values. Many of the stories included different creatures and novel contexts. Another author, Sarah Trimmer, also used a fantasy context in her *Fabulous Histories*, which was based on a family of birds that demonstrated the thoughts, feelings and behaviours of a "good" human family. Her stories were essentially a series of fables, with a distinct 'Christian and moral flavour' (Musgrave,

1985, p. 22), which were designed to teach morals as well as to develop compassion for creatures.

While simple moral stories were used to teach morals and expected behaviours, for example teaching by illustrating the consequences that characters face following their actions, towards the end of the eighteenth century the complexity of some moral stories contained within children's books became increasingly sophisticated. Whereas simple moral stories may provide limited understanding of the complexity of real situations requiring a moral response, more detailed stories often enabled authors to convey characters' thoughts and feelings to the reader. Authors such as Maria Edgeworth developed the complexity of plot and depth of characters in her stories. Edgeworth's protagonists faced multiple problems and moral conflicts, through which a number of morals were conveyed. Edgeworth's *The Parent's Assistant* aimed to be both didactic and entertaining, containing stories in which child protagonists were embroiled in complex moral situations. The story *Tarlton* was contained within the first of Edgeworth's six volumes (first printed in 1796) and focused on the contrasting characteristics of two school friends whose actions demonstrate the importance of honesty, courage, loyalty and friendship when one friend is led astray in pursuit of popularity. The increase in sophistication of some moral stories such as these could be taken to indicate that some authors believed more complex stories were needed as children mature.

The majority of the stories that were printed in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century taught about values conducive to living well with others such as honesty, politeness, obedience and care for others, and essentially addressed ethical, religious and social issues through modelling what were considered 'correct modes of behaviour' (Walker, 2014). Books were aimed predominantly at the children of the middle and upper-classes and often reflected familiar contexts and values which enabled readers to identify with characters (Grenby, 2014b; 2014a). While the content of these stories would today be considered moralistic and prudish, this was a necessary condition at the time: books were didactic and child characters had to model expected behaviours in order for the stories to be considered acceptable for children (Musgrave, 1985). Control over the content and style of children's

literature continued throughout the nineteenth century. Those in charge of the distribution of literature – the publishers, critics and those running circulating libraries – insisted on moral stories, and fiction was generally given bad reviews due to a perception that much of it was immoral (Musgrave, 1985). This perception was expressed through articles in periodicals such as the *Quarterly Review* which were influential in controlling what children read in the mid-nineteenth century. Tight control meant that children did not have their own form of literature other than heavily didactic material. Even adventure stories, which had become more prominent throughout this period, aimed to teach morals, just in a more attractive way, through ‘improvement and amusement’ (Musgrave, 1985, pp. 25-26).

Christian societies such as the *Religious Tract Society* were also influential through their distribution of moral and religious stories in the early nineteenth century and beyond. Founded in 1799, the *Religious Tract Society* originally produced and distributed religious literature to the families of the working classes in an attempt to convert them to evangelical Christianity (Fyfe, 2011). This literature was simpler and cheaper than the material aimed at the middle and upper classes, but was often even more moralistic (Musgrave, 1985). Some of the children’s books produced at this time embodied the deeply moral and religious content of the society’s tracts. Illustrating the influence of religious societies on children’s literature is Mary Martha Sherwood’s *The History of the Fairchild Family* (1822) which was based on the lives of the fictitious Fairchild family. The pious nature of the stories is clear from the outset: Sherwood (1822, p. 3), when describing the family dynamic, explains that Mr and Mrs Fairchild ‘did not wish their dear little children to be handsome, or rich, or powerful in the world: all they desired for them was the blessing of God’. Within the stories, Sherwood detailed the hymns, religious stories and prayers that Mr and Mrs Fairchild taught to their children. The religious theme and content of the book was aimed at ensuring that education in middle and upper-class homes was rooted in Christianity.

Prior to the nineteenth century, books had only been accessible to those who could afford (and read) them: mainly the middle and upper-classes. However, with the cheap production of printed reading material in the nineteenth century, reading became more affordable for the lower and middle classes. Magazines and papers in the form of chapbooks, halfpenny

and penny broadsides were established as the popular literature of the lower classes and not only provided a form of entertainment, but, as noted by Shepard (1973), also influenced cognition, informing the outlook and philosophy of the poor. Recognising the influence of cheap literature, Hannah More, a religious writer and evangelist, began to produce moral and religious tracts as a “moral” alternative to chapbooks and broadsides which she considered sinful. This series of chapbooks, entitled *Cheap Repository Tracts*, started in 1797 and became increasingly popular in the early nineteenth century. By the 1830s, publishers began imitating More’s works with their own moral tracts which were printed throughout the nineteenth century (Shepard, 1973).

Despite the efforts of writers such as More, penny literature, which focused on fictional stories of adventure and what many educational commentators considered to be immoral behaviours, gained increasing popularity between 1830 and 1850. Popularity was not only reflected by the increasing number of publishers of this genre, but by the content of school pupils’ own work. For example, Sloan’s (2017) analysis of school magazines written between 1826 and 1875 by pupils attending Croydon Friends’ School in Saffron Walden reveals clear evidence of where fairy tales and adventure stories are reflected in pupils’ own writing, despite a school-wide ban on fiction.

Fiction in the form of penny literature, some varieties of which were also known by the 1860s as “penny bloods”, or “penny dreadfuls”, were produced weekly and became popular with working class adults and children, whose literacy levels were increasing (Flanders 2014; Summerscale, 2016b). By the 1860s, the readership of penny dreadfuls had almost exclusively narrowed to working class children and, by 1895, the dreadfuls had become a public concern. As Summerscale (2016a) indicates in *The Wicked Boy*, penny dreadfuls were blamed for society’s ills – mainly the corruption of youth; they were linked to or implicated in children’s attempts to run away to distant lands, murder, robbery and suicide. Educational commentators of the time such as Edward Salmon (1886a) expressed the public opinion of boys’ magazines, also noting the class divide in readership: ‘Boys’ books are, on the whole, morally unimpeachable; boys’ magazines, with a few notable exceptions, are in every way objectionable. Books are purchased chiefly by the sons of the well-to-do. Magazines, on the

other hand, are patronised almost exclusively by the lads of the working classes' (p. 251). He regarded the content of boys' magazines as poisonous, pernicious and devoid of moral goodness (Salmon, 1886a; 1886b).

In 1871, to counter the perceived negative effects of the penny dreadful on the lower classes, the *Religious Tract Society* founded their own cheap magazine which was successfully re-branded in 1879 as the *Boy's Own Paper*. The *Boy's Own Paper* contained both implicit moral stories and those making more explicit moral points; it was regarded as the "middle-class" version of the penny dreadful as its adventure stories were underpinned by the virtues of valour, self-sacrifice and the defence of Empire (Summerscale, 2016a). The success of the paper was in-part attributed to the decision not to use the *Religious Tract Society's* name, which readers associated with sanctimonious material, and in-part to its content: engaging adventure stories as opposed to sentimental tales (Musgrave, 1985). It was regarded by Salmon (1886a) as the only antidote to the penny dreadful – though he also believed that other newspapers and magazines such as *Young Folks* and *Young England* were well-intentioned (but less successful) examples. Later periodicals such as Alfred Harmsworth's the *Halfpenny Marvel* (starting in 1893) and *Union Jack* (starting in 1894) also distanced themselves from the content of penny dreadfuls and attempted to finally kill them off. These magazines focused on stories of adventure but were rooted in jingoism, valour and self-sacrifice (Summerscale, 2016a), engaging the child audience and promoting desired values and behaviours in disguise.

Writers for the *Boys' Own Paper* and other magazines intending to teach morals used the context of the public school to set moral ideals and standards, despite being an unfamiliar context for the majority of their readers. This change was influenced by the increase in attention given to public school life from writers and policy makers (Holt, 2008) following the emphasis placed on the public school setting as one which promoted the educational ideal of noble character in the form of 'muscular Christianity' (Arthur, 2003; Arthur, 2020, p. 105). Stories set in the context of the public school were essentially used to set a frame of morality for boys and as a means to transmit ideological values to readers, including the working-class. Despite focusing on the lives of the elite, they were intended for wider

audiences and were 'held up to working-class children as the optimal way to experience youth' (Holt, 2008, pp. 3-4). Arthur (2020) acknowledges the influence of the public school novel in that it provided 'a common and influential frame of morality that effectively set ideals and standards for the conduct and socialisation of boys' (p. 106). Thomas Hughes' *Tom Brown's School Days* was one public school novel which set this precedent through focusing on Tom's character-forming experiences at Rugby School.

Charlotte Mary Yonge promoted the reading of the public school novel and other forms of literature in her *What Books to Lend and What to Give* (1887) which was essentially a compilation of books, organised according to target age group and genre, which she believed were useful with regards to moral education. Yonge hoped that through providing a careful selection of what she considered the right kind of books, the public, especially children, would avoid the reading of what she regarded to be 'profane literature' such as the penny dreadful or stories describing the criminal life (Yonge, 1887, pp. 5-8). Yonge (1887) asserted that boys, especially, needed books about heroism and nobleness, as opposed to indulging in 'weak morality' and piety. She suggested that the thirst of young men for information should be supplied in a 'sound and wholesome form', for example through adventurous or humorous stories, biographies and books of travel and adventure (pp. 6-9). Included in her recommendations for boys was *Tom Brown's School Days* which the Board of Education (1912) subsequently recommended should feature in all elementary school libraries as part of reading for enjoyment.

Tom Brown's School Days was not the only public school novel popular for this purpose. Frederic Farrar's three major novels, *Eric or Little by Little*, *Julian Home* and *St. Winifred's, or, the World of School*, were also used to set common moral standards and codes of conduct for schoolboys, but contrasted starkly with *Tom Brown's School Days*. Whereas the character of Tom Brown was presented as someone who was able to choose right from wrong while engaging in expected boyish tendencies such as games, fights and the mistrust of his teacher, Farrar's novels were regarded as 'pious prose' containing endless sermons and overstated morals concerned with self-righteous characters lacking in substance (Jamieson, 1968, pp. 272-276). Nonetheless, Farrar's novels were highly sought after, especially by

Victorian fathers who welcomed Farrar's 'mixture of godliness allied to the detailed studies of the classics' (Jamieson, 1968, p. 275).

4. Secular Moral Education through Stories in the Early Twentieth Century

Stories featured as part of a structured, secular approach to moral education which emerged in the early twentieth century. A secular ethic, described as 'the task of transmitting duty and moral behaviour to the young', developed during the Victorian era, and this had a profound influence on character education in schools in the twentieth century (Arthur, 2020, p. 116). Ethical societies such as the Moral Instruction League (MIL) sought to influence education through establishing clear and structured *secular* approaches to moral education. Formed in 1897, the MIL was a vocal and active group interested in character formation, of which moral education was seen as a central tenet. Its members approached character with a new perspective: they promoted the belief that character development was at least equally important as the technical skills taught in schools and sought improved moral education of children, especially the working class (Arthur, 2019). The MIL were opposed to the state church acting as the intermediary when it came to deciding what was moral in schooling (Arthur, 2019) and, while they developed in a Christian context, the MIL sought to distance morality from religion and replace religious teaching in English and Welsh schools with a systematic secular moral instruction (Arthur, 2019; Berard, 1984; Spiller, 1934).

The MIL's secular approach was outlined in their *A Graduated Syllabus of Moral Instruction and Training in Citizenship for Elementary Schools* (MIL, 1902). Moral instruction was removed from a Judeo-Christian context, and moral virtues were taught in a way which isolated them from their 'theological foundations' (Arthur, 2020, p. 121). The approach was one of 'direct moral teaching' through specific lessons, which was thought to be more effective than those which relied on the influence of 'the school ethos, curriculum content or extracurricular activities' (Wright, 2018, p. 219). In contrast to some of the approaches seen in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the MIL highlighted the dangers of moral teaching which overly moralised and frightened children through an emphasis on

consequences of poor behaviour (Berard, 1984). Instead, the MIL used a storytelling method, which is described in more detail below.

The extent to which schools were influenced by the MIL's publications and promotions can be seen twofold. First, the Board of Education's *Code of Regulations for Public Elementary Schools* in 1906 recommended that moral instruction should feature within the elementary curriculum; within the Board of Education's provision for moral instruction, they explained that moral instruction might occur incidentally – for example where opportunities arise in regular lessons – or through a systematic method of instruction (Spiller, 1934). In keeping with the MIL's approach, the Board of Education's recommended teaching method drew predominantly on stories as a means through which to appeal to children and make the teaching relevant to their lives (Spiller, 1934).

Second, a compilation of official MIL documents, which were used to record the 'actual practice of moral instruction in elementary schools in England and Wales' (Johnson, 1908, p. xii), reported that moral instruction was widely delivered in schools: twenty Local Education Authorities (LEAs) had adopted the *Syllabus* at this time, and approximately fifty had created their own syllabus of moral instruction.

It was in the early 1900s that the MIL, recognising that there was a dearth of materials which supported their work, began to produce manuals and resources which often comprised, or contained extracts from, moral stories (Berard, 1984). The manuals functioned as a teaching framework for parents and teachers which not only recommended which types of story should be used, but provided an outline of a teaching approach for using stories for moral education. Frederick James Gould, one of the founding members of the MIL, was influential in the approach behind moral education and the materials produced to support it. Gould regarded moral education as that which trains for the "good life", and for him this also involved 'personal hygiene, self-development and character building' (Gould, 1913, p. 1). He aimed to influence the teaching of moral education through setting out a logical and systematic approach. Gould's characteristic strategy was to use stories such as historical accounts, biographies, folklore and classical literature. Despite the MIL's anti-religious stance, Gould proposed that religious literature should be utilised for ethical teaching but

without its theological implications. This led to the MIL reversing its initial animosity towards the Bible. The MIL subsequently proposed that biblical stories should be classified as “historical literature” and taught as one of a range of texts within moral instruction (Arthur, 2019; Berard, 1984), utilising the stories for their moral content, removed from theology.

Gould held the belief that moral stories should be used as a primary vehicle for moral education and his books on moral instruction reflected this. Moral stories were the main focus of Gould’s *Life and Manners: A Volume of Stories Suitable for the Moral Instruction of Children* (1906) in which he promoted their use to build character and train judgement in accordance with the MIL’s syllabus; stories were also promoted in his later books (Gould, 1910; Gould, 1912; Gould, 1914). Gould explained that, as concrete illustrations, stories have an immediate appeal to young children:

First, the symbol, then the doctrine. First, the drama, then the appeal. And here is the model for the ethical teacher. He must convey his moral instruction through concrete vehicles.

(Gould, 1913, p. 38).

Gould believed that the concrete must come first, followed by the abstract, not the other way around; to ensure children are engaged and that engagement is sustained, children need an illustration, a clear example that they can understand and with which they can interact and consider (Gould, 1913). Gould also provided some insight into how he believed moral character could be taught using moral stories when he wrote: ‘moral truth should be taught, moral feeling trained, and moral energy stimulated by illustrations culled from life and history’ (1906, p. 11). In addressing the training of “moral feeling” and not just the teaching of moral understanding (or “truth”), it suggests that Gould believed stories could be used to stimulate an emotional response in readers.

While Gould (1906) explained that teachers should be at liberty to choose the stories and methods they employ, he summarised the main characteristics of an approach for moral instruction using stories. He promoted the *dramatic* method, which he believed encapsulated the style of Aesop and the Greek poets, as well as the works of other literary greats such as Chaucer, Cervantes and Shakespeare. This constituted “lively narration”,

through the use of parable, poem, myth and legend. Further to this, Gould advised that when using stories for moral instruction, the aim should be *definite* and clear. By this he did not mean that it was always necessary to explicitly state the moral meaning of a story, nor reach a conclusion, rather that the purpose of the activity should be intentional. He recommended that teachers should exercise their judgement to determine whether children require support, warning that unnecessary examination of a story's moral meaning may spoil its effect (Gould, 1906).

Another advocate of the use of stories for moral instruction was Felix Adler. Adler was a well-known German-American educator and secularist who founded the Society for Ethical Culture in 1876 in the USA. He believed that a person's actions, or deeds, formed the ethical culture, not their religious beliefs, or creeds. Adler's *The Moral Instruction of Children* (1906) was first published in America in 1892 and influenced the work of the MIL, which acknowledged that Adler helped to lay the foundations for their own movement (Berard, 1984). Stories were introduced as the main vehicle for moral instruction within Adler's *Primary Course*, which featured the teaching of fairy tales, fables, stories from the Bible and Homer's poems. Adler's (1906) method of moral instruction was alike to the instructional materials of the MIL in that moral illustrations were distanced from Christianity. For example, while Adler included biblical stories, their moral meaning was isolated to ensure that they were left open to diverse interpretation.

Adler also described the pedagogic value of each type of story he addressed, providing an outline of how he believed they were best used for moral education. Sharing the belief of later proponents of using stories for character building (such as Guroian, 1996; 1998), Adler (1906) suggested that fairy tales stimulate and extend the imagination of children, enabling them to learn vicariously through situations they have never been in, and through experiences they have never had. He advised that teachers should not isolate the moral from the fairy tale if they are to be used successfully; extracting the moral, he warned, would detract from the main interest of the story and nullify its value. He believed that lessons learned by chance were much more memorable, so advised that teachers should treat the morals of fairy tales as incidental when encountered or discovered during reading.

Adler also valued the teaching of fables. He suggested that, because fables narrow the attention of the reader by focusing on just one moral, they enable a deeper reflection. Adler (1906) proposed that children should be asked to explain the main points of fables to ensure that their meaning is understood. He also suggested that once meaning has been established, the moral should be related to the children's own lives, for example by asking children to share similar examples from their own experiences.

Adler's Primary Course ended with a focus on stories from the Bible and classical Greek literature. He believed that biblical stories and the works of Homer have a 'perennial vitality' and that they have stood the test of time because of the unique way in which they are perfused with moral issues concerning family, friends and society (Adler, 1906, pp. 106-109). However, he warned that stories from the Bible and classical Greek literature presuppose more advanced moral judgement, as these stories often present a series of acts requiring moral adjudication. Due to their moral complexity, Adler (1906) suggested that these stories should be preceded by the teaching of fables which address the moral issues contained within the more complex stories. This approach, it was assumed, would provide children with the foundations of knowledge and understanding required to interpret the more complex plot and characters of biblical and classical Greek stories.

Adler and Gould were not the only proponents of using stories for moral education in the early 1900s. At this time, a number of authors such as Lois Bates (1900) and Alice Chesterton (1905) promoted moral education through stories, publishing collections of children's stories which they believed could be used in the school and home. However, the types of stories included in their collections differed somewhat from those promoted by Adler (1906) and Gould (1906; 1913). Adler (1906) asserted a preference for stories which had stood the test of time. He explained that the fact fables, biblical stories and classical Greek literature were still immensely popular and attractive to children thousands of years after being created was proof enough of their worth. While he did not discount other sources entirely, he appears to have deemed them unnecessary given the abundance of classical and religious literature already available to use. Gould (1913), on the other hand, had a stricter view on other sources of stories and essentially disregarded popular fiction stories, suggesting that they

served as material for subsequent discussion, but not the vehicle for teaching morals. He also advised against using fictional stories which were written for purpose, questioning whether it was fair to teach children about what is “right” using illustrations of ethical cases which had been manufactured. While Gould appears to have been cautious of using fictional stories, it is of interest to note that he included classical myths and legends in his list of appropriate concrete illustrations, much of the content of which is undoubtedly fictitious. However, he claimed that while myths and legends may be disbelieved as fact, they have not been created, sold and copyrighted, and stem from imagination or events which have been adapted from generation-to-generation; because of this, he reasoned that they do not classify as fiction in a strict sense (Gould, 1913).

Bates (1900) and Chesterton (1905) appear to have been less concerned about the origin of the stories they used. Bates’ *Story Lessons on Character-Building (Morals) and Manners* (1900) and Chesterton’s *The Garden of Childhood: Stories for Little Folk at School and at Home* (1905) were comprised of the authors’ own fictional stories which were written specifically for the purpose of teaching of morals and expected behaviours. Many of the stories were also based in fantasy contexts. For example, all of Bates’ stories related back to an initial story about fairies which introduced *character* as a temple that is built of precious stones (morals) such as truth, honesty, obedience and kindness. In comprising fantasy stories written specifically for the purpose of moral education, these collections did not meet Gould’s (1913) criteria of appropriate illustrations, and this is despite Chesterton’s collection being written in accordance with the MIL’s elementary syllabus, and with their sanction. It may be that these collections of stories were viewed as supplementary to the MIL’s syllabus of moral instruction, as opposed to an alternative form of instruction.

In addition to differences in the types of story promoted for character education, there also appears to have been a difference in opinion concerning how stories should best be used to teach morals to children. Although Bates (1900) and Chesterton (1905) only provided brief suggestions for instruction which were contained in their respective prefaces, the suggestions differed from the more detailed methods of Gould (1906; 1913) and Adler (1906). Bates and Chesterton also differed considerably from each other. Bates (1900)

suggested that her stories should be reinforced with repetition, asserting that repetition ensured familiarity and enabled the stories to be referred back to if a reminder about a particular moral, such as telling the truth, was needed. She also complemented each one with suggested activities to further reinforce the morals, making them explicit. Chesterton, on the other hand, advised against ensuring that the moral had been understood and focused rather on the children's enjoyment of listening to them (1905). Chesterton writes:

It is my sincere hope that, while listening to the story, the children will feel touched by the lesson it seeks to embody, without realizing that a lesson is being imparted. In telling or reading the stories I would ask that the moral be not forced upon the little ones, or even emphasized by the teacher.

(1905, p. iii).

Chesterton's approach to teaching morals through stories appears passive. Although Chesterton goes on to encourage asking questions of children to understand their preferences, learning appears to be left to occur as if by osmosis, without reinforcement, or facilitation from parents/teachers. The differences in teaching approaches outlined here show the two main points on which approaches to moral education through stories appear to have differed in the early twentieth century: one concerning how best to teach morals and behaviours to children using stories, and the other concerning which story types are best suited to, and should be used for, moral education.

5. Children's Entertainment and Moral Education through Stories in the Mid-to-Late-Twentieth Century

Despite differences in pedagogical approaches and suggestions for which types of stories should be used, the volume of story-based material produced in the early twentieth century suggests that there was nonetheless a common agreement that children's stories could (and should) be used for the purpose of character education. However, from around 1920 onwards, there was disillusionment about moral preaching in education and this led to more of a focus on children's enjoyment of reading. Although there were attempts to make moral

stories more attractive for children in the mid-nineteenth century – for example by teaching through ‘improvement and amusement’ (Musgrave, 1985, p. 26) – it was only in the early twentieth century that children’s entertainment became a primary concern for authors. It was, by this time, considered more important for a story to have an engaging plot and characters than it was to have an overarching moral. Children’s interests were the main driver behind authors’ choices, stories of fantasy and adventure became more prevalent and, consequently, morals featured more at random. Stories of adventure, while often containing an exploration of moral issues, were much less didactic, and rose in popularity, extending the trend set by popular penny literature and early adventure stories such as Stevenson’s *Treasure Island* in the late nineteenth century (Rivera, 2018).

The change in the themes of children’s books is exemplified by the early twentieth century literary works of authors such as Edith Nesbit, which contained ‘more humour and perhaps less overt moralising than could previously be found in children’s literature’ (Bailey, 2016). While stories contained an exploration of moral and social issues to some extent, for example featuring through characters’ relationships and the dilemmas they face, these tended to be incidental; for example, it was more likely for the concept of honesty to be a secondary feature within a story than for the story to have been written specifically to teach about, or illustrate, the importance of honesty.

Children’s fiction continued to flourish in the twentieth century, peaking in the so-called “golden age” of children’s books in the UK – between the 1860s and 1914 – and pausing and resurging around the outbreaks of war that followed (Bailey, 2016). Other significant contributors to the direction and popularity of children’s fiction during this time included J.R.R Tolkien (*The Hobbit*, 1937), C.S. Lewis (*The Chronicles of Narnia*, 1950) and Roald Dahl (1960s and 1970s) (Rivera, 2018), whose stories were similarly written with entertainment and enjoyment in-mind. However, towards the end of the twentieth century, the popularity of children’s stories which taught morals was rejuvenated amongst a significant, yet comparatively small, group who advocated home schooling. Home schooling became a ‘discernible political movement’ in the 1970s (Gaither, 2016, p. 7), informed by the writings of educators such as John Holt (Fortune-Wood, 2005). The homeschool movement was

prominent in the United States, but it occurred at roughly the same time in European countries (Gaither, 2016), and its growth and standing influenced home education in the UK (Fortune-Wood, 2005). With the homeschool movement came a demand for books and resources which parents could use to teach their children at home; and this led to the reprinting of many of the nineteenth and early twentieth century books which promoted and taught moral, such as William Holmes McGuffey's *Eclectic Readers* (or *McGuffey Readers*). The *Readers* were first published in 1836 and were highly popular at the time, with estimations that 120 million copies were sold by 1920 (Westerhoff III, 1978). The *Readers* are still popular amongst home educators today and reprints continue to be sold.

A number of factors contributed to the popularity of the *Readers* when they were first published. While many of these relate to the teaching method employed through the books, the most important factor concerned the 'moral and social culture' and standards that the *Readers* presented (Minnich, 1936, p. 69). Other factors included the use of illustrations to capture the attention of readers, and the 'literary merit' of McGuffey's stories (Minnich, 1936, p. 70). McGuffey created the *Readers* to help to provide a basic education for children and to 'prepare citizens in character and proper principles' (Kammen, 1976, p. 58). The *Readers*, as well as teaching grammar and spelling, taught lessons through stories about 'the principles of fundamental moral behavior necessary in a good community' (Minnich, 1936, p. 33). It was believed that through reading the stories, children would *absorb* the strong morals contained within them (Kammen, 1976) which related to values such as kindness, honesty, patriotism, cleanliness, forgiveness, punctuality and courage. Piety and morality were key themes that were influenced heavily by English and Irish authors like Maria Edgeworth (Minnich, 1936).

Despite the popularity of moral stories among home schoolers, there was nonetheless a significant shift in their popularity amongst general readers and, consequently, authors, in the twentieth century. The relative reduction in attention given to the teaching of morals through stories is reflected by the reduced use of moral terms within twentieth century American literature, as identified by Kesebir and Kesebir (2012) in an analysis of word and term frequency. While the prominence of moral and virtue terms in children's stories was

not measured specifically, Kesebir and Kesebir's (2012) analysis has revealed that the frequency of moral terms declined significantly between 1901 and 2000. Kesebir and Kesebir (2012) also analysed the frequency data of fifty virtue words. Although a high percentage (66%) of virtue words had their peak frequency in the twentieth century between 1901 and 1925, 74% reached their lowest points between 1976 and 2000 and 74% had a significant negative correlation with time between 1901 and 2000 (Kesebir and Kesebir, 2012). The trend indicates a decline in explicit reference and attention given to concepts of moral character from the 1920s onwards (Kesebir and Kesebir, 2012).

The relative reduction in the popularity of moral stories for children during this time can be attributed, at least in part, to the emphasis placed on children's enjoyment and entertainment when reading. However, it is also important to consider psychological and philosophical developments that followed the Second World War and which subsequently influenced approaches to moral education. In the late 1950s, there were two influential publications: Lawrence Kohlberg's PhD thesis, which set out the research informing his cognitive development theory (1981), and Elizabeth Anscombe's aforementioned essay *Modern Moral Philosophy* (1958), which prompted some philosophers to return to the insights of Aristotle (see Chapter One).

In the 1960s and 1970s, driven by the work of influential educators such as Paul Hirst, and psychologists such as Kohlberg, *reasons* came to dominate conversations about moral education. While Christianity – though not unchallenged – continued to underpin (moral) education in post-World War Two Britain, by the 1970s there was a movement away from religious beliefs as the basis of morality (Conroy, 2023). Hirst played a transitional role for moral education in Britain; he attempted to move (moral) education away from its longstanding attachment to Christianity and instead argued that only *reasons* matter as a moral rationale (Conroy, 2023). Hirst did not suggest that secular morality and religion are *incompatible*, rather that morality does not *depend* on religious beliefs (Hand, 2023). For Hirst, moral reasoning and moral action are essentially underpinned and shaped by foundational principles. On Hirst's view, principles '... map out certain fundamental features of rational morality, laying bare what objectivity in this area necessitates' (Hirst, 1976, p. 46).

There were three rival approaches to moral education which emerged within this backdrop in the 1960s and 1970s and which provide important context for discussions of story-based character education approaches in this section: values clarification, Kohlberg's cognitive development (theory) approach, and care ethics. Each of which will be outlined briefly in turn. Values clarification emerged as popular alternative to traditional character education in the 1960s. Whereas traditional approaches were associated with the inculcation of virtues of children's communities (including religious communities) – and these were taught through examples, rules, rewards and punishments – proponents of values clarification (e.g. Raths, Harmin and Simon, 1966) instead sought to help children think for themselves and to develop and understand their own values systems to live their lives by. In this way, values clarification aimed to help pupils to discover their own values as opposed to encouraging them to adopt the values of others within their communities. It was a teacher's role to support pupils to establish and give reasons for their values, for example through asking pupils to reflect on personal experience and prompting pupils to share their perspectives about different values, predominantly through dialogue and discussion. In a sense, then, in values clarification, the post-War emphasis on reasons had taken a personalist, subjectivist turn.

Kohlberg's cognitive developmental approach followed his stage model of moral development (1981). Kohlberg believed that existing approaches – such as values clarification and traditional character education – were inadequate in that they could not adequately counter the type of moral relativism that made the events of the Holocaust possible (Kristjánsson, 2017; Sanderse, 2012). Kohlberg's stage-bound theory was established based on experiments conducted with eleven to sixteen-year-old boys. According to Kohlberg's theory, children develop through three stages of moral reasoning: pre-conventional, conventional and post-conventional stages. At the pre-conventional stage, children's decisions are shaped by their knowledge of rules and consequences; at the conventional stage, decisions are shaped by group norms and an acknowledgement of what is socially considered to be appropriate; at the post-conventional stage, decisions are shaped by an understanding of abstract rules and principles of morality, taking into account the existence of different values and opinions.

Following the development of this theory, a cognitive developmental approach led schools and teachers to guide children through the associated thinking processes. Classroom discussions and activities, based on moral conflicts and dilemmas, were the primary means through which Kohlberg recommended children's moral reasoning could be developed (Blatt and Kohlberg, 1975). It was essentially short *stories* that Kohlberg advocated as part of this approach – moral dilemmas in short narrative form that served the basis of classroom discussion. Pupils were asked to provide solutions to hypothetical and real-life dilemmas, explaining their reasons and justification for their decisions (e.g., see Hersh, Paolitto and Reimer, 1979, pp. 143-144). In schools, Kohlberg-inspired discussions could stem from the school curriculum – for example through encouraging pupils to take the perspectives of literary characters and to consider characters' reasoning, conflicts and difficulties faced (Sanderse, 2012).

Care ethics emerged in the early 1980s in reaction to Kohlberg's cognitive developmental theory. Care ethics emphasised relationships, friendships and concern for others – areas that are not accounted for in Kohlberg's considerations of moral decision making (which emphasised moral reasoning as a cognitive exercise, and prioritised moral principles). Proponents of care ethics such as Gilligan (1982) and Noddings (1984) focused less on the consequences of caring acts, and more on their prior considerations (Sanderse, 2012), emphasising moral sentiments, perceptions and feelings. Moral development from the perspective of care ethics can be understood as 'progress from being cared for as a child, to caring for intimate others, culminating in caring about strangers in need' (Sanderse, 2012, p. 62). Noddings (1984) emphasised schools as caring communities in which teachers model care for pupils, use dialogue to help pupils to understand and care for each other, provide care-giving experiences (practice), and help pupils to see the positive motivations in their actions. Care ethics sought to help pupils develop moral sentiments and enhance caring relationships. A related approach which utilises stories is Peter McPhail's *Lifeline*, which was aimed at pupils of secondary school age and was used by over 20,000 pupils prior to publication (McPhail, Ungood-Thomas and Chapman, 1972). *Lifeline* followed a consideration model which is built on "learning to care" through understanding and being sensitive to the needs of others and their situations (Martin, 1987). The strength of *Lifeline* is

held to lie in the educational materials that it provided (Martin, 1987). *Lifeline* contained short narratives which outlined dilemmas/problems set in real-world contexts. The advocated teaching approach used the narratives to present personal, interpersonal and moral dilemmas/problems, and aimed to move pupils to think about how these dilemmas affect society more generally (McPhail, Ungeod-Thomas and Chapman, 1972).

Another notable approach at around this time, which utilised stories as resources through which to teach about moral issues with secondary school-age pupils, came within Lawrence Stenhouse's widely used and influential *The Humanities Curriculum Project* (Stenhouse, 1968). *The Humanities Curriculum Project* attempted to use a range of resources, including poems, extracts from novels and biographies, and historical works, as a stimulus through which to teach about controversial issues and provide insight into others' perspectives (Stenhouse, 1971). Within this project, the nine "controversial issues" covered were war, education, family, relations between the sexes, race relations, people and work, law and order, living in the cities, and poverty. As part of the advocated teaching approach, teachers would use story forms as the stimulus, and support learning through their role as a "neutral" discussion chair, facilitating the group's conversations about the topic at hand, and encouraging pupils to share their own perspectives and arguments (Stenhouse, 1971).

It was in the 1990s that *character education* re-emerged, and this was in many ways a response to values clarification and Kohlbergian cognitive developmental theories; and, to a lesser extent, care ethics. Values clarification was criticised for failing to account for how becoming aware of one's values helps individuals to make choices, to evaluate alternatives, *reason* and deliberate. Values clarification was essentially unclear about what develops or changes through the clarification process and was based on a loose subjectivist premise that values inform choices, and that helping children to clarify what their values are will help them to know what to do (Sanderse, 2012). Kohlberg's cognitive development theory was criticised for paying limited attention to how moral reasoning leads to moral action and to how action is motivated by emotions. Kohlberg assumed that strong correlations existed between reasoning and action; however, Blasi's (1980) meta-analysis provided evidence against this assumption, indicating only weak correlations. Blasi's findings indicated that

there are additional factors that influence moral behaviour, such as moral emotions and moral identity – factors that virtue ethicists subsequently sought to take into account. Virtue ethicists, such as Carr (1991), argued that any account of moral action is incomplete if it does not consider the role of moral emotions. While care ethics accounts for emotions in influencing motivations to do good, it can be criticised for down-playing the role of moral reasoning (Sanderse, 2012); virtue ethics, on the other hand, accounts for the ‘rational refinement of our emotions’ (p. 90).

Proponents of character education in the late twentieth century sought to emphasise the development of good character, and provide schools and teachers with the means through which to develop pupils’ character virtues. American educators such as Kilpatrick (1993), Lickona (1991) and Ryan and Bohlin (1999) offered practical suggestions for character education classroom activities, but lacked a strong theoretical foundation and these approaches were not well-grounded academically as a result. However, these practical approaches were later strengthened by the work of philosophers (e.g. Carr and Steutel, 1999; Nussbaum, 1999) who had been influenced by Anscombe’s (1958) *Modern Moral Philosophy* (see Chapter One).

Late twenty-first-century writers began to publish collections of children’s stories that could be used to develop *character*. They focused on “character building” and the “development of virtue”, seeking to provide parents and teachers with story-based resources to achieve this aim. While many books of this nature originated in America, they were also published in England. The books included William J. Bennett’s *The Book of Virtues: a Treasury of Great Moral Stories* (1993); Kilpatrick, Wolfe and Wolfe’s *Books that Build Character: A Guide to Teaching Your Child Moral Values through Stories* (1994); and Vigen Guroian’s *Tending the Heart of Virtue: How Classic Stories Awaken a Child's Moral Imagination* (1998). These collections of stories are similar to the aforementioned works of Bates (1900) and Chesterton (1905) in that the authors sought to provide a range of stories for parents and teachers to teach their children about character and virtues. The stories included in these collections are wide ranging, and include classic fiction, fables, stories from the Bible, picture books, Greek myths, legends, fairy tales, folklore, fantasy and historical and contemporary

fiction. While the collections produced by Bennett (1993) and Kilpatrick, Wolfe and Wolfe (1994) include stories from across a range of story types, Guroian's (1998) *Tending the Heart of Virtue* specifically promotes the use of fairy tales and fantasy stories as a means through which to engage children's imaginations.

Despite suggesting different examples of stories that can be used to teach virtues and develop character, collections of stories such as the examples mentioned here, provided limited explanation of how they should be used to support children's learning. Guroian (1998, p. 24) suggests that fairy tales and fantasy stories can 'nurture the moral imagination' and provide children with vicarious experiences, but provides no guidance for parents and teachers on how they can support children's learning from such stories. Bennett's *Book of Virtues* promotes stories as a way to illustrate virtues and vices. Bennett refers to the book as 'a book of lessons and reminders' (p. 13) whereby stories give reference points and examples to children regarding what is considered to be right and wrong. The stories are arranged according to the virtue that is taught in each story, including self-discipline, compassion, responsibility, friendship, work, courage, perseverance, honesty, loyalty and faith. While Bennett (1993, p. 12) acknowledges that stories from *The Book of Virtues* need to be varied according to levels of comprehension, he does not address how to teach the morals he identifies, besides suggesting that the reading of moral stories develops children's "moral literacy". Bennett (1993, p. 11) defines moral literacy as the understanding of what traits of character are, why they are important and how to identify them, and holds that an increase in moral literacy will help children to better understand what they see and experience in life.

Kilpatrick, Wolfe and Wolfe's (1994) *Books That Build Character: A Guide to Teaching Your Child Moral Values Through Stories*, though suggesting that dramatic delivery of a story can help to engage listeners, also offers limited guidance regarding how to *teach* character through stories. The authors appear to believe that interaction with a moral story need not necessarily extend beyond passively hearing the text: Kilpatrick, Wolfe and Wolfe (1994) share a similar stance to Bennett in that they advise that stories set good and bad examples, which serve as reminders to children. They also warn that adults should avoid didactic

methods such as explaining the moral to children, for good moral stories speak for themselves (Kilpatrick, Wolfe and Wolfe, 1994). They further state that it is ‘fine if a story leads to a conversation’ about the moral of a story but give no further guidance, suggesting only that through hearing stories an emotional attachment is created and that children become familiarised with codes of conduct (Kilpatrick, Wolfe and Wolfe, 1994, p. 59).

Despite a lack of explanation regarding how children might learn from reading stories, one point on which Kilpatrick, Wolfe and Wolfe (1994) *do* offer recommendation is in regard to the characteristics of stories that they suggest should be used. They suggest that stories in which characters grow or learn something are helpful as readers can learn vicariously through the characters’ journey and development. Furthermore, they explain that stories for character building need not have an overtly clear moral, nor need to have been written with a moral in mind. Kilpatrick, Wolfe and Wolfe (1994) suggest that, excluding stories like Aesop’s fables which have stood the test of time, stories written specifically to teach morals are often poorly written and ineffective; the best stories – they argue – are those in which moral flow naturally and readers do not feel that they are being forced to learn.

6. Story-Based Character Education Approaches in the Twenty-First Century

The resurgence of interest in character development that started in the 1990s continued into the early twenty-first century. Story-based character education approaches have been a focus of contemporary theorists and researchers interested in character development. Whereas traditional story-based approaches aimed towards teaching compliance and conformity, and were often rooted in religious beliefs, contemporary approaches tend to align more closely with a neo-Aristotelian understanding of character education which foregrounds the development of *phronesis* and different virtue components (Jubilee Centre, 2022). In this section, prominent approaches to story-based character education are described, and what is currently known about the related practice of primary school teachers in England is outlined.

Approaches from Contemporary Theory and Research

Guidance for story-based character education provided by contemporary theorists and researchers offers insight into the characteristics of stories that are considered useful for character education. The guidance also describes how parents and teachers might use stories to support children's character development. Three main approaches are described in this section: first, a teaching approach outlined by Karen Bohlin which aims to stimulate children's moral imaginations through stories (Bohlin, 2005). Second, an approach outlined by D'Olimpio and Peterson (2018) which is inspired by Philosophy for Children and which encourages pupils to passionately engage with stories, critically reflect and discuss theirs and others' ideas, examples and feelings. Third, a research-based approach developed by Arthur *et al.* (2014) and described by Carr and Harrison (2015) which uses stories to develop pupils' virtue literacy. While the approaches are described here, the ways in which children are thought to *learn* through these approaches are analysed in the subsequent chapter.

The Moral Imagination

In her book *Teaching Character Education through Literature*, Karen Bohlin outlines an approach focused on teaching character education through stimulation children's moral imaginations. Although the approach offered by Bohlin is specifically aimed at secondary school children, the core principles of the approach could be used to inform story-based character education approaches for younger pupils. Bohlin's approach centres on how teachers can use rich story contexts, and their characters, as a stimulus for pupils' ethical reflection. Her examples of stories include traditional and modern classics, such as *The Great Gatsby*, which provide access to characters' thoughts, motivations and desires. While Bohlin does not exclude other story types, it stands to reason that simple moral stories, such as fables, may not provide the level of detail required for the approach that Bohlin describes. Bohlin contends that, through the moral imagination, readers' moral vision, identity, rehearsal and judgement can be developed; it is likely to be longer and more complex stories in which rich descriptions of story characters, their situations and insight into their thoughts, feelings and motivations are provided.

Bohlin suggests that pupils require support in probing for meaning, and need time to think about what happens in stories and why. She emphasises the role of teachers in not only

strengthening pupils' moral imagination, but facilitating pupils' learning through their engagement with stories. While Bohlin's approach is summarised here, further discussion of *how* pupils are thought to learn from stories through the moral imagination is provided in the subsequent chapter. Bohlin suggests that pupils should: be guided by teachers, evaluate characters and their goals, explore characters' moral journeys, and, focus their analysis on characters' experiences, examining what characters think, do and say. Bohlin (2005, pp. 44-52) also explains that although adolescent pupils are able to identify significant events in characters' lives, and explore factors contributing to these significant events, teachers play an important role in supporting pupils to reflect on their own lives and examine their own purpose. Teachers can help pupils to 'trace and ponder the "direction, motivation and significance" of literary characters' choices, and hopefully to become more capable of evaluating the significance of their own choices' (p. 47). Here, Bohlin shifts the focus to analysis of characters' reasoning and actions, again encouraging teachers to help pupils reflect on the significance to their own lives.

Primary school teachers might seek to develop their pupils' moral imaginations in similar ways to those suggested by Bohlin. Primary school pupils may not be able to reflect independently on characters' moral journeys and the significance of story events on their own lives to the extent expected in a secondary school. However, primary school teachers might aid their pupils through scaffolding for learning, modelling and support. For example, teachers might support pupils to explore characters' choices and motivations from age-appropriate texts, and to relate these to real-life, and age-relevant contexts, through questioning techniques and guided discussion.

Philosophical Community of Enquiry

D'Olimpio and Peterson (2018) outline an approach informed by Philosophy for Children (Lipman, 1976), which aims to teach reasoning through discussion. Stories feature prominently within this approach and are used as a stimulus for discussion. D'Olimpio and Peterson (2018) propose that the educative potential of stories resides in the opportunity given to pupils to compassionately engage with story characters and their experiences. They suggest that it is the 'detail and nuance' of stories which 'allows for sympathetic

engagement with the characters' thoughts, intentions, feelings, behaviour and circumstances' (2018, p. 98). While specific examples of stories are not provided by D'Olimpio and Peterson (2018), their approach is similar to Bohlin's (2005) in that it appears to necessitate the use of stories containing sufficient depth, detail and exploration of characters.

D'Olimpio and Peterson (2018, p. 102) also emphasise the need for 'pedagogical intervention' from teachers to ensure that children engage with a story's moral content. They propose a strategy to encourage 'explicit and philosophical discussion required to draw out the moral learning of narrative artworks' (p. 104), which they refer to as a philosophical *Community of Inquiry*. The Community of Inquiry consists of a teacher-facilitated discussion that is based on pupil-generated questions. As part of the Community of Inquiry, pupils first read a chapter of an age-appropriate text – for example one in which the experiences shared by characters are relevant to the lives of pupils. Pupils are then encouraged to generate a central question that is 'philosophical: open, 'deep', and not a question that yields an immediately obvious answer' (D'Olimpio and Peterson, 2018, pp. 104-105). The central question is then discussed. Within the Community of Inquiry approach, teachers are *facilitators*; teachers guide pupils to 'critically reflect and compassionately consider the ideas, examples and associated feelings of others as well as their own' (p. 106). Therefore, even within a pupil-led and story-based activity, teachers are 'pivotal' in guiding pupils' learning (D'Olimpio and Peterson, 2018, p. 106).

Virtue Literacy

Approaches designed to develop pupils' virtue literacy through stories appear to have received the most attention in contemporary theory and research literature. Though the term was briefly introduced in Chapter One, it is important to note that definitions of virtue literacy have evolved over time and through developments in understanding and conceptions of the term. Virtue literacy was first defined as consisting of 'three inter-related components of virtue: virtue knowledge, virtue reasoning, and virtue practice' (Arthur *et al.*, 2014, p. 9). However, Davison *et al.*'s. (2016) later definition differs from the original. Davison *et al.* (2016) define virtue literacy as being focused on 'knowledge, understanding

and satisfactory application of virtue terms’, stating that this understanding is ‘distinct from the development of virtuous emotions or virtuous behaviours’ (p. 17). Similarly, the Jubilee Centre’s (2022) definition of virtue literacy does not include the behavioural component (virtue practice) mentioned by Arthur *et al.* (2014). Instead, the Jubilee Centre’s definition includes *virtue perception* – a component related more to moral sensitivity and more closely associated to the cognitive understanding of virtues pointed to by Kristjánsson (2018, p. 555): ‘[virtue literacy is a] cognitive understanding of virtues and [an] ability to apply them to new relevant contexts’. According to the Jubilee Centre (2022), virtue literacy incorporates three components: *virtue perception* – the ability to notice when a situation involves the virtues; *virtue knowledge and understanding* – to be familiar with, and understand virtue terms, definitions and why they are important; and *virtue reasoning* – the ability to be discerning about virtues, for example when virtues conflict. While pre-phronetic children are unlikely to have developed the integrative function of *phronesis* (Darnell *et al.*, 2019) and therefore cannot be expected to adjudicate about complex virtue quandaries of adult life, it is likely that enhanced knowledge and understanding of virtues, and with opportunities to apply their understanding, that children can begin to *reason* and think about virtue conflicts in new contexts. Based on the above understandings, virtue literacy broadly relates to the ability to *perceive* what is morally relevant, and to *understand* and *consider* what it is morally appropriate in a given situation.

Carr and Harrison’s (2015) *Educating Character Through Stories* examines how teaching and learning methods aimed at developing virtue literacy might be used to support pupils’ character development. Carr and Harrison’s approach, which is underpinned by the foundational research of Arthur *et al.* (2014), outlines both the types of stories that the authors consider to be conducive to character education, and the way in which stories can be used to develop virtue literacy. The assumptions underpinning their approaches have been tested empirically, and the research findings are reviewed in the subsequent chapter.

Carr and Harrison (2015) propose that it is rich imaginative literature which holds the most promise for character education through stories in a school context. It must be noted, however, that Carr (2022) later suggests that the most morally influential fables and

parables are very thin and unpopulated with narrative details. Carr's latter suggestion contrasts with the view of Nussbaum (1992) – and the view expressed by his and Harrison's (2015) earlier suggestion – that the stories most conducive to providing insight into complexities of human character are those that are more detailed and include nuanced descriptions of character and conduct. Nevertheless, Carr and Harrison's provision of detailed descriptions regarding how different types of imaginative literature are conducive to character education in schools illuminates the potential for story-based character education using these types of story, which will be further explored in the subsequent chapter.

In a similar way to Gould (1913) and Adler (1906), Carr and Harrison (2015) suggest that religious stories can be used as 'moral and spiritual tale[s]' rather than being introduced as rival, or competing, accounts of history (p. 55). For example, teaching pupils the story of the *Exodus of the Jews* as a stimulus to teach about *suffering* and *hope*. The authors also point to the educative potential of classic Greek narratives, such as the works of Homer, which offer 'some of the best ever explorations of the moral implications and consequences of flawed human character' (p. 62), while also capturing the imagination of both older and younger readers. Carr and Harrison suggest that Greek tragedies and Shakespearian tragedies engage readers' imaginations and are perfused with illustrations of the moral consequences of vice and virtue. In a similar way to Bohlin (2005), Carr and Harrison (2015) also suggest that late eighteenth and nineteenth century novels such as Jane Austen's *Emma* and Dickens' *Great Expectations*, provide useful character studies and allow readers trace the moral development of protagonists through the close access to characters and their experiences which readers are afforded. Finally, Carr and Harrison focus attention on stories of chivalry, nobility, heroes and knighthood – such as those concerned with King Arthur and the Knights of the Roundtable, which emerged from medieval ballads. The appeal and interest in these stories, Carr and Harrison suggest, resides in the 'moral and spiritual crises and tensions' that are present in between the spiritual and interpersonal narratives (Carr and Harrison, 2015, pp. 76-77), and in the virtues (e.g. *phronesis*, humility, honesty and justice) that are exemplified by Knights of the Round Table. Classic stories of knights and heroes are believed to 'provide an effective 'hook' for attracting the interest of young people' (p. 154).

The teaching approach described by Carr and Harrison (2015) is rooted in the research of Arthur *et al.* (2014), which is discussed further in Chapter Three. Arthur *et al.*'s (2014) research project, the *Knightly Virtues*, explored how abridged versions of four modern and classic narratives – *Don Quixote*, *El Cid*, *Gareth and Lynette*, and *The Merchant of Venice* – could be used as a vehicle for character education with nine to eleven-year-old pupils. The approach focuses on how reading stories and completing related activities can develop pupils' virtue literacy. The research built on the recommendation that young people should be supported in developing a moral vocabulary in order to be able to recognise and reflect on virtues in their own lived experiences (Arthur, 2010).

The pedagogical approach used within the *Knightly Virtues* research was developed by both theorists and practicing teachers. The teaching and learning activities aimed to support pupils' comprehension of historical contexts, and to support identification and understanding of virtues and vices shown by characters in the stories (Carr and Harrison, 2015). The programme consisted of five lessons which were delivered by classroom teachers: in lessons one to four, pupils read, or were read, each of the four stories and were encouraged to reflect on the virtues displayed by the protagonists after each. Despite there being a range of virtues and vices present within each story, each of the lessons focused on one or two moral virtues. In their fifth and final lesson, pupils were encouraged to reflect on all of the stories, and to consider how the characters, actions and virtues displayed were relevant to their own character development (Carr and Harrison, 2015).

In delivering the lessons, teachers were supported with a teaching pack, which included a PowerPoint presentation for each story, providing historical context and visual and audio aids, and learning objectives linked to National Curriculum aims. Pupils were each given a journal which provided: space to include notes or reflections on each story; a glossary of key terms; and various story-related activities. In addition to engaging pupils with the stories, the activities were designed to support two main aims. First, a key priority of the *Knightly Virtues* was to develop a 'basic virtue vocabulary' – for this reason, many of the activities encouraged pupils to identify and understand the key virtues shown by the characters in the stories (Carr and Harrison, 2015, p. 138). Second, the activities were designed to support

pupils in understanding the significance of the virtues in relation to their own lives. Through the personalised journal activities, pupils were encouraged 'to engage in deeper reflection on the key character traits, their personal and social significance and their relevance to or implications for their own lives and conduct' (Carr and Harrison, 2015, p. 130).

The *Knightly Virtues* research project catalysed subsequent research (Davison *et al.*, 2016; Francis *et al.*, 2018; Hart, Oliveira and Pike, 2020; Jónsson *et al.*, 2019; Pike, Lickona and Nesfield, 2015) focusing on the development of pupils' virtue literacy through stories. One of these research projects, the *Narnian Virtues*, was also implemented in schools in England, and used a similar teaching and learning approach. The *Narnian Virtues* activities were based on twelve "Narnian" virtues exemplified within the text. Pupils first learnt the meanings of the twelve virtues, then read extracts from the book and were tasked with identifying evidence of certain virtues within the extracts. Pupils then explained and discussed the evidence together, before being asked to think about a time that they had demonstrated the virtue in focus. A reflective journal was also utilised as a space for pupils to reflect on their learning and application of the virtues (Francis *et al.*, 2018). A later iteration of the *Narnian Virtues* project (Hart, Oliveira and Pike, 2020) included an extended *Narnian Virtues* curriculum, fewer virtues taught, and more activities designed to achieve emotive and empathetic engagement from pupils. The curriculum included classroom and home activities through which pupils were encouraged to discuss and continually reflect on the taught virtues.

Another example of how stories have been promoted as a vehicle through which to develop virtue literacy is Liz Gulliford's publication of a series of stories about moral virtues. Gulliford's *Can I Tell You About...* series aims to support parents, guardians and educators in teaching their children about gratitude, hope, forgiveness, compassion and courage. Each story is told by the main character and encourages reflection on the meaning of each virtue. Questions for discussion are included in the hope that, through these, children will be supported to reflect on the complexities of each virtue and the relevance of these to their own lives.

Teachers' Approaches to Story-Based Character Education

Although there are clear indications in the literature that contemporary theorists and researchers advocate for story-based character education in schools in England, less is known about story-based character education in practice. In this section, an overview of what is known about teachers' approaches to story-based character education in primary schools in England is provided.

There is evidence that some teachers and schools have adopted and adapted the research-informed approach described by Arthur *et al.* (2014) and Carr and Harrison (2015). Floreat Education Academies Trust – now part of GLF Schools (Allen-Kinross, 2019) – developed a story-based character education programme which aims to develop virtue literacy in pupils in Reception, Year One and Year Two classes (pupils aged 4 to 7). The character programme aims to support a “caught and taught” (see Chapter One) approach to character development, and primarily consists of a story-based virtue literacy programme, which ‘guides teachers to use thoughtfully sequenced children's stories to explore character virtues in class’ (Floreat Education, no date). In using stories as a basis for virtue education, teachers provide opportunities for pupils to encounter compelling role models, develop their understanding of the virtues and relate these to their own lives (Floreat Education, no date). Pupils are encouraged to use the relevant vocabulary and to make links between the story and their own experiences (Gifford, 2016).

While this teaching approach is clearly inspired by the *Knightly Virtues* research project, the story types utilised by Floreat Education differ from those used by Arthur *et al.* (2014) and advocated by Carr and Harrison (2015). Floreat Education use modern children's stories, traditional fairy tales and fables as a stimulus through which to introduce young pupils to virtues and the language surrounding them. Though it is not clear why these types of stories have been selected, the divergence from the types of stories used in the *Knightly Virtues* research suggests that teachers' selection of stories may be influenced by other factors such as the age of the children being taught and the stories available to them in school.

Annex B of the DFE's *Character Education Framework Guidance* also offers indications that teachers utilise stories as a vehicle for teaching character education in their schools. There

are two case study examples (DfE, 2019, pp. 19-27) which suggest that stories are used in primary schools for teaching character education: St Joseph's Catholic Primary School (p. 19) and Surrey Square Primary School (p. 20). Although limited in detail, the two examples provide some insight into how stories are used as a vehicle for character education in each school. The approaches appear to share common features with some of the story-based character education approaches outlined in this chapter.

At St Joseph's Catholic Primary School, the focus appears to be on developing virtue literacy: the school uses story contexts to help to develop pupils' knowledge and understanding of virtues, and to help pupils understand how the virtues in focus are relevant in personal (everyday) contexts. Pupils are also given opportunities to demonstrate their understanding and give examples, suggesting that teachers encourage pupils to *apply* their understanding and make links between fictional and real-life contexts. This approach acknowledges that pupils' knowledge and understanding of virtue terms can be developed through story-based learning, and also that pupils may require support in relating story examples to their own lives – an area discussed further in Chapter Three. At Surrey Square Primary School, the teachers use stories to teach about each of their school's seven values. In this example, the stories serve as the basis for character education delivery in whole-school assemblies, and are followed by more interactive class-based lessons. The interactive approach described here appears to combine entertainment, reinforcement, and illustration of values in recognisable, or relatable, contexts. This approach aims to bring values to life, possibly in acknowledgement that pupils may be more likely to be interested in and motivated to learn from interactive and fictional contexts.

While the examples provided above offer indications that some schools and teachers are using stories to teach character education, it is not clear whether their approaches are typical of primary school practice in England. How, and indeed if, primary school teachers value and use stories as a vehicle for character education is largely unknown and under researched.

7. Summary

The literature reviewed in this chapter has illustrated how stories have been used as a vehicle for character education in England from at least as far back as the eighteenth century. The underlying motivations, influences and approaches have varied over the years and, while there have been some recurring themes, there appears to have been little consensus regarding the teaching of character education through stories. There are two main points on which there has been uncertainty. One, the *types and characteristics* of stories that are conducive to, and effective for, character education. It is unclear whether all story types can, or should, be used for character education, with contrasting perspectives on the use of fiction, fantastical, classical and imaginative literature. Two, the *approaches* to story-based character education. It is unclear how stories can or should be used to teach character education; there have been varied and often contrasting approaches evident within the literature, for example with some proponents of story-based character education placing emphasis on the role of the teacher in supporting children to understand moral themes, and others warning against teacher intervention.

The contemporary literature reviewed in this chapter has also indicated that although stories are still advocated by theorists and researchers, and used by some primary school teachers, the perceptions and approaches of primary school teachers in England is largely undocumented. The extent to which primary school teachers in England currently value and use stories for teaching character education is unknown. Indeed, it is unclear whether the perceptions and approaches evident within historical and contemporary literature are reflected in the perceptions and approaches of practicing teachers.

CHAPTER THREE: LEARNING FROM STORIES

1. Introduction

The review of historical and contemporary literature in Chapter Two showed how stories have long been regarded as an effective vehicle for teaching character education. However, the review of the literature so far has paid limited attention to *how* children are thought to learn from stories. In this chapter, the focus turns to research findings which offer insight into how children learn through interaction with stories, as well as the suggestions of educators and theorists who advocate for story-based approaches to character education.

In the first section, some of the influences that may support or hinder children in learning from stories are highlighted. These influences include child developmental factors and various features of story characters and settings, such as the extent to which they reflect reality. In the second section, how children are thought to understand and learn from moral themes in stories is considered, drawing on evidence from research studies in education and developmental psychology. How moral theme comprehension may be facilitated through the intervention of teachers is also discussed. In the third section, research on the development of virtue literacy, which focuses on how children can be supported to develop knowledge and understanding of virtues, is reviewed. The efficacy of approaches which encourage pupils to read stories, examine the text and reflect on story events is discussed. In the fourth section, the key assumptions of some theorists and educators, who suggest that children can learn from stories through their moral imagination, are presented: the ways in which children's understanding and reasoning about character virtues might be developed through reading about characters, rehearsing and reflecting on their experiences are discussed. In the final section, the themes discussed within this chapter are summarised and their implications for approaches to story-based character education are outlined.

2. Developmental Factors and Features of Stories that Influence Children's Learning

How children learn and take meaning from stories can depend on different developmental factors, and features of the stories themselves (Hopkins and Weisberg, 2017; Strouse, Nyhout and Ganea, 2018). In this section, three developmental factors thought to influence how children learn information from stories and transfer this to real-life contexts are introduced. Next, different features that may inhibit or support children's learning from stories containing fictional elements are considered by drawing on the findings of various research studies. While these studies are not specifically focused on the development of character, the findings emerging from this body of research have important implications when considering how stories can be used to teach character education. The factors introduced within this section are then discussed further within the subsequent section, which focuses on how children learn from moral themes in stories.

It is important to note that learning from stories has been understood and measured in different ways within the research literature that will be considered within this and subsequent sections. Hopkins and Weisberg (2017) set out three main measures of learning used within research on this topic: *recall*, *generalisation*, and *application*. Recall relates to the ability to remember and report information; generalization relates to the transfer of information and tests the ability to apply the information within a new situation or context; and application tests a behavioural application of the learned information. Strouse, Nyhout and Ganea (2018) also note the distinction between acquisition and generalisation of knowledge. They define *learning* as a 'child's ability to recognize or recite information presented in a book', and *transfer* as 'the ability to apply newly-acquired information to new exemplars or contexts' (p. 2). Strouse, Nyhout and Ganea's (2018) definition of learning can be likened to Hopkins and Weisberg's (2017) conception of recall, and transfer can be likened to Hopkins and Weisberg's (2017) conceptions of generalization and application. In both cases, the ability to recall or recite information is distinguished from the transfer (generalisation and application) of knowledge, with the *transfer* of information indicating that learning has extended beyond simply recalling information conveyed through a story.

Developmental Factors

The extent to which young children can learn and transfer information from stories to real-life contexts is thought to depend upon a number of developmental factors such as *symbolic understanding, analogical reasoning, and reasoning about fantasy and reality* (Strouse, Nyhout and Ganea, 2018). *Symbolic understanding* relates to symbolic development: the ability to understand and use symbols as visual representations. Young children often have difficulty with tasks involving symbolic reasoning (DeLoache, Miller and Rosengren, 1997; Leman *et al.*, 2019). In order for learning and transfer to occur, there needs to be a *dual representation*, whereby both the symbol and its relation to what it represents in real life is recognised; and this involves ‘thinking about the concrete features of the symbol and the abstract relation between it and something else at the same time’ (DeLoache, Miller and Rosengren, 1997, p. 308). In the context of reading picture books, with which primary school children regularly come in to contact, readers must recognise that books and the pages within them are objects in their own right, but also that the pictures on the pages are representations of real-life objects and places (Leman *et al.*, 2019). While picture books are beneficial in that they provide novel content for children, this may also make the transfer of information difficult. A child’s understanding of a concept which is introduced to them in a picture book may become tied to that book, its context and the illustrations through which it is introduced (Strouse, Nyhout and Ganea, 2018). For this reason, Strouse, Nyhout and Ganea (2018) suggest that pictures in storybooks which more accurately represent the object they are supposed to be depicting may help children to make the link between the image and the object; unrealistic images, on the other hand, may make transfer of knowledge particularly difficult for children. This consideration has obvious implications for fantastical content in picture books which does not accurately represent real-life.

Analogical reasoning refers to the ability to make an analogy or inference that if situations share some similarities, then they are likely to be similar in other respects also (Leman *et al.*, 2019). While the transfer of knowledge is not dependent on a perceptual similarity between two contexts (Holyoak, Junn and Billman, 1984), it is easier to make successful analogies and transfer learning from one context to another if there are perceptual surface similarities (Brown, 1989; Daehler and Chen, 1993). Without surface similarities, similarities at a deep

semantic level may be difficult to notice (Gobet, Chassy and Bilalić, 2011). Analogical reasoning also depends on prior conceptual knowledge and the difficulty of the task. Young children are ‘universal novices’ who tend to have limited prior knowledge and are therefore more reliant on surface level features when it comes to transferring and applying knowledge from one context to another (Brown, 1989, p. 374). When learning from picture books it may therefore be easier for children to transfer learning to the real world if the pictures are similar in surface structure to the real world (Strouse, Nyhout and Ganea, 2018). However, this understanding also has implications for stories which may have little, or no, illustrations. Stories containing detailed descriptions of characters and settings that are similar to real-life settings may also support analogical reasoning in that there may be a perceptual similarity between the imagined story context created in readers’ minds and the real world.

Reasoning about fantasy and reality relates to how children determine whether the information presented to them in a story is relevant and applicable in real life, and the bearing that this has on their learning from fictional sources. Fantastical contexts can have beneficial effects on children’s learning, both immediate and long-term, possibly as a result of children’s increased internal motivation to learn within a fictional context (Parker and Lepper, 1992) and/ or through engagement in imaginative thinking (Strouse, Nyhout and Ganea, 2018). It has also been suggested that greater attention and reflection is required when engaging with content that breaks the laws of reality (Weisberg *et al.*, 2014), potentially increasing the likelihood that children will understand and learn from stories. However, fantastical aspects of stories also pose difficulties for children. As mentioned above, the transfer of information is made easier when there are surface similarities between two contexts. Fantasy, by its nature, is an unfamiliar fiction, and it is likely that children will encounter difficulties noticing perceptual similarities between fantasy contexts and the real world. How fantastical features may support or inhibit learning from stories is discussed further below.

The Influence of Story Features

Many of the stories used within primary school classrooms contain fictitious and fantastical features, such as fantastical settings and non-human characters. The same stories often also

contain information that is reflective of and relevant to real-life (Hopkins and Weisberg, 2017) – for example providing information about a specific time in history, or about the importance of kindness to others. While it is contended that children may be more interested and motivated to engage with stories containing fictional features, and that they may experience better learning outcomes as a result (Hopkins and Weisberg, 2017), fictional features can also make learning from stories problematic for some readers.

The ability of children to understand the themes or morals presented in stories may depend in part on how closely characters and settings reflect reality. Lehr (1988) tested the ability of kindergarten, second and fourth graders (aged four to six, seven and eight, and nine and ten, respectively) to match stories with shared themes and found that, at all ages, children were far more likely to correctly identify *realistic fiction* stories with shared themes than *folktales* with shared themes. It is believed that the comparably high rate of success with *realistic fiction* may be due to differences in children's background knowledge and familiarity with settings (Lehr, 1988). Stories set within realistic contexts are more likely to resemble children's real-life experiences; folktales on the other hand focus on more abstract concepts such as greed and overcoming evil, and are often based within settings which are removed from reality (Lehr, 1988).

Another way that fictitious features can make learning from stories problematic is through the demands placed on readers to distinguish between information that is real and/or relevant to real life, and information that is not – otherwise known as *the reader's dilemma*. The reader's dilemma occurs when novel information is encountered in a story context which children know to be fictitious, and for young readers, especially, this can be challenging. Hopkins and Weisberg (2017) suggest that in order to learn new information from fiction stories, readers have to overcome the reader's dilemma. To achieve this, readers have to first believe that the new information is real. Readers then have to apply the information in the real world, which means that they have to be able to perceive similarities between the fictional context and features of the real world, understanding where and when the information is relevant and applicable (Hopkins and Weisberg, 2017). However, young children tend to be sceptical about the reality of characters and events in storybooks

(Woolley and Cox, 2007; Woolley and Ghossainy, 2013), and are sensitive to fantastical characters and settings (Walker, Gopnik and Ganea, 2015). Furthermore, children's scepticism has been found to be significantly more pronounced for fantasy stories compared to realistic or religious stories (Woolley and Cox, 2007). It stands to reason, therefore, that young children would be more likely to believe the information presented to them and overcome the reader's dilemma when interacting with stories that reflect real life.

Fantastical story content may also limit the extent to which children transfer and apply information to real-life contexts (Strouse, Nyhout and Ganea, 2018). When assessing the extent to which children transferred information learned from stories to solve physical and social problems in the real world, Richert *et al.* (2009) found that children were more likely to transfer information when characters were described as real or "like them" than when characters were fantastical or "unlike them". Interestingly, Richert *et al.*'s (2009) findings also indicated developmental effects. Older children from the three and a half-year-old to five and a half-year-old sample were more likely to transfer information from a story with fantasy characters than younger participants. Walker, Gopnik and Ganea (2015) focused on story settings and the extent to which young children (three to five-year-olds) generalised causal information from a story set in a realistic world, compared to the same story set in a world containing fantastical features which violated reality. Walker, Gopnik and Ganea (2015) found that children were more likely to generalise the same causal information from the realistic story than the one containing fantastical features. Interestingly, while Richert *et al.* (2009) found that five-year-old children were more likely to transfer information from stories containing fantasy characters than three-year-olds, Walker, Gopnik and Ganea (2015) found that when the characters were human, but the context of the story contained fantastical elements, there was the opposite effect. Despite the story being based on human characters, a logistic regression indicated that older children were less likely than younger children to generalise novel content in Walker, Gopnik and Ganea's study. Combined, the findings of these two studies suggest that children *selectively* transfer information from stories to real-life contexts. Fantastical features, which may violate what children know to be real, may not be perceived as relevant to children's lives, limiting the extent to which this information is transferred. The findings have implications for teaching and learning through

stories; stories which contain fantastical or unfamiliar characters may not be regarded as reliable sources of information, and children may not transfer information from story contexts to real life unless they are convinced that the information is real and applicable to them (Strouse, Nyhout and Ganea, 2018).

Another fantastical feature of some fiction stories written for children is that of anthropomorphism – the attribution of human characteristics or qualities to animals or other non-human characters. While moderate amounts of anthropomorphism can have a beneficial effect on children’s learning of factual information (Geerdts, Van de Walle and LoBue, 2016) it also has the potential to make learning more challenging for young children as children are expected to be selective in their learning (Strouse, Nyhout and Ganea, 2018), transferring some of the information about characters to the real world, but not all. For instance, while a parent or teacher might want their children to take meaning from the theme of friendship in *The Wind of the Willows*, they would presumably not want their children to believe that, in real-life, toads are able to talk and recklessly drive cars, as is depicted in the story. The inclusion of anthropomorphism in stories that could be used to teach about important moral themes and character virtues could therefore cause confusion for children due to the difficulty in knowing which information to transfer to the real world, and which information to ignore.

As with other fantastical features of stories that have been discussed above, anthropomorphism may affect children’s learning from stories (Ganea *et al.*, 2014), and limit the extent to which children comprehend story themes and events. Kotaman and Balci (2017) measured four and five-year-old children’s general comprehension of a storybook in two conditions, one which used human characters and one which used animal characters (rabbits), and identified significant differences in general comprehension of the story between the two groups ($p < .01$). Comprehension was significantly higher in children who read the story containing human characters, suggesting that the *type* of story character can influence children’s understanding of story themes.

Fantastical features are often contained within stories written for children and, as the review of historical and contemporary literature in Chapter Two revealed, fantasy stories have often

been incorporated into approaches to story-based character education. While some proponents of story-based character education such as Gould (1913) have expressed a preference for certain story types, the presence of fantastical features has not been a point of contention. However, the findings discussed within this chapter so far suggest that the type and characteristics of stories, such as those containing fantastical features, have the potential to influence children's learning.

3. Learning from Stories with Moral Themes and Lessons

The research described so far in this chapter has focused on children's learning from stories more generally. In this section, the focus is on children's understanding of moral themes and learning of morals. As was outlined in Chapter Two, some proponents of story-based character education (for example, Bennett, 1993; and Kilpatrick, Wolfe and Wolfe, 1994) suggest that children should read stories with moral themes in order to develop moral literacy and to instil good values. While some approaches to story-based character education (e.g. Bennett, 1993) appear to assume that children understand morals and lessons as they are understood or intended by authors and adults, it is unclear how learning is thought to occur by reading, or being read, a story with a moral theme. Empirical research seeking to understand how children learn from stories, specifically, how children identify and understand general story themes (Lehr, 1988) and prominent moral themes (e.g. see Mares and Acosta, 2008; Narvaez *et al.*, 1998; 1999; Whitney, Vozzola and Hofmann, 2005) offers insight into how learning from stories might be facilitated.

One perspective on how stories containing moral content might influence children's learning is that readers are affected by reading or listening to a story. Leming (2000, p. 423) refers to approaches based on this perspective as 'phenomenological analysis'. Phenomenological analysis approaches are based on the premise that stories with moral content can affect readers in one of three ways: 'by [either] conveying a message, awakening a sentiment, or enlarging the universe' (Leming, 2000, p. 423). However, this perspective makes three assumptions relating to the moral content of stories. First, it assumes that authors intend to provide clear and obvious morals to readers – a view challenged by Carr (2005), who

suggests that it is *not* the intention of great literary authors to provide clear-cut morals. Second and third, it assumes that where morals are seemingly evident, for example in short moral stories like fables, that they are easily understood by readers, and in the same way they are understood and intended by authors. For example, in the fable of *the fox and the crow*, the second and third assumptions would hold that the lesson “pride comes before a fall” is easily discernible and understood as intended.

Moral Theme Comprehension

Despite the assumptions of some approaches to teaching morals through stories, children can find the abstraction of moral themes challenging. As Lehr’s (1988) findings suggest, while most children are able to summarise stories accurately, the abstraction and verbalisation of story themes is more difficult. Furthermore, there are different factors that can influence children’s understanding of moral themes, including age or developmental differences, and prior knowledge and experience. Lehr (1988) found that younger children’s descriptions of story themes tend to differ from the descriptions of adults, and suggests that those with less exposure to literature may be less able to provide thematic responses. Lehr’s research suggests that children’s prior knowledge of stories and contexts may influence their ability to abstract themes – a suggestion supported by the research of Narvaez *et al.* (1998). Narvaez and colleagues also sought to assess children’s comprehension of story themes, but focused on three moral stories, including one from Bennett’s (1993) *The Book of Virtues* (introduced in Chapter Two). Three assessment tasks were used: an open-ended question asking participants to identify the moral of the story; a best-matching task from a choice of six themes; and a vignette selection task where the children were required to select the vignette, out of three possible choices, which had the same moral as the story, but within a different context. Narvaez *et al.* (1998) identified significant developmental differences, even after controlling for reading comprehension as a covariate, with younger children (with a mean age of nine) finding all moral identification tasks more challenging than older children (mean age of eleven) and college students. The developmental trend of the results indicates that children may need knowledge, or schemas, of the morals or of the contexts used within the stories, in order to understand morals. Older children may be more successful at identifying moral themes because they may have more experience of moral

concepts gained through personal experience and their reading. The findings indicate that, when reading moral stories, prior knowledge and/or experience may be necessary to understand morals as they are intended by the authors.

In a later study by Narvaez *et al.* (1999), similar findings were reported. Narvaez *et al.* (1999) used a similar assessment of moral theme comprehension but also asked participants to rate the listed themes and vignettes according to how closely they matched the theme of the original story. In addition to the results of the theme selection tasks, developmental differences were identified in the rating scores, with younger children (average age of eight years and six months) rating the correct themes lower in comparison to older children (average age of ten years and nine months) or adults. Consistent with these findings, Whitney, Vozzola and Hofmann (2005) identified differences in the moral understanding taken from stories according to age and expertise. Participants in Whitney, Vozzola and Hofmann's (2005) study were categorised as *readers* or *expert readers* of the Harry Potter book series and were asked to identify the major positive and negative themes present in the books, as well as answering questions concerned with the moral sensitivity, moral action, moral motivation and moral judgement of characters within the stories. Older and more educated readers (*expert readers*) identified additional major themes; and perceptions of characters also varied according to age and expertise level, suggesting that the ability to perceive moral themes and content is affected by age and prior knowledge.

The complexity of plot features in some stories may also affect children's knowledge and understanding of moral themes. Mares and Acosta (2008) used a televised cartoon episode to test whether the intended moral was understood by children who watched it. Five and six-year-old children watched one of two versions of an episode about anthropomorphised dogs. One dog had a disability and the episode intended to convey the lesson "people with disabilities want to be treated normally and as friends". Mares and Acosta (2008) acknowledged that morally undesirable behaviours in the original version of the story were more prominent than desired behaviours: the "correct" behaviour only occurred at the end of the story. The authors speculated that the time spent highlighting undesirable behaviours may affect the extent to which children take away the intended moral. The authors tested

two versions of the story: one version of the story was unedited (*original*). Another version of the story was edited to remove some of the content. In the *edited* version, characters' fearful reactions when they met the disabled character for the first time were removed. After watching a version of the episode, the children were asked to retell the story, they then answered a series of questions designed to assess moral theme comprehension, including open-ended and theme and vignette matching tasks. Consistent with previous findings (Lehr, 1988; Narvaez *et al.*, 1998; 1999; Whitney, Vozzola and Hofmann, 2005), children in the study had difficulty identifying the moral, with 81% providing an incorrect moral in response to the open-ended question, and 89% and 75% selecting irrelevant options in the theme and vignette matching tasks. Interestingly, when comparing the responses according to the two conditions (*original vs edited*), twice as many children gave a correct response in the edited version in comparison to the original version.

In addition to supporting previous findings regarding the difficulty that children face in identifying moral themes, the findings of this study suggest that children's comprehension of the moral may be affected by confusing plot features and superficial details (Mares and Acosta, 2008); a considerable amount of time was focused on fear-related behaviours in the *original* version of the story and this may have affected the ability of the children to identify the intended lesson. Here, Carr's (2022) suggestion that stories with "thinner" descriptions and narrative details may have more potential for making significant moral points is supported. Although Carr (2022) does not discuss the use of stories with thin description in reference to the education of children, it stands to reason that, especially for younger children, stories stripped of superficial details may help to convey underlying morals more effectively.

The findings from the research literature reviewed here suggest that reading or listening to a moral story may not be sufficient for all children to understand the intended moral, and that comprehension of moral themes may be in part dependent on the age of the children and their experience. It has been suggested that knowledge and understanding, or schemas, of the morals and contexts used within the stories may be necessary to understand moral themes (Narvaez *et al.*, 1998; 1999). Older children are likely to have had more experience of

moral concepts, and to have developed a knowledge and understanding of these. The findings leave the perceptions of traditional character educators such as Bennett (1993) and Kilpatrick, Wolfe and Wolfe (1994) open to criticism. Narvaez (2001; 2002) goes as far to suggest that the assumption that children will understand moral themes by reading stories is faulty and unsubstantiated; when left to digest the text alone, young children often miss the point of moral stories and do not generally understand morals as they are intended until children are at least nine to ten years old.

Facilitating Moral Theme Comprehension

While Narvaez' conclusions might be seen to weaken some educators' assertions that stories can be used as a vehicle for teaching character education, two studies by Walker and Lombrozo (2017) have shown that younger children's ability to identify and understand moral themes from short illustrated stories can be facilitated through adult intervention. In Walker and Lombrozo's (2017) first study, five and six-year-old participants were prompted to either *report* or *explain* key story events on two occasions during their reading of one of four moral stories, once in the middle of the story and once at the end. Each story contained human protagonists within realistic contexts and settings. In the *report* condition, participants were asked to remind the experimenter of story events which related to the problem introduced in the story, for example "remind me, was [character] sad?". In the *explain* condition, participants were asked to explain the story events relating to the problem, for example "why was [character] sad?" (Walker and Lombrozo, 2017, p. 269). The ability of participants to understand the moral theme was assessed primarily using three tasks. There was a vignette selection task which assessed both children's understanding of the story's lesson (*lesson probe*) and the conflict within it (*conflict probe*); a forced-choice theme selection task; and an open response task in which participants were asked to describe "the most important thing" learned from the story. Across all tasks, there was a main effect of condition ($p < .02$) whereby those children prompted to *explain* key events were significantly more likely to recognise and identify the moral than those asked to *report* what had happened. Furthermore, an analysis of each individual measure revealed that children prompted to *explain* performed significantly better in the *lesson probe* and theme section task than those in the *report* condition (Walker and Lombrozo, 2017, p. 272).

In Walker and Lombrozo's (2017) second study, a third condition (*pedagogy*) was added in which children were explicitly told the problem and lesson of the story using a prompt card, once in the middle of the story and once at the end. In contrast to the first study, children also received *lesson training* in which they were taught about what a lesson, or moral, of a story is and prompted to think about what the author of the story wanted them to learn. The findings of the second study provide further support to the claim that explanation helps children to identify and understand the moral themes within stories: just as in the first study, there was a main effect of condition ($p < .02$) whereby children asked to *explain* key events were more likely to identify the moral of the story. However, in the second study, children prompted to explain were not only more likely to do this than children asked to *report*, they were more likely to do this than children who had explicitly been told the moral of the story (*pedagogy*) through direct instruction: across the measures, children in the *explain* condition understood the story lesson most often (mean score 3.6) and there was a significant difference between this condition and both the *report* ($p < .01$) and *pedagogy* ($p < .03$) conditions. Interestingly, there was no significant difference between the mean scores of children in the *report* (2.9) and *pedagogy* (3.0) conditions across tasks (Walker and Lombrozo, 2017, p. 274). The findings suggest that encouraging children to explain what has happened in a story may be more effective in helping children to learn than explicitly telling children the moral.

A comparison of Walker and Lombrozo's (2017) results from the first and second studies also suggests that the way in which children are taught or prepared to think about stories can impact their understanding of story themes and lessons. While the effect of *lesson training* was not controlled for as an independent variable within study two, the differences in task performance between the first and second study suggests that the addition of the *lesson training* activity influenced the ability of the children to understand the lesson of the story. For example, in the first study, only children in the *explain* condition understood the story lesson more often than by chance in response to the *lesson probe* vignette; however, in the second study, children in all conditions understood the story lesson more often than by chance (Walker and Lombrozo, 2017). This finding has implications relating to the way in which parents and teachers approach stories with their children; it suggests that by

preparing children to think about stories in a certain way, parents and teachers can facilitate children's understanding of the morals contained within them.

Research by Mares and Acosta (2010) has also examined whether children can be supported to comprehend morals in stories. Building on their previous research which found that young children have difficulty identifying morals independently (Mares and Acosta, 2008), Mares and Acosta (2010) sought to make the morals contained within cartoon narratives more explicit and to counter the effects of potentially confusing plot features. The children in the study either watched a pro-tolerance cartoon with or without explanatory inserts which stated what the moral was at the beginning of the cartoon, linking this to the viewer's life. A second insert also commented negatively on characters' initial prejudices, in an attempt to counter this potentially confusing plot feature (as contended by Mares and Acosta (2008)). With the inclusion of explanatory inserts, Mares and Acosta (2010) reported higher comprehension of the pro-tolerance message ($p < .05$) and a more negative evaluation of the character's prejudice. While Mares and Acosta (2010) explicitly explained the story's moral, as opposed to prompting the children to think about and explain this themselves, the results of this research demonstrates that the signposting of morals and key events, and explanation of the relevance of this to the children's lives, can facilitate children's comprehension of morals as well as influence the way in which they think about characters. The results of Walker and Lombrozo (2017) and Mares and Acosta's (2010) studies may have important implications concerning the way in which teachers and parents use stories to teach morals. Contrary to previous research, these studies suggest that young children *can* understand morals, but require support to do so, for example through the signposting of key events, explanation of how story content is relevant to real-life, and questioning which encourages children to explain their understanding.

The Promotion of Prosocial Behaviour

The research discussed in this section so far has focused on children's knowledge and understanding of moral themes contained within stories. Attention now briefly turns to research that has investigated the potential of moral stories in the promotion of moral and prosocial behaviours (DeRosier and Mercer, 2007; Larsen, Lee and Ganea, 2017; Lee *et al.*,

2014; Talwar *et al.*, 2017) through the transfer of information to real-life scenarios. One perspective underpinning how stories containing moral themes may influence behaviour is based on Bandura's social learning theory (1977). Social learning theory proposes that children learn through observation and imitation. This perspective concerns 'the possible learning processes associated with cognitive, affective and behavior outcomes' resulting from story-based character education approaches (Leming, 2000, p. 424), and proposes that children's interaction with stories is a form of observational learning. On this view, stories can provide models and examples of virtuous behaviour that children observe and imitate. The research discussed in this section also offers insight into how story characteristics and plot features may influence the extent to which children learn morals from stories and transfer their understanding to real-life contexts.

Lee *et al.* (2014) found that short moral stories can influence young children's related behaviours immediately after hearing them, but that behavioural responses may be mediated by plot features. In two experiments, Lee *et al.* (2014) examined the effects of stories which taught about the importance of honesty; they also sought to identify the components of stories that were most effective in this. In the first experiment, three- to seven-year-old children were given a temptation-resistance task in which they were told not to "peek" at a toy while the experimenter was absent. Following this task, each child was read a story: this was either a control story or one of three stories about honesty. Two of the honesty stories focused on the negative consequences of being dishonest (*The Boy Who Cried Wolf* and *Pinocchio*), whereas the story of *George Washington and the Cherry Tree* focused on the positive consequences of honesty. Following the story, the children who were classified as "peekers" were asked if they peeked to see who would confess and who would lie. When asking this question, the experimenter related it to the lesson of the story, for example: "you don't want to be like [character] do you?" or "I want you to tell me the truth like [character]" (Lee *et al.*, 2014, p. 1632). Interestingly, only children who heard *George Washington and the Cherry Tree* were significantly ($p=.005$) less likely to lie than the control group (Lee *et al.*, 2014).

In the second experiment, Lee *et al.* (2014) examined whether the observed effects were due to the positive or negative consequences of characters' behaviours in the stories. To test this, two versions of *George Washington and the Cherry Tree* were used, following the same procedure as in the first experiment. There was a classic version of the story, which emphasised the positive consequences of being honest; and a second version (*Negative George Washington*), which emphasised the negative consequences of being dishonest. As in experiment one, fewer children lied about peeking after hearing the classic *George Washington* story – they were significantly less likely to lie than the control group ($p=.003$). Interestingly, however, children who heard the *Negative George Washington* story did not significantly differ from the control group (Lee *et al.*, 2014), mirroring the results of story conditions which emphasised the negative consequences of lying in experiment one. Lee *et al.*'s (2014) findings indicate that stories which convey a moral *can* positively influence children's moral behaviours, but that this may be affected by plot features or the way in which the moral is conveyed to the reader. For example, plot features which emphasise negative consequences may nullify the story's potential effects on behaviour, whereas those which emphasise positive consequences may encourage related behaviours.

While children's comprehension of the moral was not measured in Lee *et al.*'s (2014) experiments, the assessment of behaviour was set in a real-world situation which differed from that of the story plot and can be taken to indicate whether the moral had been understood, transferred and applied to a new context. The findings suggest that stories not only have the potential to convey a moral, but that they can also lead to the transfer and application of learning within a new context. However, it is important to acknowledge that the lack of a comprehension measure in this study means that it cannot be ascertained whether children who maintained the lie understood the moral. For example, it may be that children understood the moral of each story, but were still reluctant to tell the truth. Hearing the positive consequences of telling the truth may have been enough to tip the balance, whereas hearing the negative consequence of lying may have encouraged the children to maintain the lie through fear of consequences.

Similar effects were identified in a later study by Talwar *et al.* (2017) which examined the impact that moral stories have on children's lying behaviours. Four- to seven-year-old children were asked by an adult to conceal information from, and lie to, an experimenter before listening to a positive *moral story* (the classic version of George Washington and the Cherry Tree) or a *control story* (The Tortoise and the Hare). The children were also coached to different degrees on how to maintain a lie. Although there was no significant difference between the *moral story* and *control* conditions when asked an open-ended question relating to the lie, when asked direct questions about the lie, those who had heard the *moral story* had significantly ($p=.04$) lower lie concealment scores than those who heard the *control story*. This suggests that while the children felt compelled to conceal the lie for the adult, they may have faced a greater moral conflict when asked a direct question, causing them to share information with the experimenter (Talwar *et al.*, 2017). Despite the lack of a measure assessing the children's comprehension of the moral in the story, Talwar *et al.*'s (2017) results indicate that the message was understood by the child participants and that this may have influenced their behaviour when asked a direct question.

Research exploring the effects of moral stories which promote prosocial behaviours, such as sharing, also support the view that children are able to understand morals contained within stories, and that the stories can influence behaviour. DeRosier and Mercer's (2007) nine-week story-based intervention identified positive influences on children's (aged five to eleven) social behaviours, with young children (aged five to eight) demonstrating significant increases in teacher reports of prosocial behaviour compared to a control group. Larsen, Lee and Ganea's (2017) study found that reading a story to four- to six-year-olds about sharing led to an increase in sharing behaviours in one of their story conditions (Larsen, Lee and Ganea, 2017). Larsen, Lee and Ganea's research utilised a direct measure of prosocial behaviour and also looked more closely at the factors which may influence the ability of children to understand and take meaning from moral stories. By comparing the effects of three story conditions, Larsen, Lee and Ganea (2017) provide further insight into the effects of anthropomorphism on children's learning, building on the aforementioned research (Kotaman and Balci, 2017) by exploring the effect of anthropomorphism on comprehension of moral themes. The children in Larsen, Lee and Ganea's (2017) study were provided with

two opportunities to anonymously share stickers that had been given to them: once prior to hearing a story, and once again immediately after. Interestingly, there was a significant effect of condition ($p=.001$). Children who heard a story about seeds (*control* condition) or a story about anthropomorphised animals sharing (*animal* condition), shared significantly less ($p=.041$; $p=.021$, respectively) at the second opportunity. However, children who heard the same sharing story, but in which the anthropomorphised characters were replaced by human characters (*human* condition), shared significantly more ($p=.037$). The inclusion of human characters within the moral story appears to have not only negated the tendency of children to share less at the second opportunity, but caused them to share to an even greater extent the second time around. Larsen, Lee and Ganea's (2017) study adds to the body of research into the effects of anthropomorphism on children's learning (Ganea *et al.*, 2014; Kotaman and Balci, 2017; Richert *et al.*, 2009) by specifically addressing the learning of moral content. Their findings suggest that children are able to comprehend morals contained within stories and transfer their learning into real-life contexts, but that learning and transfer may be affected by story features such as the familiarity and similarity of story characters to real-life.

4. The Development of Virtue Literacy

In Chapter Two, approaches aimed at developing children's virtue literacy were described. Virtue literacy is considered to be an important part of character development which underpins other virtue components (Arthur *et al.*, 2017a; Jubilee Centre, 2022; Hart, Oliveira and Pike, 2020). Within this section, the focus is on how reading and interacting with stories can develop virtue literacy and contribute to character development.

A key conviction of research which has explored teaching character through story-based character education (Arthur *et al.*, 2014; Francis *et al.*, 2018; Hart, Oliveira and Pike, 2020; Jónsson *et al.*, 2019) is that the development of virtue literacy precedes the practice of virtues. Engaging with stories and their contexts is believed to support the development of virtue literacy because stories often express the virtues, enabling children to see them in action and to use associated vocabulary (Harrison, Morris and Ryan, 2016). Although

knowledge and understanding of virtue terms does not necessarily lead to virtuous action (Arthur *et al.*, 2014; Arthur *et al.*, 2017b), a neo-Aristotelian theory of moral development (Jubilee Centre, 2022; Kristjánsson, 2015) suggests that knowledge and understanding of virtue terms can contribute towards this aim. For example, the understanding/acquisition of moral vocabulary is considered a prerequisite for pupils to be able to engage in meaningful discussion, deliberation and reflection on moral concepts (Carr and Harrison, 2015; Jónsson *et al.*, 2019) – processes which are considered fundamentally important in moral development according to a neo-Aristotelian moral developmental perspective (Jónsson *et al.*, 2019).

It is on pupils' knowledge and understanding of virtue terms, and their ability to apply their understanding of these terms that much of the contemporary research based on story-based character education is centred. Analysis of the *Knightly Virtues* research project (Arthur *et al.*, 2014), the subsequent publications of the original authors (Carr and Harrison, 2015; 2017; Davison *et al.*, 2016), and research stemming from this work (Francis *et al.*, 2018; Hart, Oliveira and Pike, 2020; Jónsson *et al.*, 2019; Pike, Lickona and Nesfield, 2015), offers insight into the efficacy of story-based approaches aimed at developing virtue literacy. The research suggests that the study of story text facilitates the development of virtue, and elucidates the findings of Leming's (2000) evaluative study, which indicated that ethical understanding of key attributes of character (or "ethical values") was improved following a taught story-based curriculum.

Story-Based Activities to Support Virtue Literacy Development

Many of the activities used to develop virtue literacy within the existing research would appear to be forms of direct instruction. For example, within the *Knightly Virtues* and *Narnian Virtues* research projects – first introduced in Chapter Two – pupils were encouraged to learn virtue definitions, identify virtues, reflect on the virtues displayed by characters, and to consider how the characters, actions and virtues displayed are relevant to their own lives. The activities form part of a semi-phenomenological approach to story-based character education. Whereas phenomenological approaches are based on the premise that stories have a clear moral that can be discerned and understood by readers (Leming, 2000),

semi-phenomenological approaches incorporate examination of and interaction with the story text through reading-related activities. Semi-phenomenological approaches ultimately support pupils to examine the nuance and subtext of stories, and to develop critical reading skills that are necessary to understand relevant content in other stories that do not present a clear moral or virtue (Hart, Oliveira and Pike, 2020). Common activities include teaching virtue vocabulary through textual analysis, encouraging deliberation and discussion about the virtues displayed within the stories, and providing opportunities for pupils to relate characters' experiences and virtues to their own lives.

Story-based approaches that aim to develop virtue literacy by engaging pupils in reading-related activities are based on the premise that 'simply reading literature is not assumed to constitute enough to facilitate the development of good character' (Hart, Oliveira and Pike, 2020, p. 475), and the assertion that in order to develop virtue literacy, pupils require learning activities that enable them 'to discover and develop a personal understanding of the different virtues' (Arthur *et al.*, 2017b, p. 95). One perceived advantage of using stories to develop virtue literacy is that stories often feature complex characters whose actions are not wholly "good" or "evil" and complex moral dilemmas which offer opportunities for debate and discussion within a 'safe space' (Arthur *et al.*, 2017b, p. 95).

The findings of the *Knightly Virtues* research study suggest that encouraging pupils to reflect on the virtues displayed by characters can enhance pupils' knowledge and understanding of virtue terms and support pupils to reflect on the significance of the virtues in their own lives. Arthur *et al.* (2014) assessed pupils in various domains, including knowledge and understanding of virtue terms and three domains related to pupils' application of virtue concepts. Despite methodological shortcomings related to potential contamination between experimental and comparison groups, and conflation of two of the assessed domains (Davison *et al.*, 2016), Arthur *et al.*'s (2014) findings indicate that intentional approaches to story-based character education can lead to increases in virtue literacy. The overall mean score for the experimental group (*Knightly Virtues* programme) increased more than the control group from pre- to post-intervention. Furthermore, a deeper understanding of the increase is gained when looking at the individual domains. Arthur *et al.* (2014) reported

positive trends for pupils' knowledge and understanding of virtue terms, which increased from pre-test to post-test, with the experimental group increasing at a greater rate than the control group ($p=.10$). A significant effect was also observed in 'pupils' application of virtue concepts in personal, social and cultural contexts' (Davison *et al.*, 2016, pp. 20-21). Application in this domain increased by 24% compared to the control group, suggesting that the *Knightly Virtues* programme positively impacted pupils' ability to apply their understanding to their own lives and contexts. This finding is supported by evidence from pupils' journal entries and interviews with parents and teachers which suggested that pupils were linking virtues in the stories to personal experiences (Arthur *et al.*, 2014, pp. 16-17). Parents suggested that engagement with the *Knightly Virtues* helped pupils to understand their relationships with others, and parents, teachers and pupils commented on the perceived impact on behaviour and practice of the virtues. It is based on these findings that Carr and Harrison (2015) suggest reflective activities are effective for teaching character education: first, pupils can be prompted to relate virtues to their own lives, considering how virtues are relevant; and second, pupils can be encouraged to *exercise* moral reflection and deliberation in reference to personal contexts.

The findings that have emerged from another story-based character education research project – the *Narnian Virtues* (Francis *et al.*, 2018; Hart, Oliveira and Pike, 2020; Pike, Lickona and Nesfield, 2015) – also support the notion that engaging with stories can help to develop children's knowledge and understanding of virtues. The *Narnian Virtues* project was similar to the *Knightly Virtues* in combining reading and the completion of various reading-related activities, but was aimed at older pupils, aged eleven to fourteen, who studied one core text: C. S. Lewis' *The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe* (1950). Following a six-week pilot study of the *Narnian Virtues* curriculum, significant increases in virtue knowledge were found (Francis *et al.*, 2018; Pike, Lickona and Nesfield, 2015), indicating that knowledge of the twelve virtues in focus was enhanced as a result of the activities. However, it must be noted that this finding is unsurprising given that pupils were tasked with learning the meanings of the virtues, and that the measure of knowledge and understanding involved matching each virtue to words that were conceptually linked to each.

A later study emerging from the *Narnian Virtues* project, conducted by Hart, Oliveira and Pike (2020), sought to build on the earlier work but with an adapted pedagogical approach and evaluation. Hart, Oliveira and Pike's (2020) qualitative approach to data collection and inductive approach to data analysis provides further support for a semi-phenomenological approach to story-based character education. Three main themes emerged from the analysis: following participation in the *Narnian Virtues* curriculum, pupils' knowledge and awareness of virtues, reflection on the text and on their own lives, and empathy towards characters, had all increased. Whereas the pilot study of the *Narnian Virtues* project (Francis *et al.*, 2018) could not discern whether virtue terms were understood, or just memorised, interpretation of the interviews conducted by Hart, Oliveira and Pike (2020) indicated that pupils were able to talk about virtue with both *nuance* and *depth*, illustrating that knowledge had not just been memorised, but had been understood. The authors also propose that increased knowledge of virtues led 'to a greater awareness of virtues in real life and manifested in processes of reflection, empathy and, to a lesser extent, change' (p. 478), suggesting that increased awareness of virtues and ability to identify virtuous behaviours served as a lens through which pupils could not only reflect on others' situations, but on their own thoughts and behaviours. Virtue literacy was also reported to have developed as a result of empathising with characters – interview data indicated that pupils were able to consider different perspectives and draw comparisons between characters' lives and their own.

However, it must be noted that because Hart, Oliveira and Pike (2020) only interviewed pupils following the *Narnian Virtues* curriculum and did not evaluate virtue knowledge and understanding prior to the interview, causality cannot be ascertained. It is not clear whether reported developments in knowledge and understanding of virtue terms increased the frequency or depth of pupils' reflection or empathetic engagement with the story characters, nor whether opportunities to reflect on story characters as part of the curriculum increased pupils' knowledge and understanding of virtue terms. This methodological limitation aside, the findings suggest that the pedagogical approach employed in the *Narnian Virtues* research led to improvements in virtue literacy, with promising – albeit uncertain – indications that the reflective activities of the curriculum positively influenced

pupils towards independent and empathetic reflection. The research also corroborates the conclusions drawn by Arthur *et al.* (2014) that it is the development of pupils' understanding of core concepts, and opportunities to reflect on these through engagement with story contexts which enables pupils to *apply* their knowledge and understanding to other contexts. Hart, Oliveira and Pike's (2020) findings also support Arthur *et al.*'s (2014) recommendation that pupils should be provided with opportunities to reflect in order to facilitate moving from learning about abstract concepts to being able to *recognise* and *apply* these in real life: 'this journey from the abstract, moving to the contrived and fictional, and then to lived experience develops a deeper understanding of virtue' (Hart, Oliveira and Pike, 2020, p. 483).

Another research study which sought to advance the understanding gained through the *Knightly Virtues* project was conducted in Iceland. Jónsson *et al.*'s (2019) research project explored how a classic Icelandic story, *Laxdaela Saga*, could be used as a vehicle for character education with fourteen and fifteen-year-olds in Icelandic secondary schools. In accordance with the *Knightly Virtues* and *Narnian Virtues* projects, Jónsson *et al.*'s (2019) research focused on enhancing pupils' knowledge and understanding of moral vocabulary. However, in contrast to the *Knightly Virtues* and *Narnian Virtues* projects, Jónsson *et al.* (2019) did not provide set teaching and learning activities related to the story; teachers were not provided with a prescribed approach, and were encouraged to use 'dialogical methods' (p. 3) as opposed to direct instruction.

Laxdaela Saga was read over a period of six weeks, during which teachers were interviewed, pupils participated in focus groups, and lessons were observed. Pupils were also asked to complete pre- and post- measure of their understanding of moral vocabulary and ability to use this vocabulary in discourse. The measure asked pupils various questions which tested their moral vocabulary. Pupils completed a fill-in activity, where appropriate virtue words were selected from a list to complete sentences. Pupils read story excerpts and short stories, and were asked to identify the virtues that characters had exemplified, and whether their actions were justified. Pupils were also asked questions about virtues that are important for

certain professions, virtue definitions, and to identify an “exemplary individual” and explain the reasons for their choice.

Jónsson *et al.*'s (2019) findings suggest that reading stories and engaging in related activities can lead to improvements in pupils' knowledge, understanding and application of moral vocabulary. Pupils' moral vocabulary scores significantly improved following the intervention, with the main difference between control and experimental groups being associated with pupils' knowledge and understanding of virtue (and vice) vocabulary. There were also improvements in the ability of pupils to apply moral concepts in fictional and real-life contexts, but these were not significant. Improved comprehension of moral vocabulary was partially attributed to the story-based character education intervention. The authors also noted clear gender differences, with girls demonstrating higher scores in comprehension of moral vocabulary in the pre-test and more pronounced improvements from pre- to post- tests. Gender-based differences may have been due to comparable levels of engagement in the activities; teachers reported that girls were more engaged with the teaching and learning activities, including more participation in discussions about the story.

Together, the findings of research on story-based character education approaches which focus on the development of virtue literacy suggest that approaches which combine the reading of stories and the completion of reading-related activities, have the potential to enhance pupils' knowledge, understanding and application of virtue vocabulary. However, it must be noted that there is a need for further research to elucidate the findings from these studies. The research did not specifically examine the efficacy of the different types of reading-related activities used, nor whether reading the selected stories alone has an impact on the development of virtue literacy. For example, in Jónsson *et al.*'s (2019) study it is not clear to what extent improvements in pupils' understanding and use of moral vocabulary can be attributed to the reading of the story alone, nor whether certain adaptations of teachers' dialogical methods were more effective than others. Similarly, the teaching and learning approaches in the *Knightly Virtues* and *Narnian Virtues* projects involved a number of activities, for example the use of reflective journals, virtue identification tasks, prompts to relate characters' virtue to pupils' lives, and peer-to-peer discussion and reflection activities.

It is possible that certain activities hold more promise than others in the development of virtue literacy, or help to develop specific capacities. Arthur *et al.*'s (2014) and Hart, Oliveira and Pike's (2020) findings suggest that providing opportunities to reflect on virtue concepts enables pupils to recognise and apply these in real life. Future research could help to ascertain and understand the impact of different activities towards this aim. Another area in need of further research concerns the influence of story-based character education programmes on younger pupils' virtue literacy development. Although a significant body of research has assessed younger children's moral theme comprehension and behaviour following the reading of short stories, there is a paucity of research specifically looking at virtue literacy development in younger pupils (i.e. aged four to nine).

5. The Moral Imagination

The teaching about virtues through the stimulation of children's moral imaginations was introduced in Chapter Two, with some proponents of story-based character education in the 1900s (e.g. Guroian, 1998; Kilpatrick, Wolfe and Wolfe, 1994) suggesting that the moral imagination is exercised through reading stories. The moral imagination is defined by Guroian (1998) as 'the very process by which the self makes metaphors out of images given by experience and then employs these metaphors to find and suppose moral correspondences in experience' (p. 24). In this section, the focus is on *how* the moral imagination is thought to develop different capacities associated with character and virtue, drawing on the perceptions of key theorists and educators, such as Karen Bohlin.

Bohlin (2005) contends that stories provide opportunities for children to learn through the stimulation and exercise of their moral imaginations, and that there are a number of capacities that narrative literature can help to develop. It is held that the moral imagination is a 'seat of practice' for readers (Bohlin, 2005, p. 29): through the moral imagination, readers can learn as a result of understanding, navigating and evaluating imagined experiences, becoming acquainted with novel situations, gaining insight into experiences that they may not encounter in real life, and accessing characters' internal states. Stories allow readers to develop *moral vision*, bringing stories to life 'by attending to the details as

the drama unfolds' (p. 36); *moral identity*, helping readers to connect with characters and their situations; *moral rehearsal*, enabling readers to *see differently* by providing 'a rich context within which students can reflect and then mentally rehearse how they might act in similar circumstances' (p. 36); and, *moral judgement*, the ability to look under the surface of what they read, for example in being discerning when evaluating characters' motivations, and questioning 'the values, assumptions, and choices presented to them in a narrative' (moral judgement) (p. 40). There are some clear overlaps with the development of virtue literacy, such as how imaginative engagement with literature can develop moral vision (virtue perception; virtue knowledge and understanding) and moral rehearsal and judgement (virtue reasoning).

Moral Vision

Parents, teachers and significant others are often regarded as key exemplars who children look up to, and from whom children learn how to think, feel and act (Bowers *et al.*, 2014; Johnson *et al.*, 2016); however, characters from literature and stories, in various forms, are also thought to influence readers in this way (Berkowitz, 2011; Carr and Harrison, 2015; Gregory, 2009). Stories are thought to be advantageous as they have the potential to bring moral action to life: they enable children to see a 'wider moral world', as opposed to just talking about it (Vitz, 1990, p. 718). Stories can broaden knowledge and understanding of character virtues by providing detailed information about the intricacies of characters' internal states, their relationships with others, and situations. For Gregory (2009), fictional models can inform readers about 'how to deal with life's conundrums, perplexities, ambitions, motives, attitudes, actions, explanations, feelings, values, ideas, and human types' (p. 36). However, In order to access the wealth of information described by Gregory, readers not only need detailed descriptions of contexts and situations, but require intimate access to characters' experiences, thoughts, feelings and motivations. While this information is unlikely to be provided within shorter or more simplistic stories, it is something that great authors of narrative literature enable through the rich 'psychological portraits' of characters that they paint (Bohlin, 2005, p. 17). Through being acquainted with this information, or in being afforded some other unique perspective which allows characters' motivations to be

distinguished, readers are not only able to see *what* is done, they are able to see *why* it is done (Willows, 2017).

The insight provided by stories, and access to virtuous models that stories provide, is acknowledged by Alasdair MacIntyre (1981). MacIntyre assigns a great responsibility to stories in regards to children's development, warning: 'deprive children of stories and you leave them unscripted, anxious stutterers in their actions as in their words' (p. 201). He describes stories as a fundamental part of character education and development, perceiving them not only as a key vehicle in shaping perceptions and understandings of the world in which we live, but also as a gateway in educating us about the virtues. For MacIntyre, stories give children access to examples of how they should (or should not) act, and the words and ideas which underlie these actions (Bland, 2013). This discernment of characters' internal states is thought to aid readers' understanding and forms an important step in the development of 'virtuous expertise', moving readers' learning beyond that which would be possible without fictional models (Willows, 2017, p. 341).

Aristotle viewed plays and stories as important vehicles for learning, believing there to be great power and potential in imaginative literature in providing insight into the moral life and virtuous character through exploration of characters' motivations, emotions and attitudes (Carr and Harrison, 2015). Narrative artworks illustrate morally fruitful or harmful actions (Kieran, 1996), provide moral insight, and extend 'our understanding of ourselves; the world and our relations with others' (Carr, 2005, p. 149). Through gaining an understanding of the emotions, motivations and manner of exemplars' actions, the reader not only learns how such complexities relate to them, but identifies the need to evaluate and appease motivations, emotions and attitudes that have similar consequences in their lives. Exemplary actions of, and interactions with, characters can not only motivate (Croce and Vaccaresza, 2017), but can shape perceptions, providing a significant emotional experience which lasts long in the memory and emotions, affecting moral development (Wilson, 1994). Therefore, as well as providing learning through experiences which may not be available in children's day-to-day lives, stories provide a vehicle for reflection, enabling

them to consider the motivations and actions of virtuous characters or those whose behaviours fall short of embodying the ideal.

Characters in stories may also provide additional appeal and insight over other exemplars that children may encounter, such as hypothetical or actual exemplars. Whereas *hypothetical* exemplars who always get things right are not necessarily accessible, and *actual* exemplars, real people who might not always choose the right course of action, are not necessarily reliable (Willows, 2017), characters in stories have the potential to be more attainable, relatable and realistic – features considered to make moral exemplars more effective as a means of education (Han *et al.*, 2017). Furthermore, by illuminating characters' thoughts and feelings, authors provide insight that is not available with *hypothetical* and *actual* exemplars. For these reasons, Willows (2017) considers story characters to be the middle ground between the *actual* and *hypothetical* exemplar, benefitting the reader by providing context through the author's 'social commentary', access to characters' internal states and insights into their motives (Willows, 2017, p. 343). However, not all characters will be positive, or effective, exemplars; and the relevance of the characters and the engagement of the reader are also influential factors that may mediate the effect of story characters (Hopkins and Weisberg, 2017; Strouse, Nythout and Ganea, 2018).

Narrative artworks such as stories are also thought to broaden vision and understanding through imaginative engagement with aspects of the world that readers may not have first-hand experience of (Gregory, 2009; Kieran, 1996). Through stories we 'cultivate our imaginative understanding and moral sensibilities' in a distinctive way (Kieran, 1996, pp. 342-343); this is achieved by providing in-depth context and detail that is not possible within a simple abstract description (Willows, 2017), and by allowing access to places and situations that would otherwise be difficult or impossible to reach, such as different cultures or past societies (Mar and Oatley, 2008).

Moral Identity and Moral Rehearsal

Readers are also thought to learn from stories through experiencing a vivid form of moral rehearsal (Kieran, 1996); as a result, readers not only see the outcomes of characters' actions and desires, but can *feel* these too. This view is echoed by Guroian (1998) who posits

that children's stories stimulate the moral imagination by transporting children into another world and by challenging them to navigate stories vicariously, in place of the hero or heroine. In his book *Tending the Heart of Virtue: How Classic Stories Awaken a Child's Moral Imagination*, Guroian (1998, p. 38) proposes that there is much potential to shape children's 'moral constitution' through stories such as fairy tales because they enable children to experience the complexities of character and virtue 'vicariously and imaginatively through the artful delineation of character and plot'.

Stories ultimately help children to make sense of moral issues and understand their own lives (Kilpatrick, Wolfe and Wolfe, 1994). When reading stories, children are provided with contexts in which to connect with characters, reflect and mentally rehearse how they might act in those circumstances. Through rehearsal, there is also potential for an emotional response to occur. Wilson (1994) suggests that stories provide a narration which can stimulate the emotions, making us 'feel deeply about people, even those in circumstances that are utterly foreign to us' (p. 32). It is suggested that, through stories, children make emotional connections to wanting to do the right thing (Kilpatrick, Wolfe and Wolfe, 1994).

The contexts and social situations presented by stories often differ from the reader's own world, but are often realistic. Because of this, stories can "speak" to the reader 'who shares with characters certain hopes, fears, and general human concerns' (Nussbaum, 1995, p. 7). It is for this reason, Nussbaum proposes, that the reader is able to identify and sympathise with characters. D'Olimpio and Peterson (2018) elucidate the compassionate connections that readers can make with characters, suggesting that through stories children are able to compassionately engage with characters' 'thoughts, intentions, feelings, behaviour and circumstances' (p. 98). D'Olimpio and Peterson propose that through compassionate engagement, readers 'learn to adopt a moral attitude' or feeling of care towards fictional characters which, once practised, can be applied to others in real-life encounters and eventually becomes engrained, through habituation, in the reader's character (2018, p. 96).

While there appears to be a lack of research which has empirically tested how children learn through the moral imagination, research by Johnson (2012) provides some support for this line of thought. Johnson's (2012) findings indicate that greater transportation into, or

engagement with, a story is associated with greater affective empathy for characters. While the story used in Johnson's experiment was short in length, it was designed to induce compassionate feelings for characters and is likely to have offered insight into character's internal states. The findings indicate that reading fictional stories can have a direct and immediate effect on readers' emotional experiences or capabilities.

In addition to fostering compassion, it is believed that stories can stimulate other emotional responses in readers. Lickona (1991) captures the essence of this well when he writes that 'stories teach by attraction rather than compulsion; they invite rather than impose. They capture the imagination and touch the heart' (p. 79). It is proposed that by simulating the social world, narrative fiction 'simultaneously permits the exploration of our own ideas, feelings, and desires, and of our own potential reactions to the story's plot' (Mar and Oatley, 2008, p. 183). Furthermore, although the imagined experiences are not real, it is held that the emotional, intellectual and ethical responses of the reader *are* (Gregory, 2009). Gregory (2009) suggests that stories provide powerful accounts and that within the realm of a story 'we experience an immediacy of feeling, a rush of emotion, and a flow of sensations that frequently surpass the intensity and flow of firsthand experience' (p. 42). In support of these claims, the reading of a fictional narrative has been found to evoke a significant emotion change in readers (Djikic *et al.*, 2009). Although the extent and longevity of this emotion change was not measured, the findings do suggest that stories are able to "touch" readers, affecting them on an emotional level.

Moral Judgement

Imaginative engagement with stories, for example through engaging with characters' perspectives, may also be beneficial for children by providing them with a safe space in which to reflect, explore and discuss experiences and dilemmas without the real-life consequences of actions (Arthur *et al.*, 2017b; Guroian, 1998; Kidd and Castano, 2013; Kilpatrick, Wolfe and Wolfe, 1994; Nussbaum, 2001; Willows, 2017). In this way, the moral imagination enables readers to develop virtue reasoning by reflecting on the moral issues contained within stories, learning from character's successes and failures, and contemplating what actions may be taken when facing similar circumstances in the real world (Bohlin,

2005). In doing so in a fictional context, pupils can reflect but without personal risk or implications. This provides children with a unique way in which they can learn from and explore detailed situations and relationships.

Through becoming acquainted with characters' thoughts, feelings and motivations, it is held that readers are not only able to exercise moral judgement within a safe space, they are able to hone or refine their judgement (Carroll, 2000). This view is supported by literary thinkers such as Wayne Booth (1988) who claims that the "gift" that great authors offer with their stories is only available to those who truly engage in them. Engagement ultimately determines *who* readers are for the duration of the story and may result in them becoming the character in the process. Cain (2005, p. 179) asserts that by becoming a 'character-in-process', experiences afforded within a story take effect on the reader: 'while under the spell of stories, they are more passive and malleable to the experiences and principles of those stories, which in the long run produce and revise their moral judgements'.

Carroll (2000) suggests that while we often have difficulty applying the abstract moral rules and concepts that we are taught, the detailed examples provided by narrative fiction enable us to both exercise moral judgement and understand how to apply these appropriately by honing or realigning this knowledge. On this view, engagement with stories provides the opportunity to apply existing knowledge to concrete cases (Carroll, 2000), yielding the acquisition of knowledge in the form of 'the refinement or enhancement of one's experiential—especially perceptual and affective—sensibilities' (Carr and Davis, 2007, p. 106). Carroll (2000) likens fictional examples to heuristic devices such as diagrams, commenting that their simplicity (in comparison to real-life cases) does not undermine their potential to be educative, rather that the slightly narrowed focus minimises distraction and helps the refinement of moral judgement.

6. Summary

The review of theory and research contained within this chapter has indicated how children might learn about and develop character virtues through reading and engaging with stories.

Influences on children's learning, including factors that may affect the ability of children to relate to story characters and settings, have been outlined. The efficacy of different teaching and learning strategies have also been discussed.

The research findings discussed within this chapter may have implications for how teachers approach story-based character education. The research findings indicate that there are various points for teachers to consider, including: (i) children, especially younger children, do not always comprehend moral themes presented in stories, or understand intended morals in the same way as adults (Narvaez, 2002; Narvaez *et al.*, 1998; 1999; Mares and Acosta, 2008; 2010); (ii) stories which contain fantastical or unfamiliar characters may make it challenging for children to discern which information presented to them is true (Hopkins and Weisberg, 2017) – stories may not be regarded as reliable sources of information, and children may not transfer information from story contexts to real life unless they are convinced that the information is real and applicable to them (Larsen, Lee and Ganea, 2017; Richert *et al.*, 2009; Strouse, Nyhout and Ganea, 2018; Walker, Gopnik and Ganea, 2015); (iii) the age and prior experience of children can affect their comprehension of moral themes in stories, with moral schemas being more likely to be formed in older children (Lehr, 1988; Narvaez *et al.*, 1998; 1999; Whitney, Vozzola and Hofmann, 2005); (iv) plot features and complexity may influence children's learning (Lee *et al.*, 2014; Mares and Acosta, 2008); (v) children, especially younger children, may require support in understanding how information presented in story contexts relates to real-life contexts (Mares and Acosta, 2010).

The research findings suggest that children's learning from stories might be influenced by the types and characteristics of the stories used. Furthermore, the findings illustrate that certain teaching and learning approaches might help to facilitate children's learning. Story features which may positively affect children's independent learning and transfer from stories include: story characters and settings that are more reflective of real-life – for example those with human characters and real-life settings (Kotaman and Balci, 2017; Larsen, Lee and Ganea, 2017); and, stories in which positive consequences of desirable

behaviours are emphasised as opposed to negative consequences of undesirable behaviours (Lee *et al.*, 2014; Talwar *et al.*, 2017).

Teaching and learning approaches which may support children's understanding of moral themes and virtue terms include: teacher questioning and prompting which encourages children to explain or recognise key story events (Mares and Acosta, 2010; Walker and Lombrozo, 2017); training children to be able identify story themes (Walker and Lombrozo, 2017); the use of reading-related activities which develop children's understanding of core concepts, and which provide opportunities for children to reflect on story characters and events, to discuss these and consider their relevance in personal contexts (Arthur *et al.*, 2014; Davison *et al.*, 2016; Francis *et al.*, 2018; Hart, Oliveira and Pike, 2020; Jónsson *et al.*, 2019).

The theory and research discussed within this chapter offers some insight into the efficacy of story-based character education approaches. However, as was noted in the review of historical and contemporary literature in Chapter Two, the perceptions and approaches of primary school teachers are largely undocumented. Just as there is a noticeable dearth of knowledge concerning if and how primary school teachers approach story-based character education *in practice*, it is unclear whether the insights revealed in this chapter are realised in practice. The extent to which, and how, primary school teachers approach story-based character education, and the perceptions and motivations underpinning their approaches were therefore a central focus of the research study at the heart of this thesis.

PART TWO

CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

1. Introduction

In the previous chapters, perceptions of, and approaches to, story-based character education were reviewed, and the ways in which children are thought to learn from stories were considered. However, the review of historical and contemporary literature demonstrated that, despite knowing how stories have been used and valued as a vehicle for teaching character education in the past and, and how theorists and researchers suggest contemporary educators might use stories for this purpose, little is known about how stories are actually used and valued by classroom teachers. This chapter describes the design and methodology of a research study which aimed to address this gap in the character education literature and bring new insight to the field by examining the perceptions and approaches of primary school teachers in England.

The research study utilised a mixed methods design and comprised two sequential strands. In strand one, predominantly quantitative data were collected through an online survey which was administered to primary school teachers in England. In strand two, qualitative data were collected through one-to-one semi-structured interviews which were conducted with some of the participants from strand one. In this chapter, the reasons underpinning the research design and the suitability of the methods of data collection are considered. The chapter begins with a discussion of the purpose, aims and research questions guiding the study. Next, research approaches and possible methods of data collection are critically evaluated. The final research design and research instruments are then described and justified. The research design is followed by a description of the sample population and participant profile. The methods of data analysis are then described. Finally, the ethical considerations which guided the research are explained.

2. Purpose, Aims and Research Questions

There were a number of aims and anticipated outcomes associated with the research study. The research sought to build on the understanding and insight gained through the previous chapters and understand how primary school teachers value and use stories as a vehicle for teaching character education. The research also sought to understand how teachers' perceptions and approaches connect to the ideas and approaches outlined in the existing literature. Specifically, whether there was any congruence between documented approaches and the actual practice of teachers in today's classrooms.

Through examining how and to what extent stories are used and valued as a vehicle for teaching character education within an educational context, it was anticipated that this research study would contribute to the theory and practice of character education in three main ways. First, by advancing knowledge and understanding in the field. Second, by helping to evaluate the efficacy of character education theory which assumes that exposure to literature provides a unique means of facilitating character cultivation. Third, by using the understanding gleaned from the research study to inform and enhance approaches to story-based character education, for example through recommendations for teacher training and development.

The research study was structured around two primary research questions (RQ1 and RQ2) and a number of sub-questions (1a, b and c; 2a and b) which stemmed from the research aims and guided the research. The questions are set out in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1. Primary and Secondary Research Questions.

Research Questions
1 – How and to what extent do primary school teachers in England <i>value</i> stories as a vehicle for teaching character education?
a – Why do primary school teachers value stories as a vehicle for teaching character education?
b – Which story types are perceived to be more useful for teaching character education, and why?
c – Are there different story features that are perceived to be more useful for teaching character education?

2 – How and to what extent do primary school teachers in England use stories as a vehicle for teaching character education?
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a – What are the approaches used by primary school teachers to teach story-based character education?

b – What has influenced primary school teachers' approaches to story-based character education?

3. Methodological Considerations

There are a number of methodological considerations which informed the research design and methods of data collection used in this research study. The aims of this research necessitated the collection of data that could be used to not only understand *how* and *to what extent* teachers value and use stories for character education, but *why* teachers perceive and use stories in this way. Different methodologies that could be used for this research were carefully reviewed before arriving at the final research design. In this section, a summary of the main methodological considerations and methods of data collection are critically evaluated.

Selecting a Research Approach

Traditionally there have been two distinct and competing models on which to guide and base research within the social sciences: quantitative and qualitative research approaches. Quantitative research is broadly aligned with a positivist epistemology and focuses primarily on *measuring* phenomena using numerical data. Qualitative research is broadly aligned with an interpretivist epistemology and relies predominantly on the collection of qualitative data such as words and text which help to *understand* phenomena. However, *mixed methods* research has emerged as a third approach which understands the value of combining methodologies and rejects overly sharp distinctions between them, and which has rapidly evolved and gained popularity (Denscombe, 2010). In the case of mixed methods research, the 'philosophical partner' is *pragmatism* (Denscombe, 2010, p. 128; Johnson, Onwuebuze and Turner, 2007) and this association is largely attributed to the attempts of mixed methods research to consider multiple perspectives, and through the integration of both qualitative and quantitative methods (Johnson, Onwuebuze and Turner, 2007).

Pragmatism revolves around the idea that disagreement about the compatibility of positivism and interpretivism (and quantitative and qualitative research) is unhelpful. In following a “pragmatic approach”, it is the aims, objectives and research questions that dictate the design and methods of research, not the features of a set research approach (Biesta, 2017; Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Tashakkori and Teddlie, 1998). Ultimately, pragmatism provides ‘epistemological justification... and logic... for mixing approaches and methods’ (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie and Turner, 2007, p. 125), where the methods chosen are those which combine to best address the research questions in focus and are best-suited to the research context.

Within a mixed methods research approach, there are multiple different levels at which the mixing of methods might occur (Biesta, 2010; 2017). However, for the majority of researchers within social, behavioural and health sciences, the key to mixed methods research lies with the *integration* of qualitative and quantitative approaches which aim to answer the driving research questions (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2009). While there are some who offer strict clarification on what constitutes mixed methods research, arguing that the mere collection of both qualitative data and quantitative data in a single study does not qualify research as mixed methods (Sandelowski, 2003), a broader understanding of mixed methods is taken for this research study. This understanding aligns with Tashakkori and Creswell’s (2007, p. 4) definition of mixed method research:

...research in which the investigator collects and analyzes data, integrates the findings, and draws inferences using both qualitative and quantitative approaches or methods in a single study or a program of inquiry.

According to Tashakkori and Creswell’s definition, the integration of qualitative and quantitative approaches can occur in many forms, for example through using two types of data, data collection procedures or data analysis.

A mixed methods research approach, underpinned by pragmatism, was used to guide this research study. As noted above, one strength of a mixed methods approach lies in the ability of researchers to select methods which are most useful to them in gaining the knowledge needed to answer the driving research questions, and which are best-suited to the context

(Denscombe, 2010). Another strength of mixing methods is that researchers can help to ensure that breadth and depth of understanding is achieved, and that research findings are corroborated (Johnson, Onwuebuze and Turner, 2007). In order to achieve breadth of insight into teachers' perceptions and approaches, it was important to collect data from a wide-range of teachers from across school contexts. To achieve depth of insight, methods of data collection needed to enable a deeper or more elaborate understanding of perceptions and approaches; and to achieve corroboration there needed to be a form of triangulation of findings which would provide greater confidence and validity in the conclusions made (Johnson, Onwuebuze and Turner, 2007). In these ways, a mixed methods approach was considered to be particularly advantageous to the research study. Ultimately, by mixing methods, it was possible to achieve a more accurate understanding of the studied phenomenon than would be enabled through the use of a single method (Biesta, 2017).

There are multiple ways in which a mixed methods approach can help to achieve breadth, depth and corroboration of findings, for example through contributing to *compensation* and *completeness* of data, and *triangulation*, *complementarity* and *expansion* of the research findings. Compensation is where the weaknesses of one method of data collection is compensated by another; and completeness is where a more complete, fuller picture of the phenomenon of study is obtained by combining data collection approaches, making the research more meaningful (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2009). Triangulation seeks to ensure corroborating results from different methods that have been used to study the same phenomenon (Biesta, 2017); complementarity can be defined as the process of 'seeking elaboration, enhancement, illustration and clarification of the results from one method with the results from another method'; and expansion can be defined as 'seeking to expand the breadth and range of research by using different methods for different enquiry components' (Biesta, 2017, p. 159).

Selecting Methods of Data Collection

In this section, the suitability of different methods of data collection that could have been utilised as part of this research study's mixed methods approach are discussed and evaluated. Three main criteria relating to *compensation*, *completeness* and *complementarity*

of data gained through each method were considered: (1) the degree to which each method can be considered *flexible* in application; (2) the *breadth* of insight enabled through the method; and (3) the *depth* of insight enabled through the method. The chosen methods needed to be flexible enough in application to address the full scope of the research questions. The research questions required insight into how teachers value and use stories as a vehicle for teaching character education, and this necessitated that the research methods collected data on teachers' *approaches*, but also data pertaining to teachers' *perceptions* – for example their underlying views, opinions and reasons why stories are or are not used in certain ways. It was essential that the research methods could be used “flexibly” within the mixed methods design in order to sufficiently address these areas.

The chosen methods of data collection also needed to provide *breadth* and *depth* of insight through the combination of data collected. Breadth of insight into teachers' approaches, perceptions and understanding necessitated a method that could be used to collect data from a wide range of primary school teachers, across schools and contexts. It has already been acknowledged that limiting data collection to a small sample of teachers from a small number of schools would not provide sufficient coverage of primary school teachers in England. Methods were therefore evaluated based on practicality and implementation, but also according to how well they could enable the collection of a large amount of quantitative data from teachers in multiple schools, across year groups (EYFS-KS2) and from different regions in England. Depth of insight was needed to help to understand how and why teachers value and use stories for character education. In contrast to quantitative approaches, qualitative approaches allow researchers to ‘probe deeply’ and obtain a richer understanding through textual or narrative data (Denscombe, 2010, p. 102; Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2009). It was therefore considered essential that the combination of methods should enable the collection of qualitative, as well as quantitative, data.

A mixed methods case study was initially considered for this research study. A sustained focus on one or multiple cases enables researchers to collect quantitative and qualitative data using multiple sources of evidence (Day Ashley, 2017). Observations are typically used as a form of data collection in school-based case studies (Hamilton and Corbett-Whittier,

2013). Observations enable richer and more valid, or “authentic”, data to be obtained than other methods that often rely on inferences or assumptions (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018). In this study, observations may have provided insight into how teachers use stories for character education, and this data could have been used to *complement, complete* and *compensate* other methods of data collection. However, there are some practical and methodological limitations of observations. Observational research is well known for being a potentially complex and time-consuming process which is prone to observer bias – data collection requires sustained study over a prolonged period of time and is also limited to the time allocated to observation (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018; Cotton, Stokes and Cotton, 2010). Within a school context, observations need to be carefully organised, especially when researchers are looking at specific aspects of practice. Teachers may not have planned to include the researcher’s focus in a given lesson, and may need to be informed of the general focus to ensure that observations capture data relating to this. However, if those being observed become aware of the focus of the observation, threats to validity are heightened (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018), and it would not be possible able to ascertain whether the data collected was reflective of a teacher’s typical practice.

There are also some significant limitations to case study research more generally that were considered particularly problematic for the aims of this research study. Data collected through case study research may limit the generalisability of findings to other educational contexts. While the researcher’s immersion within the educational context can be illuminating, there may be a trade-off between richness and breadth of data obtained. For example, by limiting data collection to a small sample in order to achieve depth of insight, the breadth of data obtained is restricted and thus limited to the parameters of that context. Ultimately, a lack of breadth may threaten the validity of the research in terms of the generalisability of findings to larger populations (Day Ashley, 2017; Robson and McCartan, 2011). This research study aimed to understand the approaches, and perceptions of primary school teachers. Yet, teachers’ approaches and perceptions are likely to vary depending on the age of the children being taught, preferred teaching styles, school priorities, teacher training, and whether or not set schemes of work are followed. Limiting data collection to a small number of schools within case study research would therefore undermine the breadth

of understanding that the research aimed to achieve in terms of providing insight into differing approaches, perceptions and understanding of teachers from a wide-range of school contexts. Day Ashley (2017) suggests that one way to alleviate concerns over generalisability of case study research findings is to collect data from multiple cases from within different contexts: through the process of selecting a case, or multiple cases, researchers can make a connection to a 'broader phenomenon...and to a collective understanding of that phenomenon' (Day Ashley, 2017, p. 116). However, in addition to the extra resources needed to carry out multiple case studies, the resulting onus placed on the researcher to identify appropriate cases is problematic. Restricting data collection to teachers in a small number of schools would mean that cases would need to be carefully selected to ensure representativeness, both in terms of the demographics of teachers and pupils, but also in terms of the schools' systems and underlying pedagogies.

To understand how and to what extent primary school teachers value and use stories as a vehicle for teaching character education within this research study, it was necessary to collect data from a broad range of primary school teachers, across multiple schools. With the suitability of case study research and observation methods in question, attention turned to two alternative methods of data collection: survey and interview methods. The relative strengths and limitations of each method, both independently and when combined within a mixed methods approach, were evaluated and the main considerations are outlined below.

Surveys

Self-report surveys are a commonly-employed method of data collection within the social sciences. Surveys ask participants to respond to questions, reporting on their perceptions, attitudes, beliefs and behaviours relating to the topic of focus (Mrug, 2010; Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2009). Surveys are typically cross-sectional in nature, seeking to describe and interpret the nature of a particular phenomenon, but can also be exploratory, confirmatory or analytic: *exploratory* in seeking to understand patterns and relationships; *confirmatory* in testing a particular hypothesis; and *analytic* in that relationships between variables are tested (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018). In comparison to more invasive measures such as observations, surveys are considered a relatively simple, inexpensive and efficient method

of collecting data from a large number of participants (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018; Mrug, 2010; Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2009). Furthermore, when used in combination with careful sampling techniques, surveys allow researchers to establish general patterns across populations and confidently generalise findings to that population (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018; Tymms, 2017).

The flexibility of survey designs also enable a broad range of data to be collected. Using surveys, researchers are able to tailor specific questions to the topic of interest and use various question formats, including multiple choice answers, open responses and rating measures (Mrug, 2010). For example, questions utilising Likert scale-based formats enable researchers to gauge respondents' perceptions (Tymms, 2017) and by using closed-ended questions participants' responses can be easily quantified and compared (Mrug, 2010). In this way, survey data can be useful in helping to understand broad themes which can then be followed up in more depth and detail using qualitative methods such as interviews (Drever, 2006; Mrug, 2010). While qualitative survey formats also have the potential to yield rich qualitative data from a wide range of participants, perspectives and experiences (Braun *et al.*, 2020), open-ended questions may be open to interpretation, can be more difficult to analyse, and may require coding from multiple researchers to ensure reliability (Mrug, 2010).

Surveys are commonly administered in one of two formats, paper-based or online (internet-based). The choice between these modes of delivery depends on the relative strengths and limitations of each in enabling researchers to achieve the research aims. The main advantage of using a paper-based survey over an online survey resides in the understanding that paper-based surveys are a tried-and-tested method of data collection. When administering paper-based surveys, researchers have more control; researchers are often on-hand to clarify questions and their presence is associated with higher completion rates compared to postal or online delivery (Mrug, 2010). However, there a number of disadvantages of paper-based surveys. Paper-based surveys are difficult to distribute to larger populations, and researchers may have limited access to participants in distant locations, or incur costs related to travel and distribution (Tymms, 2017). On the other hand, online surveys are accessible anywhere

via multiple modes of technology, for example via desktop, laptop, tablet and mobile devices, and this means that they can be distributed on a large scale to anyone with an internet connection. The high efficiency and low cost in the time and resources taken to create, distribute and access target populations, especially with larger samples, means that online surveys are often preferred to their paper counterparts (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018; Mrug, 2010; Tymms, 2017).

Online surveys are also advantageous in regard to survey design, data collection and storage. Online programmes enable researchers to flexibly design and create surveys using multiple strategies for data collection and are becoming increasingly abundant (Best and Harrison, 2009; Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018). Unlike more rigid paper-based surveys, researchers utilising online methods can design 'conditional branching' where certain questions are displayed to participants automatically depending on their responses to prior questions (Best and Harrison, 2009, p. 424; Tymms, 2017). A number of online programmes provide readily-available software that can be used in this way (e.g. Qualtrics, Survey Monkey, Survey Gizmo); and programmes often offer comprehensive support, not only supporting researchers with survey administration and design, but with advertisement, distribution, data collection, data storage and data analysis. Whereas data collected using paper-based methods is time consuming in requiring manual data entry for analysis, online surveys enable fast and efficient data collection which is automatically provided in digital form (Tymms, 2017).

Finally, online surveys enable participants to remain anonymous which is particularly advantageous in self-reports; participants may be more honest and authentic in their responses due to a lower effect of self-report bias (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018). On the other hand, online administration of anonymous surveys means that researchers have less control over the sampled population (Mrug, 2010). There may be a particular sampling bias or skew and certain groups may not be accessed as easily, or at all (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018); nor can researchers be sure that all data is genuine. More common in longer online surveys is the effect of *satisficing*, where participants minimise the effort taken to answer questions and may enter any response, or 'straightlining' where participants

select the same responses repeatedly at speed without considering the questions (de Vaus, 2014). The net result may be that the reliability of data is compromised.

Interviews

Interview methods such as one-to-one interviews and focus groups are commonly used within mixed methods research and are potentially powerful methods of data collection which can yield insightful, in-depth and illuminating data on the phenomena in focus (Robson and McCartan, 2011; Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2009). The power of qualitative interview data is that it can be illuminating and reflects real people, whereas quantitative data – though factual – can be regarded as ‘characterless’ statistics (Gillham, 2005, p. 8). Through interview and focus groups, researchers are able to answer *what* and *how*-type questions (Mears, 2017), and can gain an understanding of *why* by asking directly about underlying reasons and motivations.

Focus groups are group interviews in which a number of participants meet with an interviewer to discuss questions, themes and topics. Focus groups can be used alongside quantitative methods as an additional source of evidence, providing a more in-depth understanding than would be afforded through quantitative data alone (Linhorst, 2016; Morgan, 1997). The advantages of focus groups reside in their cost- and time-efficiency – compared to one-to-one interviews, focus groups enable faster collection of data from more participants (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018; Hollander, 2004). Another advantage of focus groups is that the group process enables researchers to obtain data that may be less accessible using alternative research methods (Linhorst, 2016). For example, teachers’ reflective discussions in focus groups may provide more insight into their perceptions and approaches than one-to-one interviews with researchers. In addition to the group process benefit, participants with different opinions and approaches can be brought together as a representative group, and this enables researchers to gather multiple responses without relying on multiple individual interviews (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018; Gibbs, 2017).

However, a limitation of bringing participants together in focus groups is that they may be influenced by the responses and opinions of other group members. Though the *collective perspective* gleaned from focus groups (Gibbs, 2017) and the insights provided through their

discussions would be beneficial, there is the risk that a group response, and the group dynamics, may limit the efficacy of the research which seeks to understand various perceptions and approaches. Hollander (2004) points out that it is the psychological pressures typical of social situations such as conformity and compliance which may hinder data collection through focus groups. Individuals may feel discouraged to share their perspectives if they differ from that of the collective (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018) and the challenging social dynamics of group interviews may even result in low quality data with poor depth of insight (Hopkins, 2007).

An alternative method of collecting qualitative interview data is through one-to-one interviews, and there are three main formats that are commonly used: structured, semi-structured and unstructured. One-to-one interviews, in their various formats, enable researchers to gain detailed insight into to practices and perceptions of individual participants. It is held that even with only a small number of one-to-one interviews, the data collected can advance the understanding and insight gained through self-report survey methods (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2009). When deciding on an appropriate format for one-to-one interviews, researchers must consider purpose of the interview and the structure of questions and delivery which will help them to best answer the research questions. Unlike highly-structured interviews, which are tightly scripted and inflexible in similar ways to surveys, unstructured or semi-structured interviews are more flexible in question and response, and enable researchers to collect in-depth data (Mrug, 2010; Robson and McCartan, 2011).

Semi-structured interviews characteristically produce high-quality data and are balanced between flexibility and structure (Drever, 2006; Gillham, 2005). Despite the use of an interview schedule, semi-structured interviews are flexible; it is the interviewer's prerogative to further explore interviewees' responses to open questions with probes, facilitating the obtainment of rich qualitative data that would not be possible using a survey alone (Bell and Waters, 2014; Drever, 2006; Gillham, 2005; Mears, 2017; Moore 2002; Robson and McCartan, 2011). Furthermore, participants can ask for clarification and interviewers can clarify ambiguous meaning to ensure that questions have been reliably understood; in this

way, interview methods are beneficial for the collection of qualitative data because potential biases in data resulting from misinterpretation are reduced (Drever, 2006; Mrug, 2010).

A limitation of interview methods is that they are considered challenging and high-cost in terms of time and resources that need to be allocated to preparation, data collection and data analysis (Mears, 2017; Persaud, 2010). However, it is possible to alleviate some of the costs by conducting *distance interviews*, which allow improved access to participants (Gillham, 2005). With the increasing availability of video technology, video interviews have become increasingly popular form of distance interview. Video interviews bear a close resemblance to face-to-face interviews (Mears, 2017; Persaud, 2010) and enable near-equivalent insight into body language and facial expression through computer technology. Through video format it is therefore possible to limit costs, and to address a criticism typically directed at distance interviews – that some forms (such as telephone interviews) do not provide data about non-verbal communication (Drever, 2006).

Mixing Survey and Interview Methods

While it is typical of mixed methods research to utilise two or more types of data collection procedure (Tashakkori and Creswell, 2007), it is important to consider specifically how the methods combine to achieve *compensation*, *completeness* and *complementarity* of data. Drever (2006) suggests that the consecutive combination of survey and interview methods is beneficial through enabling researchers to identify broad themes and issues using a survey and to then probe in more depth and detail through semi-structured interviews. Tashakkori and Teddlie (2009, p. 300) also advocate for a combination of broadly quantitative survey questions and qualitative interview questions, advising that surveys can ‘inexpensively generate large numbers of responses’ and that a relatively small number of qualitative interviews can generate in-depth data about the topic of interest. Tashakkori and Teddlie (2009) ultimately point to the *breadth* of data afforded by survey methods and the *depth* of data enabled through interviews; the combination of numerical and narrative data is considered advantageous as this ‘provides the mixed methods researcher with rich data sets’ (p. 302).

It was anticipated that the sequential combination of survey and interview methods in this research study would provide a more accurate understanding of teacher's perceptions and approaches than would be achieved through a single method alone. For example, online surveys could enable the rapid collection of a large amount of quantitative data from a varied and diverse sample of teachers by incorporating multiple closed-ended questions focused on teachers' perceptions and approaches. One-to-one interviews could enable rich qualitative data to be obtained (Denscombe, 2010) through questions that probe more deeply into how and why teachers value and use stories for the purpose of teaching character education. Through this mixed methods approach, not only was data considered likely to be more representative and generalisable, but it was more likely to provide the depth of insight necessary to understand teachers' perceptions of, and approaches to, story-based character education.

4. Research Design

The design of the research study was informed by the evaluation of research approaches and methods of data collection outlined in the previous section. A mixed methods approach, which mixed at the levels of data collection and analysis, was employed: different methods were used to both collect and analyse quantitative and qualitative data. Quantitative and qualitative data were collected within a quasi-mixed design in which there were two strands running sequentially. A sequential design was preferred to a parallel design. In parallel designs the research strands are synchronised, occurring at the same time, and the reasons for mixing methods need to be known from the outset. Whereas in sequential designs, the research strands occur in chronological order and, while the reason for mixing methods may be known from the outset, inferences made from the first strand can be used to inform the second (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2009). As a key aim of this research study was to *understand* how and why teachers value and use stories as a vehicle for teaching character education, it was important that the research design allowed flexibility and the opportunity to follow-up on emerging themes. A sequential implementation enabled themes emerging from the first strand to be analysed and explored first; emerging themes could then be

followed-up in more depth within the second strand (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2009; Biesta, 2017).

As is typical of quasi-mixed designs, this research did not involve serious integration across the respective qualitative and quantitative approaches (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2009): the decision to employ a mixed methods design was made on the understanding that the integration of quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection would enable a more complete description and understanding than through adoption of a quantitative or qualitative perspective alone (Denscombe, 2010). In strand one, predominantly quantitative data were collected through an *online survey* method. In strand two, predominantly qualitative data were collected through *semi-structured interviews*, conducted and recorded using video technology software. An overview of the research design can be seen in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2. Overview of the Research Design.

Strand	Order	Method of Data Collection	Administration	Participants	Predominant type of data	Period of Data Collection
One	Sequential (1)	Online survey	Online: <i>Qualtrics survey software</i>	School teachers (EYFS – Y6)	Quantitative	06.11.20 to 31.03.21
Two	Sequential (2)	Semi-structured interviews	Online: Video interviewing via <i>Zoom</i>	School teachers (EYFS – Y6)	Qualitative	21.04.21 to 02.08.21

The research instruments were designed to tap into the perceptions and approaches of teachers, and underwent a process of design and development which included piloting. Descriptions of the design and development of the online survey and semi-structured interview schedule are provided below.

Research Instruments: Online Survey

An online survey was used in strand one of the research study. The robustness of the online survey as a valid and reliable method of data collection was a primary concern during its design and development. Despite the utility of surveys as an efficient method of data collection which can be flexibly designed, there are a number of limitations associated with this method which may compromise the validity and reliability of data. Fowler and Cosenza

(2009) point to the design of survey questions as one of the major sources of survey error, emphasising the importance of careful survey development and refinement of the measure. There are four characteristics of survey questions and answers that Fowler and Cosenza (2009, p. 376) consider to be 'fundamental to a good measurement process', and each characteristic will be briefly considered in the description of the survey design and development that follows:

1. Questions need to be consistently understood.
2. Respondents need to have access to the information required to answer the question.
3. The way in which respondents are asked to answer the question must provide an appropriate way to report what they have to say.
4. Respondents must be willing to provide the answers called for in the question.

(p. 376)

Although the topic in focus and the intended participants for this research would suggest that the second characteristic set out by Fowler and Cosenza (2009) would be met, steps were taken to ensure that characteristics one, three and four were also satisfied. The recruitment method (see 'The Sample Population and Participant Profile') used to access participants helped to ensure that it was teachers who were contacted about the survey, and within this teachers were encouraged to participate through an emphasis on the importance of the research and a financial incentive. Participants were also asked demographic questions about themselves and their role in the first section of the survey. In 'Section A: About You' participants were asked questions about their age and qualifications; school experience, leadership roles and responsibilities; and, age group taught. These questions were asked to help ensure that responses were submitted by teachers, who could reliably answer the subsequent survey questions.

The reliability of self-report measures such as surveys is partly dependent on all participants understanding the questions in the same way. Once designed and in print, surveys are

inflexible and out of the control of researchers; in their absence, participants are unable to ask for clarification and may only partially complete questions (Drever, 2006; Mrug, 2010). Ensuring that participants consistently understand what is being asked of them is one of the most difficult tasks in survey design (Fowler and Cosenza, 2009). As Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2018, p. 337) highlight, words are 'inherently ambiguous' and steps must therefore be taken to ensure that questions are reliably understood.

In order to help ensure that questions were reliably understood and could be answered sufficiently, the survey was reviewed and piloted during development in May-July, 2020. The uses and benefits of carrying out pilot studies have been well-documented within the research literature (see Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018; Denscombe, 2010; de Vaus, 2014). Mrug (2010) asserts that all new survey questions 'should be first evaluated in a pilot study to ensure that they are clearly worded and correctly understood, reliable, and valid' (p. 1473). Mrug's point is especially relevant to this research; as noted previously in this chapter, surveys that are administered online do not afford participants or researchers the opportunity to clarify the meaning of questions. Through the piloting of a survey, researchers are able to gain feedback on questions and their formats, and understand how these might be refined to tap into targeted constructs (de Vaus, 2014).

Participants of the pilot study ($n=10$) completed the survey questions and then explained their experience and understanding of the survey to the researcher to highlight any potential issues. All participants were from, or associated with, the target sample population, and included primary school headteachers ($n=2$), and teachers from EYFS ($n=1$), KS1 ($n=4$) and KS2 ($n=3$). While completing the survey, participants were asked to make notes on any questions they were unclear on (ambiguity of question wording or content), questions they found difficult to answer, the ease of navigation using the online software and finally, whether the closed response options for each question provided sufficient coverage – i.e. whether there were responses that were missing, or redundant, in that participant's opinion. Participants were asked to email their notes for the researcher to review. Where appropriate, follow-up conversations were held via Zoom, email or telephone to discuss the points raised in more detail.

There were two primary benefits of piloting the survey in this way. First, it was possible from the responses entered, and feedback gained, to understand whether each question was understood by participants. Through this approach, it was possible to identify questions that needed to be changed, refined, or expanded; the subsequent discussions with participants enabled changes to be made in consultation with members of the target sample population. Second, it was possible to refine the way in which participants could respond to questions. Through the pilot, it was possible to understand common responses that were not included in the piloted response options (de Vaus, 2014). Participants' suggestions for potential response options were reviewed and, where appropriate, incorporated into the survey. For example, question 27b asked participants why they encouraged pupils to take part in subsequent activities about story meaning. Two participants of the pilot selected 'other' for their response to this question and subsequently explained that they did so in order to evidence learning for the purpose of ongoing assessment – a priority in their schools. Anticipating that assessment would feature as a common response, the list of possible answers to question 27b was expanded to incorporate this. A description of the main revisions made to the survey following the pilot is provided in Appendix B. A full list of the final survey questions is provided in Appendix C, and these will be discussed in more detail later in this section.

The format of the survey questions, while also reviewed during piloting, was primarily informed by the research methods literature. Though it will not be possible to describe all questions here, some of the main points are discussed below. These include the wording of questions, question branching, the use of closed-ended vs open-ended questions, and Likert scale questions.

The wording of each survey question was carefully considered. Careful wording is needed to ensure that meaning is accurately and consistently understood. To help to ensure this, Fowler and Cosenza (2009) recommend that unfamiliar, abstract or technical terms should be avoided. While it was judged that the majority of terms in focus within the research would be familiar to the sample population, care was taken to define important or

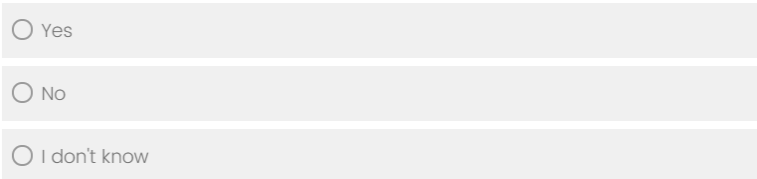
potentially ambiguous terms. Definitions were included to help to ensure that important terms were consistently understood.

A central consideration in the development of the teacher survey concerned the use of the term “character education”. In 2018, a Jubilee Centre survey administered by Populus to 457 UK teachers indicated that only 11% of teachers were familiar with the term character education and knew what this meant (Jubilee Centre, 2018). At the time of the survey’s development, familiarity with character education was likely to have increased on this figure owing to the DfE’s (2019) development of the *Character Education Framework Guidance*. However, without relative certainty that respondents to the teacher survey would be familiar with the term, and acknowledging the aforementioned variety in terms and phrases used to refer to character education in schools (see Chapter One), the term was not included in the wording of survey questions which collected data on teachers’ perceptions and approaches. Instead, and in an attempt to capture teachers’ perceptions of, and approaches to, using stories broadly for the purpose of character education – i.e. using stories to support ‘the learning and habituation of positive moral attributes, sometimes known as ‘virtues’...’ (DfE, 2019, p.7) – three terms were used. The three terms were those that one could reasonably expect all teacher to be familiar: teachers were asked about how they used and valued stories to teach about 1) *morals or moral lessons*, 2) *“good” character*, and 3) *“good” behaviour*. Short descriptions of each were provided in the survey (see Appendix C). It was anticipated that asking teachers how they value and use stories for these three purposes would be more likely to capture a true reflection of teachers’ perceptions and approaches: the use of an unfamiliar term may have negatively affected the validity and reliability of the survey.

The order and style of questions was also used to aid comprehension. To help to ensure that responses are accurate and that data quality is high, Fowler and Cosenza (2009, p. 386) recommend developing questions that ‘trigger associations that may aid recall’. Had participants been asked Questions 19a and 20a early on in the survey and without context, it is not known whether participants would have fully understood the full breadth of the questions. Questions 12a, 12b, 12c and 14 preceded 19a and 20a, and encouraged

participants to reflect on how useful stories are to teach about *morals or moral lessons*, *“good” character*, or *“good” behaviour*, helping to trigger associations through reflection. Questions 19a and 20a also included guidance for participants to help ensure that the purpose of the questions was clearly understood. For example, Question 19a asked:

Q19a. Do you ever teach about [Morals/Moral lessons, “Good” Character or “Good” Behaviour] when using stories? This might be the main reason for reading the story or something that is taught incidentally when reading a story for other reasons.



Yes

No

I don't know

The question guidance helped to ensure that a response of ‘Yes’ was captured even if teachers used stories in this way *incidentally* – i.e. when it was not the teacher’s main reason for using the story, but they did sometimes teach about these areas incidentally. Had this guidance not been included, participants only teaching about *morals or moral lessons*, *“good” character*, or *“good” behaviour* incidentally may not have responded with ‘Yes’.

Question branching allowed follow-up questions to be asked dependent on participants’ previous responses. In some cases, dichotomous questions (e.g. ‘Yes/No’ responses) were used to determine question branches. Questions 19a and 20a (see Appendix C) are examples of key questions in the survey branching. A response of ‘Yes’ to either question led participants to be asked further questions about how and why they use stories for character education. A response of ‘No’ took participants to the end of the survey. For this reason, it was essential that the question wording and meaning were accurately conveyed in both, and the questions and instructions were kept brief to help to ensure consistent comprehension. An option to select ‘I don’t know’ was sometimes included so that participants did not feel forced to choose a response that they did not know the answer to or have an opinion on (Tymms, 2017) – for example, Question 19a (provided above). Because the question branching relied on participants’ response to question 19a, the ‘I don’t know’ response was

branched in the same way as 'Yes' and participants were then able to read the follow-up questions, leaving these blank if it transpired that the questions were not applicable.

An important decision facing researchers is whether to use open- or closed-ended question formats in survey-based research. Closed-ended questions were preferred to open-ended questions because of the comparative ease at which data can be collected and analysed. Open-ended questions are well-known for being open to misinterpretation, require more effort for participants to answer and are often skipped or left blank for these reasons (Best and Harrison, 2009; Mrug, 2010). The questions required participants to select responses from a pre-determined list. Where appropriate, participants were encouraged to select 'all that apply' or to 'select one', choosing the answer which 'best described' their response. However, despite the advantages of closed-ended question formats, the limited number of responses that are typical of closed-ended questions may affect validity as the participant is forced to choose from a prescribed list which may not provide the most accurate or suitable answer (Mrug, 2010). Tymms (2017) also raises concerns about a reliance on closed-ended questions, advising that they should only be used when the researcher has a clear idea of the most likely responses. The pilot of the survey helped to ensure that common responses were included; however, for questions in which responses were potentially broad and varied, an 'other' option was included so that participants could include and describe additional responses.

Likert scale ratings were also included in order to tap into participants' perceptions regarding the usefulness and value of stories. For example, in Question 15a, participants were asked to rate how useful they believed different types of story were for teaching about the areas related to character education. Likert scales enable researchers to 'gauge participants' feeling' (Tymms, 2017, p. 225), attitudes and opinions (de Vaus, 2014) and allowed insight into the perceived usefulness of each type of story.

Survey Questions

The focus of the survey questions was informed by the key themes emerging from (a) the review of literature pertaining to historical and contemporary story-based character education in Chapter Two, and (b) the analysis of research findings and perspectives

pertaining to how children learn from stories in Chapter Three. The survey was organised into four main sections: A to D.

In Section A of the survey (*Section A: About You*), participants were asked basic demographic questions (e.g. age, gender) and questions relating to their school context, role and level of experience. Participants were also asked about whether their school had a policy or scheme of work related to character education. This information was gathered to help to analyse data and interpret findings. In Section B of the survey (*Section B: Stories and Education*), participants were asked questions about their perceptions and use of stories as a vehicle for teaching education within the school. Questions asked participants to rate the usefulness and importance of stories for different purposes, including areas related to academic knowledge, and areas more broadly related to character education such as teaching about good character, morals and good behaviour.

In Section C (*Section C: Using Stories*), participants were asked specifically about how they use stories as a vehicle for teaching character education. Questions focused on: (a) the curriculum areas that stories are used within; (b) how stories are selected for use; (c) what is taught using stories, including virtues and other qualities related to character (e.g. honesty, fairness, perseverance etc.); (d) the types of stories used and how *useful* different types of stories are to teach character education; (e) perceptions of the usefulness of stories according to different story-level factors, such as the age of protagonists, characteristics and settings of stories; (f) if stories are used to teach character education (whether intentionally or incidentally); (g) how often stories are used to teach character education; and (h) whether participants ever choose and use stories specifically to teach character education. If so, why and which types of stories they tend to use?

The questions contained in Section C were primarily informed by the review of the literature in Chapter Two and Chapter Three, and refined during piloting. For example, of particular interest following the review of historical and contemporary literature were the types of story used for teaching character education in primary schools, and teachers' perceptions regarding the features and characteristics of stories that may affect children's learning from stories.

There were ten story types included in Section C of the survey, and a short definition was provided for each (see Appendix C): biographical accounts (biographies and autobiographies), classic stories, fables, fairy tales, folklore, myths and legends, picture books and storybooks, popular fiction, religious stories, and stories from history. It must be acknowledged that the ten story types included in the teacher survey is by no means an exhaustive list of story types or genres. The list was created drawing on personal experience of primary school practice and informed by (a) the story types which commonly feature in historical and contemporary approaches identified in the existing literature; and, (b) the pilot study conducted with primary school teachers.

Piloting was especially important: it was essential to reflect the “types” of story that primary school teachers use and choose from in practice. The ten story types included in the survey were considered by pilot study participants to be broadly reflective of the story types used in their schools. During piloting, picture/story books were highlighted as a “type” of story that teachers, especially teachers of younger children (in EYFS and KS1) often use for teaching character education. Picture books, while broad in the sense that other story types can also be picture books, were included knowing that there are an abundance of picture books used in schools which fall into no discernible category.

The virtues and character qualities that participants could choose from in question 14 were selected through a review of historical and contemporary approaches to story-based character education. For example, drawing on Gould’s (1906) *Life and Manners*, which includes instructions for educators on how to use stories to teach about *courage, self-control* and *kindness*; Carr and Harrison’s *Educating Character through Stories* (2015) includes a focus on using stories to teach about *courage, gratitude* and *humility*. While it was considered impractical to include all virtues and character qualities that had featured in the reviewed literature, a sample was selected for inclusion in the survey in an attempt to shed light on the sorts of virtues and character qualities that teachers teach about using stories.

Section D (*Section D: Pedagogy*) was only answered by participants who indicated that they intentionally used stories to teach character education. In this section, participants were asked to describe their approaches, and to justify and explain these. For example,

participants were asked whether they help children to relate the meaning of the story to their own lives, and for the reasons underpinning their response.

Survey Administration and Delivery

The online survey was administered to participants using software provided by Qualtrics.com, which was a University of Birmingham-approved and recommended software application at the time of use. While some of the benefits and limitations of online surveys have already been discussed, the following points were also considered in relation to the practical administration and formatting of the online survey: the researchers' control of survey questions and administration; expected response rates; and social desirability biases.

Control over surveys based online have important implications for the reliability and validity of data. In comparison to paper-based surveys, online administration may lessen researchers' control over who completes the survey as well as the control of the conditions in which the survey is completed (Mrug, 2010). While sampling methods can help to ensure that surveys are only shared and completed by the intended population, it is acknowledged that there may have been variability in the environments in which participants completed the survey. However, researchers' control can also be strengthened through online delivery of surveys. Online software – including that of Qualtrics – enables researchers to use question branching and participants can be prevented from skipping questions or revisiting previously completed questions (Best and Harrison, 2009). This additional control is advantageous in helping to prevent participants from altering answers based on knowledge gained through the survey itself; and in helping to ensure that certain questions are answered. As previously noted, there were questions of particular interest in the survey; though not all questions were formatted to require a response, some were set with a condition where participants had to respond in order to progress. Participants were also unable to return to previous questions.

Response and incompleteness rates are also important factors to consider with online survey administration. There are various characteristics of surveys which are thought to affect the success of online survey delivery and completion, including content, presentation, and incentives provided (Fan and Yan, 2010). However, length and duration of surveys are

considered particularly influential. Survey length has been found to have ‘a negative linear relation with response rates’ (Fan and Yan, 2010, p. 133); and longer surveys are associated with higher incompleteness rates (Best and Harrison, 2009). Adding qualification to these findings, Blumenberg *et al.* (2019) suggest that it is the *duration* of surveys that is most important, finding that the length of online surveys does not affect response rates when the survey duration is short (4 minutes) to moderate (14 minutes). Following feedback provided during piloting, the online survey used in this research was estimated to take participants between 10 and 15 minutes to complete, and a reasonable completion rate was anticipated as a result.

An important consideration for any research utilising self-report measures such as surveys is the potential effects of social desirability and response biases. Whether delivered in paper or online form, surveys are open to response biases which may affect the validity of data collected (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018). Participants may under- or over-report, for example by avoiding responses that are socially undesirable or providing responses that are deemed to be socially-desirable (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018). There are also problems associated with self-perception biases where participants give responses based on idealised or inaccurate self-perceptions which are not a true reflection of their perceptions or behaviours (Mrug, 2010). While it may not be possible to address self-perception biases, Fowler and Cosenza (2009) suggest that researchers can help to reduce social desirability bias by: ensuring and reassuring participants that responses are confidential; emphasising that the accuracy of answers is imperative to the research; and ensuring that questions are carefully worded to help reduce participants’ perceptions that particular responses will be viewed in a positive or negative light. To counter the effects of social desirability biases, participants were reminded to give honest and accurate responses and were assured regarding confidentiality of responses. In fact, use of the online software enabled participants to complete the survey *anonymously* if they wished, as no identifying data was required unless participants chose to give contact details at the end of the survey. While the survey questions were not deemed to be of a sensitive nature, questions were worded carefully to ensure that responses were not going to be perceived in a negative light (Fowler

and Cosenza, 2009). Through the steps that are described here, it was anticipated that social desirability biases would be minimized.

Research Instruments: Semi-Structured Interviews

In strand two, semi-structured interviews were used to gain deeper insight into the research questions, and to elucidate initial findings from strand one. The interview questions were designed to help to understand and build on the findings collected in strand one of the research study in two main ways. First, the interviews provided participants with an opportunity to respond to the question topics in more depth. Although the survey questions from strand one enabled participants to describe their perceptions of and approaches to story-based character education, the closed-ended format of most questions and quantitative nature of the survey limited the depth with which participants could respond. By covering similar topics within the interviews, participants could be encouraged to *explain* and *expand upon* their initial responses to the survey. Second, findings emerging from strand one could be expanded and elaborated on within the semi-structured interviews. Through the interviews, participants could be asked to explain their perceptions of and approaches to story-based character education.

As with the online survey, the interview questions were reviewed and piloted with teachers from both the Lower School and Upper School during development. Participants of the pilot study ($N=2$) were interviewed for approximately one hour and were asked to provide feedback on their understanding of the interview questions. The participants were both teachers: one participant was based in KS1, and one was based in UKS2. Participants provided feedback on questions they felt were ambiguous, or were unclear on, and the subsequent discussion enabled the researcher to revise the wording of interview questions in order to help ensure that they were clear and sufficiently understood. For example, within the teacher survey, participants had been asked about whether the type, age and appearance of characters, and setting of stories, affected how *useful* the story was for character education. Within the pilot study, interviewees explained that it was predominantly the ability of pupils to *relate* to a story that would affect its usefulness for character education. Therefore, in strand two of the research study, interviewees were

asked specifically about whether there were any factors (such as the type, age and appearance of characters, and setting of stories) which affected how easily pupils could *relate* to the story, and whether this affected how useful a story could be for character education. The length and complexity of stories were also highlighted by pilot study interviewees as having an influence on the usefulness of stories for character education. In strand two of the research study, interviewees were therefore also asked about how length and complexity of stories influences their usefulness for character education. A description of the main revisions made to the interview schedule following the pilot is provided in Appendix D. A full list of questions contained in the final interview schedule is provided in Appendix E.

The interview schedule began with a *preamble* which explained the purpose of the interview and offered a contextualised definition of character education which drew on the DfE (2019) *Character Education Framework Guidance*. Participants were reminded that Section C and Section D of the survey asked questions about using stories to teach about morals/moral messages and “good” character and behaviour. The semi-structured interview questions aimed to understand: how and the reasons why teachers might value and use stories as a vehicle for teaching character education; how children are perceived to learn through listening to and reading stories; typical approaches to story-based character education; the types and features of stories used, including perceptions about how useful different story types are for character education; how and why stories are chosen; how and the extent to which teachers’ perceptions and approaches are influenced by training and experience; and, potential barriers to using stories as a vehicle for teaching character education in the primary school.

After being asked questions about their perceptions of story-based character education – for example “Which story types do you think are most useful for story-based character education? Can you explain why you think this?” – participants were asked supplementary questions to help to understand findings from strand one. For example, participants were asked “Do you think that the length or complexity of stories affects how useful they are for character education?”. Supplementary questions offered a chance to understand possible

reasons for trends in the survey data – for example why shorter stories such as fables and picture books might be considered more useful for teaching character education.

Interview Administration and Delivery

The semi-structured interviews were conducted as distance interviews and were held virtually via online video conferencing software (Zoom.us), enabling access to teachers across England and minimizing costs and resources (Gillham, 2005). Each interview was held on a one-to-one basis between the participant and the researcher who arranged the interview at a convenient time for the participant: interviews were typically conducted before or after participants' working hours, but where preferred by the participant, some also took place during participants' non-teaching time during the school day. Approximately equivalent time was allocated to each interview, but due to the differing depth of responses, interviews varied in duration, ranging from between 28 minutes and 1 second, and 50 minutes and 20 seconds. The interviews lasted an average of 38 minutes 20 seconds. Interviews were recorded on Zoom and subsequently transcribed.

It is important to consider potential threats to the validity and reliability of data collected through an interview method. As with any form of self-report, there is the potential for biases from participants and researchers to influence the validity and reliability of data. Participants' self-conceptions are not always a true reflection of their actions or behaviours (Gillham, 2005) and, even if participants have an accurate self-conception, participant bias may lead to the distortion of responses which are socially desirable or provide researchers with answers they are perceived to be looking for. To try to minimise the effects of social desirability biases, participants were reminded about the purpose of the study and were asked to answer all questions honestly, and in relation to their current school/context. Care was also taken to ensure that questions did not lead participants' responses, and were reliably understood. To help to minimise interviewer bias and to help ensure consistency across interviews, the researcher asked all of the questions contained in the interview schedule (see Appendix E) and did not deviate from the question wording (Persaud, 2010). However, due to the semi-structured nature of the interviews, the researcher also used question probes at their discretion to help elicit additional information in response to the set

questions (Gillham, 2005). To avoid leading participants' answers, neutral, unbiased, and nondirective probes were used, such as "Can you explain why?" "In what way(s)?" and "Can you provide an example?" (Persaud, 2010). Written notes were made to assist the subsequent analysis of the interview data.

5. The Sample Population and Participant Profile

The sample population for the research study was primary school teachers in England, who taught EYFS, KS1 and KS2 classes. It was imperative to the external validity, as well as the integrity of the research, that participant sample reflected and represented the target population (Fritz and Morgan, 2010). Mrug (2010, p. 1477) considers generalisability of research findings to be a 'direct function' of representativeness. It was therefore important that the research study enabled data to be collected from a representative sample of teachers. However, the population of teachers in England is large and widely dispersed, and teachers work within and across various school settings and contexts.

To help to ensure that data was collected data from a wide-range range of teachers, randomised cluster sampling was initially used to recruit participants for the online survey. Cluster sampling is commonly employed in small-scale research and is recommended for use specifically when populations are 'large and widely dispersed, [and when] gathering a simple random sample poses administrative problems' (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018, p. 216). To ensure that the variability of the target population is captured, Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2018) recommend light sampling from a larger number of clusters, as opposed to heavy sampling from a small number. In this research study, the forty-eight ceremonial counties of England were used as clusters and a random sample of schools from within each cluster were approached for participation in the online survey.

In order to secure a sample of sufficient size, anticipated response rates must be carefully considered prior to recruitment (Fritz and Morgan, 2010). At the time of survey data collection (November 2020 – March 2021), schools and teachers in England were under increased pressure due to online teaching requirements at a time of national (and

international) uncertainty stemming from the Coronavirus pandemic. For this reason, a poor response rate was anticipated and a financial incentive – the chance to enter a prize draw for online shopping vouchers – was offered. Using the Government’s school search tool, twenty-five percent of schools in each county were randomly selected and their headteachers were contacted via email. Headteachers were provided with information about the research study and were asked to pass this information onto their teaching staff. The email included a link to the online survey where prospective participants were provided with further information about the research and a consent form. Owing to low recruitment following the initial email, the percentage of schools contacted using the cluster sampling method was increased to fifty percent. The survey was also advertised via email to University of Birmingham alumni who trained to teach at the University, or who had completed an alternative degree but went on to pursue a career in primary education in England.

Non-probability sampling was used to select participants for the semi-structured interviews. While the representativeness of non-probability samples is usually difficult to determine (Fritz and Morgan, 2010), steps were taken to ensure that participants broadly represented the target population. Participants from strand one were asked to indicate if they would be happy to be contacted about the possibility of further participation in the research. From this pool of respondents, a quota sample was selected, and the quota sample helped to ensure that the teachers interviewed taught across the range of year groups included in the research study (EYFS-KS2).

Researchers often use saturation, the point at which unique perspectives are no longer conveyed within subsequent interviews, as a guide for determining the sufficiency of sample size for interviews. Hennink, Kaiser and Marcon (2017) distinguish between *code saturation* and *meaning saturation*. Code saturation is ‘the point when no additional issues are identified and the codebook begins to stabilize’, whereas meaning saturation can be defined as ‘the point when we fully understand issues, and when no further dimensions, nuances, or insights of issues can be found’ (p. 594). Despite the importance placed on saturation when planning and conducting qualitative research, there is a scarcity of research into the factors

affecting saturation, and there is no set guidance regarding the sample size required to reach saturation in a given study (Guest, Bunce and Johnson, 2006; Hennink, Kaiser and Marcon, 2017). The point at which saturation might occur is dependent on the research focus and the homogeneity on the sample (Hagaman and Wutich, 2017).

Cobern and Adams (2020) suggest that the point of saturation cannot be accurately determined prior to data collection; it is only after two or three additional interviews where no new information is gathered that researchers can be confident of saturation.

Furthermore, the number of interviews taken to reach *code saturation* can differ from that of *meaning saturation* – in Hennink, Kaiser and Marcon’s (2017) study, fewer interviews (nine) were taken to reach code saturation than meaning saturation. However, as a guide, it is suggested that saturation can be reached through in-depth interviews with between nine and twenty-four participants (Cobern and Adams, 2020; Guest, Bunce and Johnson, 2006; Hagaman and Wutich, 2017; Hennink, Kaiser and Marcon, 2017; Namey *et al.*, 2016). To illustrate, Guest, Bunce and Johnson (2006) found that twelve interviews were enough to reach saturation, with ninety-two percent of codes – developed from a total of thirty interviews – occurring after just twelve interviews. Namey and colleagues (2016, p. 430) found that the median number of in-depth interviews needed to reach eighty percent and ninety percent saturation was eight and sixteen, respectively (with ranges of five to eleven; and eleven to twenty-six, respectively).

The range of topics covered, and the number of different questions asked within the interviews meant that interviewees’ responses to some questions were broad and varied. For example, when asked to discuss the story types most and least useful for character education, interviewees’ explanations differed depending on the stories they chose. There were two main sources used to determine saturation of interview data. First, the reasons given for why stories are useful for teaching character education (question 1) and, second, interviewees’ responses to questions asking whether certain features of stories affected whether pupils are able to relate to the stories used (questions 4-8). In line with the guidance from Cobern and Adams (2020), code saturation became apparent between

interview ten and twelve. While *meaning* saturation was aimed for, response rates were low and it was not possible to recruit additional interviewees after the fifteenth interview.

Participant Profile

The total number of teachers who participated in the research study was 220. All 220 participants were surveyed within strand one of the study. 15 participants also took part in the teacher interviews in strand two. All interviewees had completed the teacher survey. In order to understand the contexts in which participants taught, key demographic data were collected in strand one of the research study. The data collected included participants' age, gender, teaching experience, the key stage in which participants taught and their school's name and location.

Age, Gender and Experience

The average age of the 220 participants from strand one was 39.18 years (SD 10.26), and ages ranged between 21 and 63 years. The median age was 39 years. 189 participants (85.9%) were female, and 31 participants (14.1%) were male. The participant profile is broadly in-keeping with the proportion of female to male teachers in the UK workforce: according to collated figures from 2021, 82.4% of classroom teachers in the UK were female (BESA, 2021). The average age of the 15 interviewees was 43.07 years (SD 8.07), and ages ranged between 29 and 56 years. The median age was 42 years. 13 interviewees (86.7%) were female, and 2 interviewees (13.3%) were male.

Participants varied in experience level: 22.7% of participants surveyed in strand one had between 0 and 5 years of teaching experience; 22.7% had between 5 and 10 years of teaching experience 31.4% had between 10 and 20 years of teaching experience; and, 23.2% had over 20 years of teaching experience. All interviewees in strand two were experienced teachers: 20.0% had between 5 and 10 years of teaching experience; 66.7% had between 10 and 20 years of teaching experience; and, 13.3% had over 20 years of teaching experience.

Key Stage Taught

There are three main key stages taught within primary schools in England: EYFS, KS1 and KS2. However, there are four year groups within KS2 (Years Three, Four, Five and Six) and

KS2 is often broken down into further sub-groups as a result. Years Three and Four are often referred to collectively as “Lower Key Stage Two” (LKS2). Years Five and Six are often referred to collectively as “Upper Key Stage Two” (UKS2). The majority of participants in the study taught pupils from within one key stage; however, some participants indicated that they taught across key stages.

To enable comparisons to be made between teachers of younger primary school children and teachers of older primary school children, participants were grouped during data analysis into “Lower School” teachers (teachers of children aged two to seven) and “Upper School” teachers (teachers of children aged eight to eleven). This grouping ensured that there were adequate group sizes for comparison. The “Lower School” is therefore used to refer to teachers who taught pupils in EYFS and/or KS1. The “Upper School” is used to refer to teachers who taught pupils in KS2. Of the 220 participants involved in strand one of the research study, 83 (37.7%) taught in the Lower School (in EYFS and/or KS1 classes), 101 (45.9%) taught in the Upper School (KS2 classes), and 36 (16.4%) taught in both the Lower School and the Upper School: “Mixed Ages”. Of the 15 interviewees involved in strand two, 8 (53.3%) taught within the Lower School, 6 (40.0%) taught within the Upper School and 1 (6.7%) taught Mixed Ages. A breakdown of the key stages taught by participants in each strand of the research study can be seen in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3. Participant Numbers in Each Strand of the Research.

This table describes the total number of participants and the age/key stage of pupils they taught.

Strand	N ^o of Participants According to Age Group/ Key Stage Taught						Total N ^o of Participants	
	Lower School (Pupils aged between 2-7)			Upper School (Pupils aged between 8-11)				Mixed Ages (Pupils aged between 2-11)
One	EYFS	KS1	EYFS & KS1	LKS2	UKS2	LKS2 & UKS2	EYFS-UKS2	220
	32	44	7	42	57	2	36	
	83			101			36	
Two	EYFS	KS1	EYFS & KS1	LKS2	UKS2	LKS2 & UKS2	EYFS-UKS2	15
	5	3	-	3	3	-	1	
	8			6			1	

Number of Schools

In the teacher survey, participants could choose whether or not to provide their school's name, but were required to provide their county. From the responses, it was determined that participants from at least 115 schools, from across 42 counties in England participated in strand one. As a point of reference, according to collated figures from 2021, there were 16,791 primary schools in England (BESA, 2021). Interviewees in strand two came from 14 different schools. 2 interviewees came from the same school; one teacher from this school taught in EYFS; the other taught in LKS2.

6. Data Analysis

Two types of data analysis were undertaken in this research study, as is common within mixed methods research (Tashakkori and Creswell, 2007). Quantitative data from strand one and qualitative data from strand two underwent parallel mixed analysis – a form of triangulation (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2009). The quantitative data collected using the online survey in strand one were statistically analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics 27; the qualitative data collected through the semi-structured interviews in strand two underwent content analysis using NVivo 12, a form of computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software. Details of how data were cleaned and analysed within each strand are provided below.

Strand One: Survey Data

Prior to being analysed in SPSS Statistics 27, participants' responses to the teacher survey were transformed and cleaned. There were four stages in the transformation and cleaning of raw data. First, raw data from the teacher survey were exported from Qualtrics into a Microsoft Excel document for review. Second, raw data underwent coding, whereby respondents' selections were translated into a numerical code for analysis. In questions where some respondents selected 'other' and opted to provide a written response, the data were saved in text form which could be reviewed alongside numerical data. Following the coding of data, 50% of participants' responses were spot-checked for accuracy by comparing coded data with raw data. Third, data were cleaned. Partially completed surveys were

reviewed and data from respondents who had successfully completed questions up to and including Question 12b were retained for analysis; missing data were coded as “-99”. Questions 1-11 collected data on participants and their schools. Questions 12a and 12b collected data on the perceived *usefulness* and *importance* of stories for character education and for teaching reading and writing skills. Completion of question 12b enabled the calculation of a score for how respondents *value* stories as a vehicle for teaching character education and was therefore used as the minimum point of completion for inclusion of partially-completed surveys. Fourth, coded and cleaned data were imported into SPSS for analysis. Data from 206 completed surveys and 14 partially completed surveys were included in the analysis. Due to question branching, the number of responses for each question (*N*) did not always correspond to the total number of completed surveys.

Descriptive and Inferential Statistics

Analysis of survey data involved both descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics were used to describe the participant profile and understand general trends in the data: for example, in understanding how all participants, and different sub-groups of participants, valued and used stories as a vehicle for teaching character education. Inferential statistics were used to determine whether significant relationships existed between variables. For example, whether ratings of ‘usefulness for character education’ significantly differed by story type, or whether ratings differed significantly depending on the age group taught by participants (Lower School teachers compared to Upper School teachers).

Comparison of Lower School and Upper School Teachers’ responses

Inferential statistics were predominantly used to test differences between two main sub-groups of participants. As was seen in Table 4.3, the majority of participants either taught younger pupils (in EYFS and KS1) or older pupils (in KS2). It was possible to explore whether responses differed depending on whether participants taught pupils in EYFS and KS1 (Lower School teachers) or pupils in KS2 (Upper School teachers). Comparison of teachers’ responses according to the age group taught excluded the relatively smaller number of teachers who taught pupils from across EYFS/KS1 and KS2 (Mixed Ages teachers).

While the majority of data from the teacher survey were cleaned, coded and then analysed, participants' ratings of the 'usefulness' and 'importance' of, and 'confidence' in, using stories in the classroom (see Section B of the survey) underwent an additional step in conversion of the data set prior to inferential statistics. An exploratory factor analysis was used to determine the factorability of these items.

Factor Analysis

In the teacher survey, participants were presented with six different reasons that teachers might use stories in the classroom. Three of the reasons were associated with *character education*. These were to: 'teach about "good" character', 'teach about morals/ moral lessons', and 'teach about "good" behaviour'. The other three reasons were associated with *teaching reading and writing skills*. These were to: 'develop reading fluency, recall and comprehension', 'teach about specific reading and/or writing skills', and 'teach about relevant curriculum knowledge'. For each reason, participants were asked to rate (i) how *useful* stories are for that purpose (ii) how *important* it is for teachers to use stories for that purpose and (iii) how *confident* they feel in using stories for that purpose. Therefore, participants provided rating scores for nine items associated with using stories for character education, and nine items associated with using stories to teach reading and writing skills. Ratings were each on a five-point Likert scale. For each item, a rating score of 1 indicated low perceived usefulness, importance, or confidence, whereas a rating score of 5 indicated high perceived usefulness, importance, or confidence.

The factorability of the nine items relating to character education was examined using an exploratory factor analysis ($n=219$). The value for the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) Measure of Sampling Adequacy was 0.828. This value was far above the minimum value of sampling adequacy of 0.50 outlined by Field (2018), and more than the more cautious minimum value of 0.60 recommended by Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2018), indicating that there was an adequate sample size for the factor analysis. Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant ($\chi^2(36) = 1601.02, p < .000$), indicating that correlations between variables differed significantly from 0. All primary factor loadings were 0.549 or above and met the recommended minimum criteria of 0.40 (Stevens, 2002), therefore all 9 items were retained.

Factor rotation was used to discriminate between factors. As can be seen in Table 4.4, oblique rotation (Oblimin with a delta of 0) revealed that a two-factor structure best fit the data. Items within each factor were found to have high values for internal reliability. Cronbach’s Alpha for the six items loading onto the first factor (*value*) was $\alpha=.92$; Cronbach’s Alpha for the three items loading onto the second factor (*confidence*) was $\alpha=.89$.

The first factor was labelled *value* as this factor comprised items in which participants rated the usefulness and importance of stories for character education (items 1-6), which relate to the *value* attributed to stories for this purpose. Participants’ responses to items 1-6 were subsequently combined into one rating score corresponding to how participants *value stories for teaching character education*. The second factor was labelled *confidence* as this factor comprised items in which participants rated their confidence in using stories for teaching character education (items 7-9). Responses to items 7-9 were subsequently combined into one rating score corresponding to *confidence in using stories for teaching character education*. The minimum and maximum possible rating score for *value* was 6 and 30, respectively. The minimum and maximum possible rating score for *confidence* was 3 and 15, respectively. Lower rating scores indicated lower perceived value of stories for teaching character education, or confidence in using stories for this purpose. Higher rating scores indicated higher perceived value of stories for teaching character education, or confidence in using stories for this purpose.

Table 4.4. Factor Loadings.

This table shows the factor loadings for items associated with character education based on principal axis factoring: rotation method of Oblimin with Kaiser normalization^a ($N=219$).

	Item	Factors	
		Value	Confidence
1	Usefulness of stories to teach about “good” character	.769	
2	Usefulness of stories to teach about “good” behaviour	.802	
3	Usefulness of stories to teach morals/moral messages	.706	

4	Importance of stories to teach about “good” character	.896	
5	Importance of stories to teach about “good” behaviour	.861	
6	Importance of stories to teach morals/moral messages	.864	
7	Confidence in using stories to teach about “good” character		.801
8	Confidence in using stories to teach about “good” behaviour		.957
9	Confidence in using stories to teach moral/moral messages		.810

a. Rotation converged in 3 iterations.

To enable direct comparisons, participants’ rating scores for the nine items associated with *using stories to teach reading and writing skills* were analysed in the same way as the items associated with *using stories for teaching character education*. Questions about the *usefulness* and *importance* of stories for teaching reading and writing skills were combined into one rating score corresponding to how participants *value* stories for this purpose. Questions about confidence in using stories for to teach reading and writing skills were combined into one rating score corresponding to *confidence* in using stories for this purpose. Cronbach’s Alpha values indicated high internal reliability for the six items comprising *value* ($\alpha=.81$) and three items comprising *confidence* ($\alpha=.88$). The minimum and maximum possible ratings for *value* were 6 and 30, respectively. The minimum and maximum possible ratings for *confidence* were 3 and 15, respectively.

Strand Two: Semi-Structured Interview Data

Each semi-structured interview was recorded using Zoom’s video technology software. Intelligent verbatim transcriptions – which provide a layer of filtering, editing out fillers such as “um” and “er” – were automatically created by Otter.ai and each interview transcript was saved as a Word file. Each interview was then watched back in full and automatic transcripts were checked for accuracy and completeness. Automatic transcripts were amended to ensure that the data provided an accurate account of interviewees’ responses.

Analysis of interview data predominantly followed an inductive approach. Thematic content analysis was used to establish emerging themes (Braun and Clarke, 2006). However, analysis

was also guided by themes emerging from strand one; transcripts from strand two of the research study were simultaneously reviewed with the aim of achieving triangulation, corroboration and expansion of findings from the survey data (Biesta, 2017; Drever, 2006). Although the reliability of interview data is threatened when researchers attempt to summarise common themes (Drever, 2006; Mears, 2017), care was taken to avoid distorting or omitting information and provide a true and balanced account of what interviewees had said. Furthermore, the way in which data is interpreted by the researcher affects the validity of research findings. Researcher biases are inherent to interview methods (Persaud, 2010) and, regardless of whether interviews are analysed with careful attention and rigor, 'subjective constructions' on the part of the researcher are likely to affect the validity of data (Gillham, 2005, pp. 6-7; Mrug, 2010).

The different interview questions and topics were used to structure the analysis of the interview data. For each interview question, the relevant portions of each transcript were reviewed and coded through a process of open, axial and selective coding (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2009). NVivo 12 software was used to support the analysis of interview transcripts, allowing for units of data to be coded and organised in multiple ways. Transcriptions first underwent open coding and grouping. Text was unitised and labelled according to the question theme(s) and descriptor(s) to which it related. Related category labels were then connected and grouped using axial coding (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018). Segments of data, fractured by open coding, were essentially pieced back together in new ways to form sub-categories of common meaning (Corbin and Strauss, 1990). Selective codes for each interview question were subsequently formed. Selective codes represented the main analytic ideas formed through the research (Corbin and Strauss, 1990).

7. Ethical Considerations

All research was conducted in line with the British Educational Research Association's (BERA) *Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research* (2018). An application for ethical review for the research study was reviewed and approved by the University of Birmingham's Humanities and Social Sciences Ethical Review Committee in October 2020 (ERN_20-1204).

Prior to data collection, voluntary informed consent was sought from participants. Participants were asked to read an information sheet and complete a consent form as part of the online survey (see Appendix C). The information sheet outlined the purpose of the study, what would be required of participants and how their data would be used. The consent form reminded participants of their right to decline and withdraw, and asked participants to sign in acknowledgement. Participants were reassured that they would not be identifiable by any content from the survey or interviews included in material for publication. The consent form also explained that once data had been included in any analysis or material for publication, withdrawal would not be possible. For this reason the deadline for withdrawal was set at one month after participants' completion of the survey. At the end of the survey, participants were asked if they would be happy to be contacted about participation in an interview. Participants who agreed were asked to provide an email address and were subsequently contacted. Participants were reminded of their right to withdraw at the start and end of the interviews.

Confidentiality of information was a priority in this study. In working with children, teachers have knowledge that could be used to identify pupils. While questions did not ask for information relating to individuals' identities, some names were mentioned by participants during the interviews. Where names were mentioned, these were replaced with pseudonyms in the transcripts and subsequent analysis. Within the survey, participants were asked to provide information about their school, including the school name and age group taught. This information was used to help to group and analyse responses. School names were not included in the findings. All electronic data relating to the surveys and interviews were anonymised and stored securely in the University of Birmingham's password-protected electronic systems. Participants were anonymised in all printed material and printed material was kept securely within University of Birmingham premises.

A financial incentive was used to encourage participation in strand one of the research in anticipation of a low response rate (see 'The Sample Population and Participant Profile'). Although payment for participation in educational research is generally discouraged, BERA (2018) advise that incentives can be used provided that incentives are 'commensurate with

good sense, such that the level of incentive does not impinge on the free decision to participate' (p. 19). The incentive was the chance to enter a prize draw for one of three £25 online shopping vouchers. The incentive was introduced in consultation with the Chair of the University of Birmingham's Humanities and Social Sciences Ethical Review Committee, who approved the change under the existing ethics application (ERN_20-1204) in November 2020.

8. Summary

In this chapter, the methodology of the research study which aimed to build on the knowledge and insight gained through Part One of this thesis was described. The research study adopted a pragmatic approach and utilised mixed methods to understand how primary school teachers in England value and use stories as a vehicle for teaching character education. Specifically, the research aimed to understand the perceptions and approaches of practicing primary school teachers and to uncover how these align with perceptions and approaches evidenced in the existing literature. Also set out in this chapter were the methodological considerations informing the research study, the research design, the methods of data collection, a description of the participant profile, the methods of data analysis and the ethical considerations guiding the research. The results of the data analysis are presented in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE: FINDINGS

1. Introduction

In this chapter, the main findings of the research study are described. The main findings are presented under two main headings, which align with RQ1 and RQ2, respectively. RQ1 asked ‘How and to what extent do primary school teachers in England *value* stories as a vehicle for teaching character education?’. Findings included under the first main heading relate to the analysis of teachers’ perceptions of stories as a vehicle for teaching character education – their usefulness and factors that may affect this. RQ2 asked ‘How and to what extent do primary school teachers in England *use* stories as a vehicle for teaching character education?’. Findings presented under the second main heading relate to the analysis of how teachers *use* stories as a vehicle for teaching character education – their pedagogical approaches. How the key findings compare to perceptions and approaches identified in the historical and contemporary literature are discussed within the interpretation provided in the subsequent chapter.

Under each of the main headings, data from strand one (the teacher survey) and strand two (the teacher interviews) of the research study are presented together. This is so that, where relevant, insights gained from the teacher interviews are used to illuminate trends identified through the survey. Survey data are predominantly presented in table form, but where appropriate, graphical representation is also used to illustrate findings. In addition, selected quotations from the interviews are offered to support or expand on the survey data. The chapter closes with a summary of the main findings that are interpreted and discussed in Chapter Six.

2. Primary School Teachers’ Perceptions of Stories as a Vehicle for Teaching Character Education

In this section, the main findings corresponding to RQ1 are presented. RQ1 asked ‘How and to what extent do primary school teachers in England *value* stories as a vehicle for teaching

character education?'. The findings centre on teachers' perceptions of stories and their value (usefulness and importance) for teaching character education. Within the teacher survey, participants were asked questions regarding the value attributed to stories as a vehicle for character education, their views on the usefulness of different story types, and about factors affecting the perceived usefulness of stories for this purpose. During the interviews, interviewees were asked about similar topics, but were prompted to reflect on and explain their answers. The findings are displayed under subheadings which correspond to the question topics. Where possible, data from the teacher survey are presented first. Data from the teacher interviews are then used to illustrate, support or expand on the data from the survey.

The Value of Stories for Teaching Character Education

How teachers value stories as a vehicle for teaching character education was a central focus of the research study. As can be seen in Table 5.1, the mean rating score for how participants ($N=220$) value stories as a vehicle for teaching three areas related to character education was 27.1 ($SD=3.4$) out of a maximum possible score of 30. To determine whether the observed rating scores differed from hypothesised responses, which assume an equal distribution of rating scores, a One-Sample Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test was used. The hypothesised median was 18, the mid-point between the minimum possible score (6) and the maximum possible score (30). The median score for *value* (29.0) was significantly higher than the hypothesised median score for *value* (18.0; $T=24043.50$, $p<.000$, $r=.87$). This finding indicates that stories are highly valued by participants for teaching character education.

Table 5.1. Rating Scores for How Participants Value^a Stories for Teaching Character Education and for Teaching Reading and Writing Skills.

This table displays descriptive statistics for rating score data from all respondents, respondents who taught exclusively in the Lower School, and respondents who taught exclusively in the Upper School.

	Participants	<i>n</i>	Mean	SD	Median	Min	Max
The Value of Stories for Teaching Character Education	All	220	27.12	3.44	29.0	12.0	30.0
	Lower School	83	27.18	3.33	29.0	19.0	30.0
	Upper School	101	26.60	3.74	28.0	12.0	30.0

The Value of Stories for Teaching Reading and Writing Skills	All	220	27.71	2.64	29.0	18.0	30.0
	Lower School	83	27.95	2.53	29.0	21.0	30.0
	Upper School	99	27.40	2.58	28.0	20.0	30.0

a. For each participant, a rating score for *value* was calculated. Value scores were the sum of six survey items, each of which were rated on a Likert scale of 1-5. The minimum and maximum possible scores were 6 and 30, respectively.

An Independent-Samples Mann-Whitney U Test was used to examine whether there was a difference in how participants value stories as a vehicle for teaching character education according to the age of the pupils being taught. Survey responses of participants who taught exclusively within the Lower School ($n=83$) were compared to responses of participants who taught exclusively within the Upper School ($n=101$). There was no significant difference in value scores between Lower School teachers ($Mdn=29.0$) and Upper School teachers ($Mdn=28.0$; $U=3914.00$, $z=-.82$, $p=.410$, $r=-.06$).

The findings from the analysis of the teacher interview data supported the findings from the analysis of the survey data: primary school teachers highly value stories as a vehicle for teaching character education. As can be seen within the quotations below, stories were described by teachers in all key stages as the primary vehicle through which they teach character education.

In my experience, I think that they're [stories] probably the most useful tool [for teaching about character]. I think if you want to explain the difference between someone being honest and dishonest a story is the best vehicle to do that. ... I think, to deliver what you want, the messages that you want to kind of get across to the children, I can't think of another way that's more valuable.

P219, LKS2 teacher

[Stories are] our primary way of explaining and exploring people's character, you know, whatever story it is you can always find in some kind of moral character.

P209, EYFS teacher

Well I think they're invaluable really.

P133, Mixed Ages teacher

The quotations also show how stories are considered to be highly useful for teaching

character education; many interviewees described stories as the *most useful* resource that they have for teaching for this purpose.

The Reasons that Stories are Used and Valued for Teaching Character Education

In the teacher survey, participants who said that they intentionally choose and use stories to teach character education ($N=182$ – see Table 5.9) were asked about the reasons why they use stories. Participants were provided with a list of seven possible reasons. As can be seen in Table 5.2, there were five reasons selected by over 80% of respondents. The three most frequently selected reasons – each selected by at least 90% of respondents – were a) stories are a good gateway to discussion, b) stories provide pupils with a safe space to learn, and c) stories provide insight into characters’ thoughts and feelings. Interestingly, only 35.7% selected ‘books and resources containing stories are abundant in schools’, suggesting that the majority of teachers were not motivated to use stories because of their abundance/availability as a resource in schools.

Table 5.2. Reasons for Using Stories as a Vehicle for Character Education.

This table shows the reasons selected by all respondents ($N=182$), respondents who taught exclusively in the Lower School ($n=76$), and respondents who taught exclusively in the Upper School ($n=78$). Chi-Square tests indicate whether there was a significant association between the age group taught (Lower School or Upper School) and whether or not the reason was selected. Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Reason Selected	All Respondents (N=182)		Respondents from Lower School (n=76) or Upper School (n=78)			Chi-Square Test		
	Freq	%	Lower or Upper	Freq	%	χ^2	V	p
Stories are a good gateway to discussion	172	94.5	Lower	70	92.1	1.147	.09	.284
			Upper	75	96.2			
Stories provide pupils with a safe space to learn	169	92.9	Lower	70	92.1	.002	<.01	.963
			Upper	72	92.3			
Stories provide insight into characters’ thoughts and feelings	166	91.2	Lower	64	84.2	6.246	.20	.012*
			Upper	75	96.2			
Stories are entertaining and enjoyable	153	84.1	Lower	64	84.2	.022	.01	.883
			Upper	65	83.3			
Stories often provide good examples	152	83.5	Lower	62	81.6	.253	.04	.615
			Upper	66	84.6			
Story illustrations help to keep children engaged	114	62.6	Lower	54	71.1	4.854	.18	.028*
			Upper	42	53.8			

Books and resources containing stories are abundant in schools	65	35.7	Lower	29	38.2	1.722	.11	.189
			Upper	22	28.2			

Chi-Square tests were used to compare responses of Lower School teachers and Upper School teachers. As can be seen in Table 5.2, there were significant associations between the age group taught (Lower School or Upper School) and participants' responses. A significantly lower proportion (84.2%) of Lower School teachers than Upper School teachers (96.2%) use stories because 'stories provide insight into characters' thoughts and feelings' ($\chi^2(1) = 6.246, p=.012$); and, a significantly higher proportion of Lower School teachers (71.1%) than Upper School teachers (53.8%) use stories because 'story illustrations help to keep children engaged' ($\chi^2(1) = 4.854, p=.028$).

Interviewees described five main reasons underpinning how and why stories are highly valued for teaching character education within a primary school context, and there was overlap between the reasons given during interview and the reasons selected in the survey. One, stories contain themes that are relevant to pupils' lives and can be matched to pupils' emerging social and emotional needs. Two, stories enable pupils to see and understand abstract concepts. Three, stories provide pupils with new experiences. Four, stories provide a safe space in which pupils can reflect on their own lives. Five, stories engage pupils and hold their attention. Further details are provided for each reason, below.

Story themes are relevant to pupils' lives and match pupils' emerging social and emotional needs.

Interviewees commonly explained that they utilise stories for teaching character education because story themes often match pupils' emerging social and emotional needs. Some teachers explained that the stories they choose focus on particular values or character strengths that they believe their pupils would benefit from developing, for example friendship, kindness and honesty. Although many teachers explained that stories were often built into the curriculum in order to teach about age-related topics and themes, many teachers also described the reactive nature of story-based character education, whereby stories are selected and used in response to specific social issues, or other needs that

become apparent while in school, as illustrated by the following two teachers in their interviews:

We pick stories that suit the needs of the children and the message that we want to deliver to those children and the discussions that we want to have with them.

P100, EYFS teacher

Being able to read a story that will develop empathy first of all for our children is key and it's being able to read through a story and highlight the positive negative characteristics of the characters...we can then use that to look at addressing issues that might link to moral and sort of social themes.

P201, UKS2 teacher

Stories enable pupils to see and understand abstract concepts

Interviewees explained that using stories to teach character education was preferable to simply “telling” pupils about good character and behaviour, because through stories teachers are able to “show” pupils instead. Some interviewees explained that pupils can find it hard to understand abstract concepts like morals, feelings or emotions.

With the [EYFS] children actually this far down the school, where they haven't quite developed the abstract thinking, stories is almost the key to their development and their understanding of character and morals and what's right and wrong.

P100, EYFS teacher

I think a lot of children can't see it if you're trying to explain a feeling or emotion and so on. They can't understand it, so having that sort of prompt and that seeing it from someone else's point of view can help them understand that information better.

P12, UKS2 teacher

It's very useful to have a tool for sharing so rather than just talking about positive attributes that you value or generally value about being kind or being thoughtful to actually have a story that demonstrates this...I think that's more valuable than me sitting there, giving a lecture on how we should be treating our friends, so it's that modelling, it's that showing.

P88, EYFS teacher

Although teachers from all key stages explained that stories help pupils to “see” abstract concepts and to understand these within a relatable context, this point was most frequently raised by teachers of the youngest pupils in the Lower School: EYFS teachers. As the quotation from P100 above attests, stories are considered to be particularly useful in helping younger pupils to understand character.

Stories provide pupils with new experiences

Interviewees also explained that stories are useful for teaching character education because stories can provide pupils with new experiences. It was suggested that stories can introduce new contexts, settings and scenarios to pupils and that they are able to experience these vicariously, through characters' eyes.

If they've never experienced somebody who's a bully, they can. In a book, they can, through a story. They can at least get some empathy with the characters to understand what this is, probably what it would feel like if somebody was doing that to me.

P115, LKS2 teacher

This quotation from P115's interview illustrates the types of novel experience that interviewees believe stories can give their pupils access to.

Stories provide a safe space in which pupils can reflect on their own lives

Interviewees who taught in all key stages described how pupils are able to relate to characters, behaviours or scenarios that are depicted in stories. Interviewees also explained that stories are advantageous because pupils can unpick and discuss characters' morals and behaviours before reflecting on their own. Although both Lower School and Upper School teachers selected this reason in the teacher survey, in the interviews it was only Upper School teachers who described how stories provide pupils with a "safe" space or context in which to reflect on their own lives, behaviours and experiences. The quotations below, taken from interviews with two Upper School teachers, illustrate how stories are perceived to be beneficial in providing "safe" contexts for Upper School pupils to reflect:

I think stories give you the ability to look at different characteristics and you know characters and name and shame kind of the good and the bad without making it personal to the children... It allows children to invest in a safe way, doesn't it?

P115, LKS2 teacher

I think it helps to think differently, and it also means that they're not talking about themselves. So particularly if it's a behaviour that they've done, and they don't want to admit that they've done and they see another character using it, then they distance themselves, but they can see how that behaviour change it allows people to express things without feeling that they're talking about themselves.

P152, UKS2 teacher

Stories engage pupils and hold their attention

Interviewees explained that one of the main reasons that stories are so useful for teaching character education is because stories provide an effective “hook” to engage readers. Teachers within all key stages shared this perception, though it was emphasised by some Lower School teachers that engaging pupils’ interests was especially important when teaching younger pupils.

...Lessons would be utilizing stories of some sort to kind of find a way to capture the children's interests...I think that, as I say, you know for young children it's a natural hook, and children love stories, so it engages them.

P3, KS1 teacher

I think, particularly in Early Years they [stories] are crucial, and because it's the thing that gets them. We use it for everything in Early Years so we use it for delivering mathematics, for delivering literacy, we use stories for delivering personal social emotional education and generally stories are just into woven throughout the day because it gives children that hook, to get them into learning.

P100, EYFS teacher

The tendency for interviewees from the Lower School to discuss their pupils’ engagement with stories, illustrated by the two quotations above, helps to support the findings of the survey data which suggested that children’s engagement was a reason more commonly associated with Lower School teachers (see Table 5.2).

Comparing How Stories Are Valued for Teaching Character Education and for Teaching Reading and Writing Skills

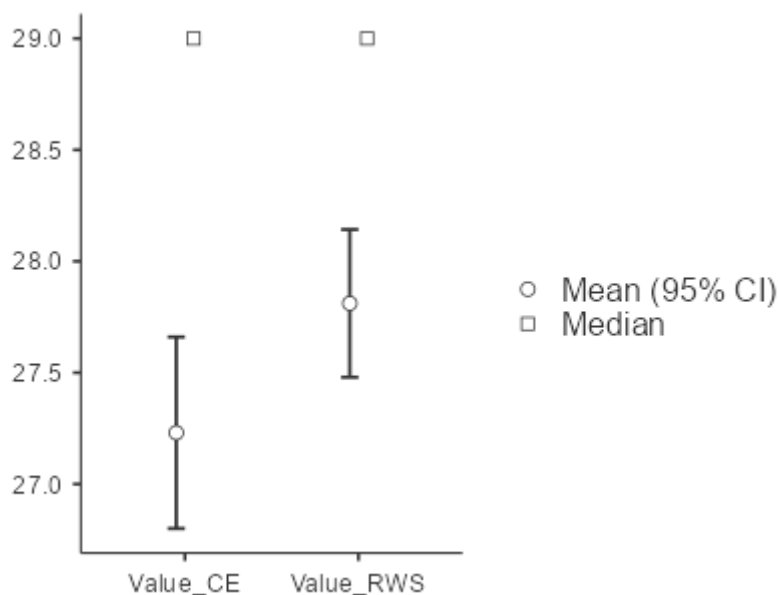
In the teacher survey, participants were also asked questions about how they value stories to teach reading and writing skills, enabling comparisons to be made between how stories are valued for this purpose, and for teaching character education. As can be seen in Table 5.1, the mean rating score for how participants ($N=220$) value stories as a vehicle to teach reading and writing skills was high ($M=27.7$; $Mdn=29$; $SD=2.64$). An Independent-Samples Mann-Whitney U Test revealed that there was no significant difference in how Lower School

teachers ($Mdn=29.0$) and Upper School teachers ($Mdn=28$) value stories for teaching reading and writing skills, $U=3670$, $z=-1.52$, $p=.127$, $r=-.11$.

To test whether there was a difference in how participants value stories as a vehicle for teaching character education, and how they value stories as a vehicle for teaching reading and writing skills, a Related-Samples Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test was used. Rating scores for how participants ($N=217$) value stories as a vehicle for teaching reading and writing skills ($Mdn=29$) were significantly higher than rating scores for how participants value stories as a vehicle for character education ($Mdn=29$; $T=4319.50$, $p<.000$, $r=.24$). Although median rating scores were the same, the mean scores ($M=27.2$ for character education; $M=27.8$ for reading and writing skills) and the general distribution of the data differed, as is illustrated in Figure 5.1.

Figure 5.1. The Value of Stories for Teaching Character Education (CE) and for Teaching Reading and Writing Skills (RWS).

This figure shows the data distribution for how respondents ($N=217$) value stories for character education (CE) and for teaching reading and writing skills (RWS).



Rating scores for how Lower School teachers ($n=84$) value stories as a vehicle for teaching reading and writing skills ($Mdn=29$) were significantly higher than for how they value stories

as a vehicle for teaching character education ($Mdn=29$; $T=624.0$, $p=.004$, $r=.32$). Although median rating scores were the same, the mean scores ($M=27.9$ for reading and writing skills; $M=27.1$ for character education) and the general distribution of the data differed. Similarly, rating scores for how Upper School teachers ($n=99$) value stories as a vehicle for teaching reading and writing skills ($Mdn=28$) were significantly higher than for how they value stories as a vehicle for teaching character education ($Mdn=28$; $T=1207.00$, $p=.014$, $r=.25$). Although median rating scores were the same, the mean scores ($M=27.4$ for reading and writing skills; $M=26.8$ for character education) and the general distribution of the data differed.

The Usefulness of Different Types of Story for Teaching Character Education

Within the teacher survey, participants used a five-point Likert scale to rate how useful ten different types of story are for teaching character education. Rating score data for all respondents ($N=211$) can be seen in Table 5.3. A rating score of 1 indicated low perceived usefulness, whereas a rating score of 5 indicated high perceived usefulness.

Table 5.3. Usefulness of Different Story Types for Teaching Character Education – All Respondents. This table displays descriptive statistics for data from all respondents ($N=211$).

Story Type	All Respondents' Rating Scores ($N=211$)					
	Mean	SD	Median	Min.	Max.	Mode
Picture Books	4.45	.670	5.0	2.0	5.0	5.0
Fables	4.22	.822	4.0	1.0	5.0	5.0
Stories from History	4.16	.782	4.0	1.0	5.0	4.0
Religious Stories	4.09	.828	4.0	1.0	5.0	4.0
Fairy Tales	3.93	.884	4.0	2.0	5.0	4.0
Classic Stories	3.92	.798	4.0	2.0	5.0	4.0
Popular Fiction	3.91	.879	4.0	2.0	5.0	4.0
Biographical Accounts	3.86	.944	4.0	1.0	5.0	4.0
Myths and Legends	3.82	.890	4.0	1.0	5.0	4.0
Folklore	3.69	.929	4.0	1.0	5.0	4.0

A Kolmogorov-Smirnov test indicated that the distribution of data for each story type was significantly different from a normal distribution ($p < .001$). The distribution of data for each story type can be seen in Appendix F. One-Sample Chi-Square Tests indicated that all observed responses significantly differed from hypothesised responses ($p < .000$), which assume that participants will respond in equal frequencies to each of the five Likert scale options. All mean rating scores were 3.69 or above, indicating that all story types are perceived to be at least 'moderately' to 'very' useful for teaching character education. Picture books, fables, stories from history, and religious stories all had mean ratings above 4, indicating that these story types are perceived to be between 'very' and 'extremely' useful for character education. Picture books were the only story type with a median score of 5, and a rating score of 5 was the most frequent rating for both picture books and fables.

A Related-Samples Friedman's Two-Way Analysis of Variance was used to analyse whether there were differences in how participants ($N=211$) rated the usefulness of different story types for teaching character education. There was a main effect of story type on perceived usefulness: $\chi^2(9) = 219.84$, $p < .001$, which indicated that there were significant differences between how respondents rated different story types. Pairwise comparisons (Wilcoxon-Signed Rank Tests) were then used to identify where significant differences – adjusted using a Bonferroni correction – occurred. Of particular interest were three story types that were rated significantly higher than more than half of the other story types. These were picture books, fables, and stories from history. A full breakdown of pairwise comparisons ($N=211$) can be seen in Appendix G.

Picture Books

The usefulness of picture books ($Mdn=5$) was rated significantly higher than seven of the nine other story types: religious stories ($Mdn=4$; $T=1.15$, $p=.004$, $r=.27$); fairy tales ($Mdn=4$; $T=1.77$, $p<.000$, $r=.41$); classic stories ($Mdn=4$; $T=1.88$, $p<.000$, $r=.44$); popular fiction ($Mdn=4$; $T=1.95$, $p<.000$, $r=.45$); biographical accounts ($Mdn=4$; $T=2.01$, $p<.000$, $r=.47$); myths and legends ($Mdn=4$; $T=2.19$, $p=.00$, $r=.51$); and folklore ($Mdn=4$; $T=2.63$, $p<.000$, $r=.61$).

Fables

The usefulness of fables ($Mdn=4$) was rated significantly higher than six of the nine other story types: fairy tales ($Mdn=4$; $T=1.04$, $p=.020$, $r=.24$); classic stories ($Mdn=4$; $T=1.88$, $p=.004$, $r=.27$); popular fiction ($Mdn=4$; $T=1.21$, $p=.002$, $r=.28$); biographical accounts ($Mdn=4$; $T=1.28$, $p=.001$, $r=.30$); myths and legends ($Mdn=4$; $T=1.46$, $p<.000$, $r=.34$); and folklore ($Mdn=4$; $T=1.89$, $p<.000$, $r=.44$).

Stories from History

The usefulness of stories from history ($Mdn=4$) was rated significantly higher than five of the nine other story types: classic stories ($Mdn=4$; $T=.97$, $p=.044$, $r=.23$); popular fiction ($Mdn=4$; $T=1.04$, $p=.019$, $r=.24$); biographical accounts ($Mdn=4$; $T=1.11$, $p=.008$, $r=.26$); myths and legends ($Mdn=4$; $T=1.28$, $p=.001$, $r=.30$); and folklore ($Mdn=4$; $T=1.72$, $p<.000$, $r=.40$).

Independent-Samples Mann-Whitney U Tests were then used to compare how Lower School and Upper School teachers rated the usefulness of each story type for teaching character education. As can be seen in Table 5.4, Lower School teachers rated picture books ($Mdn=5$; $U=2954.50$, $z=-3.07$, $p=.002$, $r=-.23$); fairy tales ($Mdn=4$; $U=2625.00$, $z=-4.11$, $p<.001$, $r=-.31$); classic stories ($Mdn=4$; $U=3191.50$, $z=-2.40$, $p=.016$, $r=.18$); and folklore ($Mdn=4$; $U=3138.00$, $z=-2.51$, $p=.012$, $r=-.19$); significantly higher than Upper School teachers ($Mdn=4$ for picture books; $Mdn=4$ for fairy tales; $Mdn=4$ for classic stories; $Mdn=3$ for folklore).

Table 5.4. Usefulness of Different Story Types for Teaching Character Education – Lower School and Upper School Respondents.

This table displays descriptive statistics for data from respondents who taught exclusively in the Lower School ($n=80$), and respondents who taught exclusively in the Upper School ($n=99$). Mann-Whitney U tests indicate whether there were significant differences in how Lower School and Upper School teachers rated the usefulness of each story type. Note. $*p < .05$, $**p < .01$, $***p < .001$.

Story Type	Respondents		Rating Score					Mann-Whitney U	
	Lower or Upper	n	Mean	SD	Median	Min.	Max.	Test Stat.	P
Picture Books	Lower	80	4.62	.513	5.0	3	5	2954.50	.002**
	Upper	97	4.32	.670	4.0	3	5		
Fables	Lower	79	4.29	.719	4.0	2	5	3468.00	.163
	Upper	99	4.09	.870	4.0	2	5		
Stories from History	Lower	79	4.14	.873	4.0	2	5	3845.50	.834
	Upper	99	4.19	.650	4.0	3	5		
Religious Stories	Lower	79	4.13	.740	4.0	3	5	3653.00	.490
	Upper	98	4.02	.825	4.0	2	5		
Fairy Tales	Lower	80	4.20	.753	4.0	2	5	2625.00	<.001* **
	Upper	99	3.65	.918	4.0	2	5		
Classic Stories	Lower	80	4.06	.817	4.0	2	5	3191.50	.016*
	Upper	99	3.80	.742	4.0	2	5		
Popular Fiction	Lower	80	3.91	.874	4.0	2	5	3910.50	.879
	Upper	99	3.90	.839	4.0	2	5		
Biographical Accounts	Lower	79	3.65	.988	4.0	2	5	4480.50	.080
	Upper	99	3.91	.870	4.0	2	5		
Myths and Legends	Lower	78	3.79	.903	4.0	2	5	3992.00	.680
	Upper	99	3.87	.804	4.0	2	5		
Folklore	Lower	80	3.85	.901	4.0	2	5	3138.00	.012*
	Upper	99	3.51	.908	3.0	1	5		

During the teacher interviews, participants were asked which of the ten story types they considered to be *most useful* and *least useful* for teaching character education. Interviewees were also asked to explain their selections. While the majority of interviewees were able to describe which story types they believed were *most* and *least* useful for teaching character education, it is important to note that two Upper School teachers expressed difficulty in selecting specific story types as *most useful*, explaining that they believed *all* story types could be used to teach character education.

Really hard to say which one – I would use I use them all. And I have, I have used them more depending on the context of what you're trying to teach and what group of children you've got because some books will work better with other children.

P115, LKS2 teacher

Despite the difficulty that two of the interviewees faced, the majority of interviewees expressed their preferences with relative ease. When asked about the most useful story types to use for teaching character education, teachers from all key stages commonly selected picture books and fables, corroborating the survey findings in which the usefulness of picture books and fables were rated highest. In addition, Lower School teachers selected fairy tales, and some Upper School teachers selected biographical accounts. However, it must be noted that there were some contrasting perceptions on the usefulness of biographical accounts: other interviewees selected this story type as *least useful*. Religious stories were also selected by some interviewees as *least useful* for teaching character education. Interestingly, although some Lower School teachers were of the opinion that popular fiction would be more useful for teaching pupils in the Upper School, only one of the Upper School teachers interviewed explicitly mentioned popular fiction when asked about the *most useful* story types for teaching character education. Common themes and justifications for interviewees' selections are outlined below.

Picture books

Picture books were the most frequently selected story type when interviewees were asked which they thought were *most useful* for teaching character education. Picture books were commonly selected by both Lower School and Upper School teachers, with eleven of the fifteen interviewees referring to this story type. The quotations included below help to illustrate the ways in which picture books are perceived by teachers of all primary school Key Stages to be useful:

Just as soon as you have open any picture book for Key Stage One children, they're just instantly enthralled and engaged and wanting to hear what's going on, so to kind of capture their attention, which is obviously slightly more difficult for the younger children, it's always got to be a picture book...kids in Year Six still love a picture book ...a lot of our books that we

use up in the older year groups actually are our picture books ...picture books are really useful for the older children.

P133, Mixed Ages teacher

...they're simple in terms of the understanding from the children, so the children will be able to access them very easily without needing to delve too much into their own mind and imagine a scenario ...they can see it right in front of them. The children engage a lot more with pictures. They would have a deeper understanding of the message you're trying to get across because they can see it rather than just trying to think of it in their head.

P100, EYFS teacher

I love using picture books for character [education], but again I think it's that it's the visual – in terms of them being able to see that character and the simplicity with picture books ... it is normally the simplicity of the image which allows them to follow the character, at all ages.

P152, UKS2 teacher

When examining justifications for why picture books were perceived as most useful for teaching character education, two main themes were apparent. First, that picture books are simple for pupils to understand and easy to access. Second, that pupils – especially younger pupils – engage more with picture books, and this was perceived to enable teachers to sustain pupils' attention and teach them more effectively.

Fables

Fables were the second most frequently selected story type when interviewees were asked which they thought were *most useful* for teaching character education. Fables were commonly selected by both Lower and Upper School teachers, with eight of the fifteen interviewees referring to this story type. The most cited reason for the usefulness of fables was the simplicity of the story:

Fables because that you know they do have a moral in them, which is near normally quite straightforward in the children. You know, especially when you read some of them so they kind of have that sort of, you know, light bulb moment.

P133, Mixed Ages teacher

Teachers from all key stages explained that fables are, by nature, straightforward with a clear moral, and this was perceived to make morals easier to teach. It was also indicated that the resolution, or ending, of fables can trigger a cognitive response in readers.

Fairy tales

Of the fifteen interviewees, six selected fairy tales when asked which story types they thought were *most useful* for teaching character education. All six interviewees taught in the Lower School. None of the Upper School teachers mentioned fairy tales as most useful for teaching character education; however, two Upper School teachers mentioned fairy tales when asked about story types that are *least useful* for teaching character education, explaining that they did not consider fairy tales to be useful or suitable for character education. In addition to pupils' enjoyment of reading fairy tales, the simplicity of the stories and examples they provide were common reasons for their use in the Lower School, as illustrated by the quotations taken from interviews with two Lower School teachers:

I would say fairy tales, because the younger children understand them and you've always got the characters where someone might make the right choices and the other person doesn't and it's that kind of moral and they get understand that. They understand that they shouldn't have done that, and you know, and that kind of example.

P43, EYFS teacher

What I like about fairy tales is that...[you can] say that this is, this is an example of a good character, this is an example of a not so good character. But I mean children really love fairy tales, so you can get them hooked.

P129, EYFS teacher

Biographical Accounts

Of the fifteen interviewees, three selected biographical accounts when asked which story types they thought were *most useful* for teaching character education. All three interviewees taught in the Upper School. None of the Lower School teachers mentioned biographical accounts. Two of the three interviewees who selected biographical accounts explained that they tended to use real-life events to teach character education, and two explained that biographical accounts were useful because of their powerful effect on pupils:

If you want to be a little bit more hard hitting you know, biographies and autobiographies with older children ... you can get a lot of different characteristics.

P115, LKS2 teacher

So from my point of view, I really like biographies and autobiographies, and I can rationalize that if you look at someone like Rosa Parks. Because that is something that is historically documented and is real and we can talk about the examples, and there are re-enactments

available to look at...it's obviously it's a long time ago, but because it's in a context that children can understand and identify with it can be really powerful.
P219, LKS2 teacher

In contrast, five interviewees discussed biographical accounts when asked about the *least useful* story types for teaching character education. Three of the five taught in the Lower School, one taught in the Upper School and one taught Mixed Ages. When explaining their reasons for selecting biographical accounts as least useful, interviewees commonly described the difficulty that pupils face in understanding and relating to the life of another person, as illustrated by the two interview quotations provided below:

I would say for my class would be biographies or autobiographies. And purely because it's bit more abstract it's that I think that, reading it from somebody else's point of view about their life, rather than necessarily fiction, so they might not be able to relate to it as much.
P40, KS1 teacher

I suppose biographies. Our children might see them as. They might be able to see the characters with the characteristics within those people, but they might not just use it as a sort of, as a separate entity as and, yes, but that's them and "I don't know how that relates to me".
P201, UKS2 teacher

Religious Stories

Of the fifteen interviewees, five discussed religious stories when asked about the least useful story types for teaching character education. Two of the five taught in the Lower School, two taught in the Upper School and one taught Mixed Ages. Conversely, two other interviewees discussed religious stories when asked about the *most useful* types of stories for teaching character education. The prominence with which religious stories were discussed as *least useful* for teaching character education in the interviews was surprising given that the usefulness of religious stories was rated with a high score ($M=4.09$) in the teacher survey (see Table 5.3 and 5.4).

When explaining why they viewed religious stories as least useful, the five interviewees commonly described reasons relating to pupils' attention and engagement.

I think in today's day and age they're a little bit out of date... a lot of our children don't believe in God, don't have any religion is just not part of their everyday life, so as soon as you sort of mention it ... they don't really take much notice of it.

P133, Mixed Ages teacher

I personally wouldn't use a religious story because I'm not religious in any sense, and I think that you can make an equally good – we can portray an equally good – character or moral without having to go into anything that's linked to religion.

P129, EYFS teacher

When it's a religious story, they can hear the moral but they're very much “that's the story” and “that's what we're being taught”, whereas others tend to lead to more... they can have more of an open discussion about it and draw on other things...I don't know about other schools, but because we listen to the same sort of [religious] stories, year on year and assemblies and stuff they [already] know the answer.

P12, UKS2 teacher

The quotations above, which are taken from three of the interviews, illustrate how some primary school teachers believe that their pupils “switch off” when introduced to religious stories. Three main reasons were apparent: one, because pupils have heard the stories before, two, pupils find it difficult to relate to religious stories, or, three, pupils have limited understanding of the religious story contexts. The range of other available story choices, which portray the same morals but do not have links to religion, was also described as a reason why some teachers avoided using religious stories for teaching character education.

Factors Perceived to Affect the Usefulness of Stories for Teaching Character Education

In the teacher survey, participants were asked about different factors that might affect how useful a story can be for teaching character education. Participants were asked about the influence of the *type*, *appearance* and *age* of the main characters. Participants were also asked about the influence of the story *setting*. Analysis of the survey data revealed a general perception that the type and physical appearance of story characters, and the type of story settings does not affect how useful the story can be for teaching character education. However, respondents were split on whether the age of the main characters affects the usefulness of the story.

During the teacher interviews, interviewees were also asked about factors that might make a story more or less useful for character education. The interview questions were designed to elucidate findings from the teacher survey and were also adapted based on a pilot study, as explained in Chapter Four. In light of the pilot study, interviewees were asked specifically about whether certain factors – such as the type, age and appearance of characters, and setting of stories – affect how easily pupils can relate to stories, and whether this affects how useful a story can be for teaching character education using that story. Interviewees were also asked about whether, and how, the length and complexity of stories influences their usefulness for teaching character education.

Four main themes emerged from the teacher interviews. First, that the appearance of the main characters is not perceived to have much bearing on story usefulness, provided that there are other similarities between pupils and story characters or contexts. Second, there was a common perception that pupils are more able to relate to and take meaning from stories in which the main characters are a similar age to the pupils. Third, that the most relatable and useful stories for character education are believed to be those with which pupils can make links to the experiences, or social setting, of characters. There were mixed opinions on the influence of fantastical or real-life contexts. Fourth, that shorter stories are perceived to be more useful than longer stories for teaching character education; shorter stories enable pupils to remain engaged, and enable teachers to lead subsequent reading-related activities with pupils. Each of the themes identified in the teacher survey and interviews are discussed below.

The Type and Physical Appearance of Main Characters

As can be seen in Table 5.5, when asked whether the type of story character affects how useful a story can be for teaching character education, the majority of respondents (79.4%) selected 'The type of main character does not affect how useful a story is or can be'. A small proportion (13.4%) thought that stories with human main characters are more useful, and an even smaller proportion (7.2%) believed that stories with non-human main characters are more useful for this purpose.

Table 5.5. Factors Perceived to Affect the Usefulness of Stories for Character Education – The Type of Main Character.

This table shows the selections of all respondents ($N=209$), respondents who taught exclusively in the Lower School ($n=80$), and respondents who taught exclusively in the Upper School ($n=98$).

Response	All Respondents ($N=209$)		Respondents from Lower School ($n=80$) or Upper School ($n=98$)		
	Freq	%	Lower or Upper	Freq	%
The type of main character does not affect how useful a story is or can be	166	79.4	Lower	69	86.3
			Upper	71	72.4
Main characters who are human are more useful	28	13.4	Lower	4	5.0
			Upper	19	19.4
Non-human main characters are more useful	15	7.2	Lower	7	8.8
			Upper	8	8.2
Total	209	100.0	Total Lower	80	100.0
			Total Upper	98	100.0

A Chi-Square test was used to compare responses of Lower School teachers and responses of Upper School teachers. The Chi-Square test indicated that there was a significant difference between how Lower School teachers and Upper School teachers responded to the question ($\chi^2(2) = 8.14, p = .017$). Cramer's statistic was .21, indicating a medium association between the age group taught (Lower or Upper School) and responses to the question. As can be seen in Table 5.5, a far higher proportion of Upper School teachers (19.4%) than Lower School teachers (5.0%) thought that human main characters are more useful for character education. The proportion of Upper School teachers who thought that the "type" of main character does not affect how useful a story is for character education (72.4%) was lower than the corresponding proportion of Lower School teachers who thought the same (86.3%). The findings indicate that Upper School teachers are more likely than Lower School teachers to think that the type of main character can affect how useful the story is for character education.

Similarly, the majority of respondents (69.4%) did not think that the physical appearance of main characters affects how useful a story can be for teaching character education. As can be seen in Table 5.6, just over a fifth (22.5%) thought that main characters with a similar

appearance to the children being taught are more useful for character education, and a small proportion (8.1%) thought that main characters with a different appearance to the children being taught are more useful.

There was no significant difference between how Lower School teachers ($n=80$) and Upper School teachers ($n=98$) responded to the question ($p>.05$). The relative proportions of Upper School and Lower School teachers' responses were similar, as can be seen in Table 5.6.

Table 5.6. Factors Perceived to Affect the Usefulness of Stories for Character Education – The Physical Appearance of Main Characters.

This table shows the selections of all respondents ($N=209$), respondents who taught exclusively in the Lower School ($n=80$), and respondents who taught exclusively in the Upper School ($n=98$).

Response	All Respondents ($N=209$)		Respondents from Lower School ($n=80$) or Upper School ($n=98$)		
	Freq	%	Lower or Upper	Freq	%
The appearance of the main characters does not affect how useful a story is or can be	145	69.4	Lower	55	68.8
			Upper	65	66.3
Main characters with a similar appearance to the children being taught are more useful	47	22.5	Lower	17	21.3
			Upper	25	25.5
Main characters with different appearance to the children being taught are more useful	17	8.1	Lower	8	10.0
			Upper	8	8.2
Total	209	100.0	Total Lower	80	100.0
			Total Upper	98	100.0

Corroborating the findings from the teacher survey, interviewees commonly expressed a similar view that the type and appearance of characters does not affect the ability of most pupils to relate to and learn from stories. This view is illustrated by the two interview quotations below:

I don't think our children would read a book that was written about a black child and think "why am I reading that because I'm not black?" I don't I don't think they would think, they would just literally see them as a child in a book and "they're about the same age as me and they're a boy, yeah that might be like me".

P133, Mixed Ages teacher

Most of the other story books have got white people in them so actually you know I think now, on reflection, I would say that, actually, it is important that you've got you know, certainly some of the characters representing the children, certainly in age and in ethnicity, as well, I would think.

P3, KS1 teacher

However, despite the overarching belief that the appearance of characters does not affect the usefulness of a story for character education, two interviewees explained that the appearance of characters could help some pupils to better relate to the story. The two interviewees noted that they had tried to diversify their teaching resources and source picture books in which main characters reflected the diversity of their class and community.

There were some contrasting perceptions regarding anthropomorphism among Lower School teachers. Two Lower School teachers explained that they preferred to use human characters for story-based character education, and suggested that human characters allowed pupils to better “see” themselves in the story. However, three other interviewees, two of whom were Lower School teachers, explained that they often used anthropomorphised (animal) characters because they find that younger children enjoy and engage with animal characters more than in stories with human characters. The two quotations below, taken from interviews with two teachers, help to illustrate the contrasting perceptions of anthropomorphised characters:

As the character story that's got to be...I quite like it to have real people in it. That is just my view I know some people love fantasy stories, but I prefer to have real characters and it will sort of spin on a dilemma of a sort...they need to be relatable they need to see themselves in. And it doesn't have to be the same colour [skin], but the situation in some way has to say that they can link themselves to that book.

P88, EYFS teacher

It doesn't necessarily have to be like other children in the story...like, if it's about animals, you know, most children love animals, you know and they like the fact that they that come alive.

P209, EYFS teacher

The gender of main characters was not perceived to have much bearing on how useful a story could be for teaching character education, with the majority of the interviewees who

commented specifically on gender suggesting that this would have no influence on their pupils' learning from stories:

Gender – I don't think makes much difference to our children. We are also quite boy heavy [in our class] so you do have to be careful, but I don't think having a female protagonist would make any difference at all.

P201, UKS2 teacher

I don't think gender has any, would make any, difference. I don't think the children would bat an eyelid as to whether it was a boy or a girl.

P76, EYFS teacher

Although there was one interviewee who suggested that boys would find it easier to relate to main characters who are male, no other interviewee suggested that a specific character gender could have a detrimental impact on their pupils' learning.

The Age of Main Characters

Approximately half (49.8%) of the respondents to the teacher survey question did not think that the age of the main characters affects how useful a story can be for teaching character education. Just under half of respondents (46.4%) thought that main characters who are of a similar age to the children being taught are more useful. A very small proportion of respondents (3.3%) thought that main characters who are older than the children being taught are more useful. Only one respondent thought that main characters who are younger than the children being taught are more useful.

As can be seen in Table 5.7, the proportion of Lower School teachers (51.2%) who thought that main characters who are of a similar age to the children being taught are most useful for teaching character education was higher than corresponding proportion of Upper School teachers (42.9%) who thought the same. A higher proportion of Upper School teachers (53.1%) than Lower School teachers (45.0%) did not think that the age of the main characters affects how useful a story can be. Combined, these findings suggest that Lower School teachers are more likely than Upper School teachers to believe that the age of story characters can affect how useful a story is for teaching character education. However, there was no significant association between the age group taught (Lower School or Upper School) and responses to the question.

Table 5.7. Factors Perceived to Affect the Usefulness of Stories for Character Education – The Age of Main Characters.

This table shows the selections of all respondents ($N=209$), respondents who taught exclusively in the Lower School ($n=80$), and respondents who taught exclusively in the Upper School ($n=98$).

Response	All Respondents (N=209)		Respondents from Lower School (n=80) or Upper School (n=98)		
	Freq	%	Lower or Upper	Freq	%
The age of the main characters does not affect how useful a story is or can be	104	49.8	Lower	36	45.0
			Upper	52	53.1
Main characters who are of a similar age to the children being taught are more useful	97	46.4	Lower	41	51.2
			Upper	42	42.9
Main characters who are older than the children being taught are more useful	7	3.3	Lower	2	2.5
			Upper	4	4.1
Main characters who are younger than the children being taught are more useful	1	0.5	Lower	1	1.3
			Upper	0	0.0
Total	209	100.0	Total Lower	80	100.0
			Total Upper	98	100.0

In contrast to the survey data, the majority of the interviewees suggested that the age of the main characters *does* affect the usefulness of the story. The following quotations, taken from interviews with two teachers, illustrate how interviewees from both the Lower School and Upper School believe that the age of the main characters affects pupils' engagement and ability to relate to story characters and events:

...appearance isn't [a factor], but age most definitely. The books that go down best with children are when the protagonist is the same age as them... It's about trying to keep it for children who are with an age group that they are aware of. If it was a story about a twenty-year-old, it's not as relevant to them and if it was obviously the same if it's about a four- or five-year-old.

P201, UKS2 teacher

I do think age is useful, I think you often children will say "how old are they?" So, if they're obviously much older than them...younger children might then begin to look up to that character, but they might not be able to think actually "this is me", and I do think it [age] matters.

P88, EYFS teacher

Interviewees explained that pupils are likely to learn more from characters who are a similar age to them; if the age of the main character is too far removed from the age of the pupils being taught, pupils may not see the relevance of the story to their own lives. Some interviewees added that main characters who are slightly older than the pupils would also be effective for character education, but that pupils would not learn much from younger characters, or those perceived to be too much older than pupils.

The Story Setting and Context

As can be seen in Table 5.8, the majority of the respondents (62.7%) to the teacher survey did not think that the type of story setting affects how useful a story can be for teaching character education. Approximately one third of respondents (33.0%) thought that stories set in real-life settings are more useful for teaching character education, and a small proportion (4.3%) thought that fantasy settings are more useful.

Fischer's Exact Test revealed that there was no significant difference ($p=.101$) between how Lower School teachers and Upper School teachers responded to the question. However, as can be seen in Table 5.8, the proportion of Upper School teachers who thought that real-life settings are more useful for teaching character education (41.8%) was notably higher than the corresponding proportion of Lower School teachers (27.5%). The proportion of Lower School teachers who did not think that the type of story setting affects how useful a story can be for teaching character education (66.3%) was higher than the corresponding proportion of Upper School teachers (55.1%). These findings suggest that Upper School teachers may be more likely than Lower School teachers to think that stories with real-life settings are more useful for teaching character education. Interestingly, qualitative data from the subsequent interviews support this view: in the interviews, Upper School teachers expressed a preference for using "real-life" stories for character education.

Table 5.8. Factors Perceived to Affect the Usefulness of Stories for Character Education – The Story Setting.

This table shows the selections of all respondents ($N=209$), respondents who taught exclusively in the Lower School ($n=80$), and respondents who taught exclusively in the Upper School ($n=98$).

Response	All Respondents ($N=209$)		Respondents from Lower School ($n=80$) or Upper School ($n=98$)		
	Freq	%	Lower or Upper	Freq	%
The story setting does not affect how useful a story is or can be	131	62.7	Lower	53	66.3
			Upper	54	55.1
Real-life settings are more useful	69	33.0	Lower	22	27.5
			Upper	41	41.8
Fantasy settings are more useful	9	4.3	Lower	5	6.3
			Upper	3	3.1
Total	209	100.0	Total Lower	80	100.0
			Total Upper	98	100.0

When asked specifically about the influence of the reality of the story – for example whether the story contained fantastical features or was based in a real-life setting – interviewees expressed mixed opinions. Some interviewees suggested that that a combination of fantasy and reality could be effective, as long as there was a connection to reality. The two quotations below illustrate how fantastical elements of stories are perceived by some teachers to help to capture pupils’ interests and to encourage pupils to use their imagination. However, it was also noted that entirely fantastical stories would make it difficult for pupils to relate to the characters and their experiences.

So whether it's like a real life, setting or it sort of a fictional setting [it's] a bit of both really. I'm thinking of something like *The Tiger Who Came to Tea*. Obviously, children can relate to sitting down and having a meal. But even though it's sort of being at home with your parents, you don't often have a tiger come so there's still an element of imagination and I think that works really well – a little bit of both combined in the same story.
P129 EYFS teacher

I do think real life matters. Obviously, a lot of books have that link between real life and then going into fantasy and then coming back to real life, and I think that can draw the children in imaginatively, definitely. ...but I think if it's entirely fantasy then it's harder to relate to.
P88, EYFS teacher

Conversely, two interviewees, who both taught in the Upper School, explained that they

believed it was important to use the “real world” and real-life stories for teaching character education. For example, one interviewee clarified that while fantastical stories could be effective for teaching younger pupils, real, concrete examples were important to use with older pupils. The other interviewee, P115, explained that fantastical story content can influence their pupils’ learning:

If I’m trying to get the children to think about character education, I want them to think about the real world, and dragons and fairies give you a nice excuse that it's not real... So, I think the more you can ground something in reality, the more the children will accept that it's something that they should take on board.

P115, LKS2 teacher

This finding helps to support the difference observed in the teacher survey data (as seen in Table 5.8), which showed that a higher proportion of Upper School teachers than Lower School teachers selected real-life settings as ‘most useful’ useful for teaching character education.

Similarities Between Story Themes and Contexts, and Pupils’ Own Lives and Experiences

Interviewees from all key stages commonly explained that the most relatable and useful stories for teaching character education are those with which pupils can make links to the experiences, or social setting, of main characters. For example, in a story where a main character goes to school, pupils would be able to make a link between the story character going to school and their own experience of going to school. Interviewees commonly discussed the importance of shared experiences when prompted to think about the age of the main characters, suggesting a close association between the two themes.

I think the characters having some kind of shared experience with them [, the children, is important], whether that be that they go to school, whether it be that they like playing with boats, whatever that might be.... They can relate more to the character if that character does something that they do. So, if that character goes to school it's like “Oh, they go to school, just like me”

P100, EYFS teacher

If you were reading a novel that focused on something that was beyond their experience, that will be harder for them...I think the children, when they can talk about him having to get ready for school, or him not being able to do things instantly, they can imagine that being them or being somebody else in the class, and I think things that are very relatable like that are the most effective for our children...it really does make a difference if it's something that

they can relate to – to that character, or to those experiences.
P201 UKS2 teacher

Interviewees also suggested that, when using a story to teach character education, similarities between characters' and pupils' experiences was more important than similarity in terms of the physical appearance of the character. A common view was that, in order for a story to be useful for character education, there needs to be one link or connection between the story and the pupils being taught. Examples of the types of connection that pupils can make with stories include surface level similarities with characters and shared experiences, such as going to school or on a bouncy castle, as illustrated in the quotations below:

They [the animal characters] eat sweets and go to the funfair and one of them likes karaoke night and the other one likes going on the bouncy castle. So ... animal characters but they're showing all the traits that the children in my class have. I don't think they care that it's a penguin or anything like that. There's more to it than just one thing, so I think they can easily relate to a character in space, if there are some other traits of the character that that make them relate to it.
P146, LKS2 teacher

As long as there's one thing that they can connect with...then it works. So...if it was a fantasy setting and again it was a little fairy who was five and went to fairy school, then they would [be able to relate to the character].
P100, EYFS teacher

The Length and/or Complexity of the Story

When interviewees were asked about whether the length and complexity of stories influences their usefulness for teaching character education, nine interviewees expressed the opinion that shorter stories are more useful for teaching character education to their class. The quotations below, taken from the interviews with one Lower School teacher and one Upper School teacher, illustrate how this perception is shared by teachers across primary school age ranges:

[With] simpler books, they seem to, they understand it. If there's too much in it ... the message it gets lost in the fact that it's a bit overwhelming.
P43, EYFS teacher

The more useful ones are the short ones definitely. I prefer shorter stories and certainly ones where you can talk about, read them, talk about...Most of the longer stories always take longer... whereas if you can pick [a short] one we can discuss it.

P152, UKS2 teacher

It was mainly practical considerations that underpinned this perception. For example, it was suggested that pupils may lose focus with longer stories, and that shorter stories can be read quickly and then used to inform a class discussion, or a reading-related activity.

Three interviewees suggested that the length and complexity of stories should progress with the age of the pupils being taught; in essence, that shorter stories should be used with Lower School pupils, but that these should become longer and more complex when pupils move into the Upper School to enable them to gain a more in-depth understanding.

Interestingly, only one of the three interviewees sharing this perception taught within the Upper School, and, despite the assumption from two other Lower School teachers that more complex stories should be used in the Upper School, Upper School teachers expressed a tendency to use shorter stories for character education, as illustrated by the following quotation taken from an interview with one of the Upper School teachers:

... the shorter the story, the more compact, the better. If I'm teaching if I'm just using it to purely for character education, yeah, short and sweet.

P115, LKS2 teacher

3. Primary School Teachers' Approaches to Story-Based Character Education

In this section, the main findings corresponding to RQ2 are presented. RQ2 asked 'How and to what extent do primary school teachers in England use stories as a vehicle for teaching character education?'. The findings centre on teachers' approaches to story-based character education. Within the teacher survey, participants were asked about their approaches to story-based character education and reasons underpinning why they taught in this way. For example, participants were asked about how and why they used stories for teaching character education, the intentionality and frequency with which they taught story-based

character education, the story types they used, and the curriculum areas in which story-based character education featured. During the interviews, interviewees were also asked about their approaches; they were asked to provide examples and to explain their how and why they taught in this way. Interviewees were also asked about how story-based character education was integrated within their curriculum, and about the influences on their teaching approaches. The findings are displayed under subheadings which correspond to these question topics. Where possible, data from the teacher survey are presented first. Data from the teacher interviews are then used to illustrate, support or expand on the data from the surveys.

The Use of Stories to Teach Character Education

Before understanding *how* teachers use stories to teach character education, it was important to first establish *if* and *why* teachers use stories for this purpose. The findings presented here include those relating to whether teachers: intentionally select and use stories to teach character education; influences on teachers' approaches to story-based character education; and, confidence in using stories to teach character education.

Story-Based Character Education in Primary School Classrooms

In the teacher survey, participants were asked whether they use stories to teach character education. Of the respondents ($N=209$), 97.6% reported that they use stories, 0.5% said that they do not use stories and 1.9% said that they did not know. Participants who either reported using stories to teach character education, or were not sure ($N=207$) were then asked whether they *intentionally* select and use stories to teach character education. 87.9% responded 'yes'. The remaining 12.1% reported using stories for teaching character education *incidentally* – they teach character education using stories, but they predominantly select and use stories for other reasons, for example to teach reading and writing skills.

Table 5.9. Intentionality of Story-Based Character Education.

This table shows the selections of all respondents ($N=207$), respondents who taught exclusively in the Lower School ($n=78$), and respondents who taught exclusively in the Upper School ($n=98$).

Response	All Respondents ($N=207$)		Respondents from Lower School ($n=78$) or Upper School ($n=98$)		
	Freq	%	Lower or Upper	Freq	%
Yes – stories are chosen and used intentionally	182	87.9	Lower	76	97.4
			Upper	78	79.6
No – character education is taught incidentally, when reading a story for other reasons	25	12.1	Lower	2	2.6
			Upper	20	20.4
Total	207	100.0	Total Lower	78	100.0
			Total Upper	98	100.0

A Chi-Square Test revealed a significant association between the age group taught (Lower School or Upper School) and responses to the question ($\chi^2(1) = 12.64, V = .27, p < .001$). As can be seen in Table 5.9, a higher proportion of Lower School teachers (97.4%) than Upper School teachers (79.6%) reported intentionally selecting and using stories to teach character education. The reasons that participants intentionally choose and use stories to teach character education were previously outlined in Table 5.2.

Influences on Primary School Teachers' Use of Stories for Teaching Character Education

When participants were asked about their approaches to story-based character education in the teacher survey and teacher interviews, four main influences became apparent. One, the extent to which teachers were free to choose the stories they use; two, the influence of school training and experience; three, the influence of personal interests and personal experience; and four, time and curriculum demands as a barrier to teaching story-based character education.

Autonomy in Selecting Stories

When asked about their role in selecting the stories that they use in their classrooms, 17.8% of respondents reported that they are able to choose all of the stories they use in their classrooms, whereas only 1.8% reported that they had no choice over the stories used. Overall, 98.2% reported having at least some choice in selecting stories, with 84% selecting

at least half of the stories that they use in the classroom. A breakdown of participants' responses to this question can be seen in Table 5.10.

Table 5.10. Participants' Responsibility Over Story Selection.

This table describes all respondents' (N=219) roles in selecting the stories that are used in their classrooms.

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Cumulative Percentage (%)
Only I select the stories that I use	39	17.8	17.8
I select most of the stories that I use, some are selected by others	102	46.6	64.4
Approximately half of the stories are selected by me	43	19.6	84.0
I select some of the stories that I use, most are selected by others	31	14.2	98.2
I don't select the stories that I use	4	1.8	100.0
Total	219	100.0	100.0

When interviewees were asked about how they select stories for the purpose of teaching character education, most interviewees explained that they were free to look for and select stories to use in the classroom. Some interviewees explained that their choice of stories was at least partly dependent on the school's prescribed curriculum – for example, existing curriculum plans, statutory guidance, PSHE or Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural (SMSC) development schemes.

Some interviewees also explained that they would draw on a variety of sources if they wanted to use a story for the purpose of teaching character education but did not have existing knowledge of appropriate stories to use. For example, by asking colleagues in their school or consulting other educational professionals using social media.

The Influence of Training and School Experience

In the teacher survey, participants were asked whether they had ever received training in using stories to teach character education, PSHE or SMSC. Over half of the respondents (53.2%) had received training in using stories for PSHE. A smaller proportion of respondents

had received training in using stories for teaching SMSC (37.7%) and character education (27.3%).

A Chi-Square test indicated that there was a significant association between the subject (PSHE, SMSC and character education) and whether training had been received ($\chi^2 (2) = 31.31, V=.22, p<.001$). There were no significant differences between the proportions of Upper School teachers and Lower School teachers who had received training in using stories to teach PSHE, SMSC or character education.

During the teacher interviews, interviewees were asked to describe any influences on their approaches to story-based character education. The training and school-based experiences of teachers were commonly mentioned by interviewees, and can be seen illustrated in the quotations below:

I just have a large bank of stories in my head that I can that I can you know refer to. And I think a lot of that is experience.

P146, LKS2 teacher

I think, having different mentors and working in a range of schools has really shaped the way that I deliver it because I know some really outstanding teachers who are great with stories and I try and mimic how they deliver it.

P40, KS1 teacher

Interviewees described how, over time, they had refined their approaches, and had collected a “bank” of stories that they found had “worked” for story-based character education. Others described the influence of in-service training – for example, some interviewees explained that they had learnt through watching colleagues’ lessons and drawing on colleagues’ expertise.

The Influence of Personal Experience and Personal Interests

In addition to training and experience gained in schools, two other influences were discussed within the interviews. Three interviewees explained that their experience in reading stories with their own children had influenced their approach in school.

I have two little girls, and I think that has influenced me over the past, certainly, since Emma has been born about six years and it's definitely helped me to see how stories have helped

her on a one-to-one basis and to begin to understand the world.
P100, EYFS teacher

Personal interests, such as a love of English, reading or drama, were also discussed. Interviewees explained how these interests were often their motivation for teaching in a particular way, and that personal interests shaped their teaching and learning approaches.

I like drama and I like stories, and I mean that's what my degree was in many moons ago, so I guess that I would naturally go there because that's my that's my preferred method of learning and my preferred method of teaching.
P115, LKS2 teacher

Time and Curriculum Demands as Barriers to Teaching Story-Based Character Education

When asked about potential barriers to teaching story-based character education, five interviewees explained that time was sometimes a barrier. The main reason given for the lack of available time to teach story-based character education as regularly as interviewees would like was the demands of the curriculum. Interviewees who taught in both the Lower School and Upper School indicated that finding time to teach story-based character education in addition to core subject lessons was a challenge, and this perception across primary school age ranges can be seen in the following quotations:

...Yes, time, so the curriculum is pushing things out pushing things out like everyday story time is being pushed out and I'm a bit worried that we're now having a new Early Years [framework].
P209, EYFS teacher

I think the biggest thing is time is with every especially important with schools where I have to teach every subject and trying to fit it into the curriculum is hard.
P40, KS1 teacher

So yes, there are things that prevent us from doing it. Time constraints is one of them.
P209, LKS2 teacher

Teachers' Confidence in Using Stories to Teach Character Education and to Teach Reading and Writing Skills

The teacher survey collected data on teachers' confidence in using stories to teach character

education and to teach reading and writing skills. This enabled comparisons to be made between teachers' confidence in using stories for these purposes. The mean rating scores for participants' confidence in using stories to teach character education and to teach reading and writing skills can be seen in Table 5.11. The mean rating score for confidence in using stories as a vehicle for character education ($N=219$) was 12.52 ($Mdn=12.0$; $SD=2.0$). A One-Sample Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test was used to determine whether the observed rating scores differed from hypothesised responses. The hypothesised median was 9.0, the mid-point between the minimum possible score (3.0) and the maximum possible score (15.0). The median score for *confidence* (12.0) was significantly higher than the hypothesised median score for *confidence* ($T=20398.00$, $p<.000$, $r=.83$), indicating that participants were very confident in using stories for this purpose.

An Independent-Samples Mann-Whitney U Test was used to test whether there was a difference in participants' confidence in using stories to teach character education according to the age of the pupils being taught. There was no significant difference in confidence in using stories to teach character education between participants who taught exclusively within the Lower School ($n=83$; $Mdn=12.0$) and participants who taught exclusively within the Upper School ($n=100$; $Mdn=12.0$; $U=3659.50$, $z=-1.42$, $p=.155$, $r=-.11$).

Table 5.11. Confidence in Using Stories to Teach Character Education and to Teach Reading and Writing Skills.

This table shows respondents' ($N=219$) rating scores for their confidence in using stories to teach character education and their confidence in using stories to teach about reading and writing skills.

Confidence in Using Stories:	n	Mean	SD	Median	Min	Max
To Teach Character Education	219	12.52	2.05	12.0	6.00	15.00
To Teach Reading and Writing Skills	219	12.86	1.90	13.0	6.00	15.00

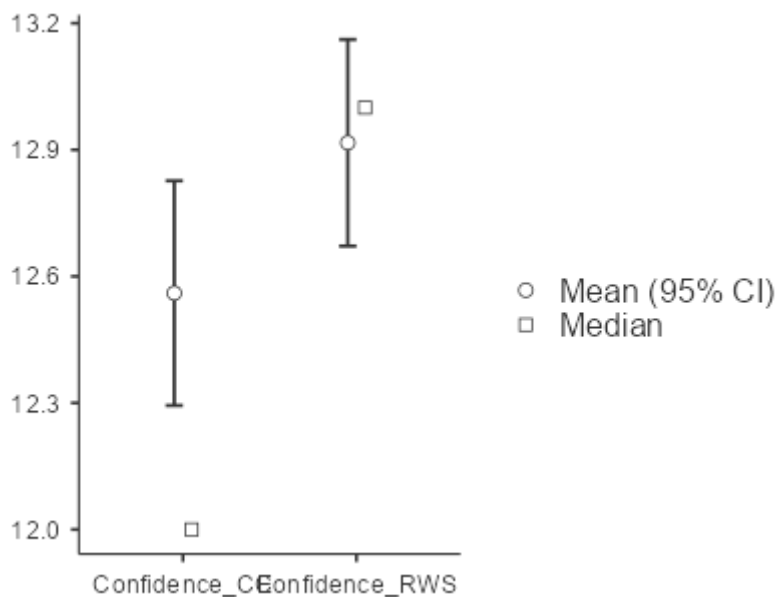
- a. For each participant a rating score for *confidence* was calculated. Confidence scores were the sum of three survey items, each of which were rated on a likert scale of 1-5. The minimum and maximum possible scores were 3 and 15, respectively.

A Related-Samples Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test was used to test whether there was a difference in participants' confidence using stories to teach character education, and their

confidence using stories to teach reading and writing skills. Rating scores ($N=217$) for confidence in using stories as a vehicle for teaching reading and writing skills ($Mdn=13$) were significantly higher than for confidence in using stories as a vehicle for character education ($Mdn=12$; $T=3624.50$, $p=.002$, $r=.21$). The distribution of data is illustrated in Figure 5.2.

Figure 5.2. Respondents' Confidence in Using Stories.

This figure shows the data distribution for how confident participants ($N=217$) are in using stories for character education (CE) and for teaching reading and writing skills (RWS).



A Related-Samples Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test revealed that Lower School teachers' ($n=83$) rating scores for confidence in using stories to teach reading and writing skills ($Mdn=13$) were significantly higher than for their confidence in using stories to teach character education ($Mdn=12$; $T=351.00$, $p=.013$, $r=.27$). Upper School teachers' ($n=99$) rating scores for confidence in using stories to teach reading and writing skills ($Mdn=12$) were significantly higher than for their confidence in using stories to teach character education ($Mdn=12$; $T=1037.50$, $p=.048$, $r=.20$). Although median rating scores were the same, the mean scores ($M=12.6$ for confidence in teaching reading and writing skills; $M=12.3$ for confidence in teaching character education) and the general distribution of the data differed.

Story-Based Character Education and the Curriculum

Analysis of the teacher survey and teacher interview data offers insight into how story-based character education features within the curriculum in primary schools. Findings presented here relate to where and how frequently story-based character education features within the curriculum, which types of stories are used by primary school teachers, and which character qualities they teach about.

Frequency of Story-Based Character Education

To help to understand how frequently story-based character education is taught and where it features within primary school curricula, participants of the teacher survey were asked how frequently they use stories to teach about character education: the teacher survey asked how frequently participants use stories to teach about (a) morals/moral lessons, (b) “good” character, and (c) “good” behaviour. Respondents ($N=208$) answered the three questions in similar ways: for each question, the option selected by the highest proportion of respondents was ‘once a week’; and, the option selected by the second highest proportion of respondents was ‘once every few days’. Overall, over half of the respondents reported using stories to teach character education at least once a week: 55.8% used stories to teach about morals/moral lessons at least once a week; 53.8% used stories to teach about “good” character at least once a week; and, 52.4% used stories to teach about “good” behaviour at least once a week. A full breakdown of the data distribution for all respondents can be seen in Appendix H.

A comparison of Lower School teachers’ and Upper School teachers’ responses suggests that Lower School teachers teach story-based character education more frequently than Upper School teachers. For example, 40.5% of Lower School respondents taught morals/moral messages using stories at least once every few days; 40.5% of Lower School respondents taught about “good” character using stories at least once every few days; and, 41.8% of Lower School respondents taught about “good” behaviour using stories at least once every few days. By comparison, 18.4% of Upper School respondents taught morals/moral messages using stories at least once every few days; 19.4% of Upper School respondents taught about “good” character using stories at least once every few days; and, 19.4% of

Upper School respondents taught about “good” behaviour using stories at least once every few days. A full breakdown of the data for Lower School and Upper School respondents can be seen in Appendix H.

Areas of the Curriculum in Which Story-Based Character Education Features

In the teacher survey, participants were also asked about the subject areas in which they generally use stories as part of their teaching. In this question, participants were asked about the subject areas in which they used stories – the question was not specific to story-based character education. The question focused on subject areas as opposed to curriculum areas, therefore ‘assemblies’ was not included in the list of options. The majority of participants reported using stories in English (92.2%), PSHE (or equivalent)/ citizenship education (82.6%), religious education (80.4%) and history (76.7%). As can be seen in Table 5.12, a higher proportion of Lower School teachers reported using stories in eleven of the twelve subject areas. MFL was the only subject area in which a higher proportion of Upper School teachers reported using stories.

Table 5.12. Subject Areas That Stories Are Used In.

This table shows the selections of all respondents (*N*=219), respondents who taught exclusively in the Lower School (*n*=83), and respondents who taught exclusively in the Upper School (*n*=101).

Subject Area	All Respondents (N=219)		Respondents from Lower School (n=83) or Upper School (n=101)		
	Freq	%	Lower or Upper	n	%
English	202	92.2	Lower	81	97.6
			Upper	92	91.1
PSHE (or equivalent)/ Citizenship Education	181	82.6	Lower	72	86.7
			Upper	83	82.2
Religious Education (RE)	176	80.4	Lower	69	83.1
			Upper	80	79.2
History	168	76.7	Lower	66	79.5
			Upper	80	79.2
Geography	96	43.8	Lower	51	61.4
			Upper	33	32.7
Mathematics	65	29.7	Lower	45	54.2
			Upper	13	12.9

Science	62	28.3	Lower	32	38.6
			Upper	17	16.8
Art and Design	50	22.8	Lower	22	26.5
			Upper	18	17.18
Music	41	18.7	Lower	19	22.9
			Upper	19	18.8
Physical Education (PE)/ Sport	28	12.8	Lower	17	20.5
			Upper	6	5.9
Modern Foreign Languages (MFL)	27	12.3	Lower	6	7.2
			Upper	15	14.9
Computing	26	11.9	Lower	15	18.1
			Upper	7	6.9

During the interviews, teachers were asked about where story-based character education features within their curriculum. The majority of the interviewees explained that story-based character education was both integrated into subject lessons *and* taught in standalone lessons with their classes. Lower School teachers explained how character education was central to their teaching aims – for example linking with the EYFS Personal, Social and Emotional Development Early Learning Goals (DfE, 2021a, p. 12) – and that story-based character education was integrated into the wider curriculum as a result. English lessons and school assemblies were commonly mentioned by Lower and Upper School teachers as curriculum areas in which story-based character education was often, and easily, integrated. Upper School teachers also commonly mentioned PSHE and SMSC as lessons in which they taught character education using stories.

We do some standalone lessons that would be you know, be PSHE kind of lessons and I would do a story at snack time and again I might specifically choose one with my class if there was a particular need, let's say, I might choose a story that helps me to kind of push through a particular issue that we've got going on in the class if it was sort of a being kind, for example. And, but also, even within any sort of texts that we use for English lessons as well that, you know, there's always going to be something that you can pull out and discuss and usually linked to character education and yeah any topic areas really.

P3, KS1 teacher

I think assemblies in this school are heavily loaded with, you know, character education, and they're the main times when you know that everyone's getting the same message.

P129, EYFS teacher

[Story-based character education] is integrated throughout the curriculum in many different ways, in different forms, in different lessons.

P12, UKS2 teacher

A common theme evident in the interviews with both Lower School teachers and Upper School teachers was how story-based character education was often taught in reaction to pupils' emerging needs. Interviewees explained that they often taught standalone lessons in order to address emerging social issues, or to teach about character strengths that they deemed particularly relevant to pupils at that time.

If we have a problem with a child, say, maybe it's a friendship group or something, we can just nip to the bookcase, pick an appropriate book and talk about friendships using a story and talk about the characters in there.

P129, EYFS teacher

It is led by curriculum to an extent – what we're doing in English – and we can use that. ...We have a PSHE lead and we have a lot of other stuff and if there's something specific that a child needs to deal with, we have got the materials around the school that we can choose a novel or choose reading material that would really be tailored to an issue that might link... to you know any issue that's going on in a child's, you know, household or life at that time.

P201, UKS2 teacher

Lower School teachers explained how standalone story lessons were a regular part of their teaching, whereas Upper School teachers expressed a tendency to integrate story-based character education into subject lessons, and to only teach story-based character education in standalone lessons when deemed necessary to suit pupils' emerging needs.

The Story Types Used for Character Education

In the teacher survey, participants who said that they intentionally use stories to teach character education ($N=182$) were asked to select all of the story types that they use. As can be seen in Table 5.13, the story types that most respondents reported using are picture books (78.6%), fables (62.6%) and religious stories (59.3%). It is notable that the story types selected by most respondents were also rated highly in terms of *usefulness* for character education in an earlier question (see Table 5.3). The story types that fewest respondents reported using are folklore (24.2%), biographical accounts (34.6%), popular fiction (35.7%),

and myths and legends (36.8%), consistent with teachers' relatively lower rating scores for the *usefulness* of these story types (see Table 5.3).

The story types selected by most and fewest Lower and Upper School teachers appeared to be consistent with Lower and Upper School teachers' rating scores for the *usefulness* of these story types (as seen in Table 5.4): higher proportions used the story types that were rated higher for *usefulness* and lower proportions used the story types rated lower for *usefulness*. The story types selected most by Lower School teachers were picture books (92.1%), fairy tales (67.1%), fables (50.0%) and religious stories (50.0%). The story types selected by fewest Lower School teachers were biographical accounts (17.1%), myths and legends (17.1%) and folklore (18.4%). The story types selected most by Upper School teachers were fables (69.2%), picture books (65.4%), and stories from history (65.4%). The story types selected by fewest Upper School teachers were folklore (28.2%), popular fiction (43.6%) and fairy tales (44.9%).

Chi-Square tests were used to compare responses of Lower School teachers and responses of Upper School teachers. As can be seen in Table 5.13, there were significant associations between the age group taught (Lower School or Upper School) and responses for picture books, fables, fairy tales, stories from history, myths and legends and biographical accounts. 92.1% of Lower School teachers use picture books compared to 65.4% of Upper School teachers ($p < .001$); 50.0% Lower School teachers use fables compared to 69.2% Upper School teachers ($p = .015$); 67.1% Lower School teachers use fairy tales compared to 44.9% Upper School teachers ($p = .005$); 32.9% Lower School teachers use stories from history compared to 65.4% Upper School teachers ($p < .001$); 17.1% Lower School teachers use myths and legends compared to 51.3% Upper School teachers ($p < .001$); 17.1% Lower School teachers use biographical accounts compared to 48.7% Upper School teachers ($p < .001$).

Table 5.13. The Story Types Used for Character Education.

This table shows the selections of all respondents ($N=182$), respondents who taught exclusively in the Lower School ($n=76$), and respondents who taught exclusively in the Upper School ($n=78$). Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Story Type	All Respondents ($N=182$)		Respondents from Lower School ($n=76$) and Upper School ($n=78$)			Chi-Square test		
	Freq	%	Lower or Upper	Freq	%	χ^2	v	p
Picture Books	143	78.6	Lower	70	92.1	16.32	.33	<.001***
			Upper	51	65.4			
Fables	114	62.6	Lower	38	50.0	5.92	.20	.015*
			Upper	54	69.2			
Religious Stories	108	59.3	Lower	38	50.0	2.57	.13	.109
			Upper	49	62.8			
Fairy Tales	103	56.6	Lower	51	67.1	7.72	.22	.005**
			Upper	35	44.9			
Stories from History	91	50.0	Lower	25	32.9	16.26	.33	<.001***
			Upper	51	65.4			
Classic Stories	86	47.3	Lower	31	40.8	1.32	.09	.251
			Upper	39	50.0			
Myths and Legends	67	36.8	Lower	13	17.1	19.92	.36	<.001***
			Upper	40	51.3			
Popular Fiction	65	35.7	Lower	22	28.9	3.57	.15	.059
			Upper	34	43.6			
Biographical Accounts	63	34.6	Lower	13	17.1	17.37	.34	<.001***
			Upper	38	48.7			
Folklore	44	24.2	Lower	14	18.4	2.06	.12	.151
			Upper	22	28.2			

The Character Qualities Taught Using Stories

In the teacher survey, participants were also asked to indicate the character qualities that they taught about when using stories. Five character qualities were selected by over 80% of respondents: friendship (91.2%), kindness (88.0%), respect (83.4%), courage (82.0%) and honesty (81.1%). There were two character qualities selected by less than 50% of all respondents: humility (35.5%) and loyalty (39.6%).

Chi-Square tests were used to compare responses of Lower School teachers and Upper School teachers. There were significant associations between age group taught (Lower School or Upper School) and the selection of the following character qualities: helping others ($\chi^2(1) = 8.56, V = .22, p = .003$); teamwork ($\chi^2(1) = 4.56, V = .16, p = .033$); following the rules ($\chi^2(1) = 4.89, V = .16, p = .027$); and sharing ($\chi^2(1) = 4.47, V = .16, p = .035$). A higher proportion of Lower School teachers (88.0%) than Upper School teachers (70.0%) reported using stories to teach about helping others. A higher proportion of Lower School teachers (84.3%) than Upper School teachers (71.0%) reported using stories to teach about teamwork. A higher proportion of Lower School teachers (83.1%) than Upper School teachers (69.0%) reported using stories to teach about following the rules. A higher proportion of Lower School teachers (78.3%) than Upper School teachers (64.0%) reported using stories to teach about sharing. The frequency and relative proportions of all respondents' selections can be seen in Appendix I.

Story-Based Character Education Approaches

In the teacher survey, participants who intentionally use stories as a vehicle for teaching character education ($N=182$) were asked about their teaching and learning approaches. Participants were asked about: how they check pupils' understanding of stories, and whether or not they help pupils to relate to the story themes and characters. Participants were also asked about whether they use reading-related activities, and the different teaching and learning strategies they utilise.

During the teacher interviews, interviewees offered further insight into story-based character education approaches. Notably, all interviewees described approaches which extend beyond simply reading a story to pupils, or asking pupils to read a story independently, as can be seen in the quotations provided below:

There will be children who are just struggling to read the book without thinking about any messages that might be hidden in there, so you could say to some of these children, "What are the messages?" and they'd say, "What are you talking about, messages? I just read what was on the page and it said this" ...you can't rely on anybody to pick what the messages are even on a good day...The pedagogy is really important.
P219, LKS2 teacher

If you're not engaged or excited about the book, they're not going to be either, and I think that's a really big thing with the reading is making sure that we're not just standing there or sitting there reading a book to them ... you've got to have you know the things afterwards, the activities that support it.

P43, EYFS teacher

I would never expect a three-, four- or five-year-old to almost through like an osmosis thing that like "oh yeah I've got it" and it's very much that the learning down here is very much a two-way discussion. It's thinking about what you think they've gotten, talking to them and elaborating on points and things like that.

P100, EYFS teacher

Although interviewees were not asked specifically about the motivations behind their approaches, the examples they described indicate that primary school teachers seek to facilitate pupils' learning from stories. Furthermore, some interviewees explained that they believe pupils may not necessarily learn from stories without teacher intervention. The way in which teachers read stories to pupils was also discussed; interviewees explained that teachers can not only engage pupils' attention through lively intonation and expression, but can help to support pupils' comprehension of story content and themes.

Understanding Stories and Relating Learning to Pupils' Lives

In the teacher survey, participants were asked about how they check pupils' understanding of the meaning of stories. The survey asked participants to select the statement that "best described" their approach. Lower School teachers and Upper School teachers responded in similar ways to this question. As can be seen in Table 5.14, the majority of respondents (55.6%) reported that they encourage pupils to explain what has happened in the story and why, but offer a "correct" account if they feel that this has not been properly understood. 37.2% of respondents reported that they encourage pupils to explain what has happened in the story. Only a very small proportion of respondents (2.8%) reported that they leave pupils to take their own meaning. Similarly, only a very small proportion of respondents (2.2%) reported that they explain to pupils what has happened and why. Only one respondent (0.6%) reported that they did not check pupils' understanding. Three respondents selected 'other' and provided a written response. Two of these respondents (one Lower School and one Upper School teacher) explained that their approach depended on the focus of the

lesson or “type” of story used. The other respondent (Lower School teacher) said that they encourage pupils to explain what has happened and why, but ask questions to “get them back on track” if they felt the meaning had been misinterpreted or missed.

Table 5.14. Teachers’ Story-Based Character Education Strategies: Checking Pupils’ Understanding. This table shows the selections of all respondents ($N=180$), respondents who taught exclusively in the Lower School ($n=75$), and respondents who taught exclusively in the Upper School ($n=78$).

Strategy	All Respondents ($N=180$)		Respondents from Lower School ($n=75$) or Upper School ($n=78$)		
	Freq	%	Lower or Upper	Freq	%
Encourage the children to explain what has happened in the story and why, but I offer a “correct” account if I feel that this has not been properly understood	100	55.6	Lower	39	52.0
			Upper	43	55.1
Pupils encouraged to explain what has happened in the story and why	67	37.2	Lower	28	37.3
			Upper	31	39.7
Pupils are left to take their own meaning	5	2.8	Lower	2	2.7
			Upper	2	2.6
Teachers explain what has happened and why	4	2.2	Lower	3	4.0
			Upper	1	1.3
Other	3	1.7	Lower	2	2.7
			Upper	1	1.3
I don’t check understanding	1	.6	Lower	1	1.3
			Upper	0	0.0
Total	180	100.0	Total	153	100.0

Participants were also asked whether they help pupils to relate the meaning of the story to their own lives. 97.8% of respondents to this question selected ‘Yes’. As can be seen in Table 5.15, the relative proportions of Lower School and Upper School teachers who responded ‘Yes’ and ‘No’ to this question were similar.

Table 5.15. Relating the Meaning of Stories to Pupils' Lives.

This table shows the selections of all respondents ($N=180$), respondents who taught exclusively in the Lower School ($n=75$), and respondents who taught exclusively in the Upper School ($n=78$).

Response	All Respondents ($N=180$)		Respondents from Lower School ($n=75$) or Upper School ($n=78$)		
	Freq	%	Lower or Upper	Freq	%
Yes, pupils are supported in relating the meaning of stories to their own lives	176	97.8	Lower	73	97.3
			Upper	76	97.4
No, pupils are not supported in relating the meaning of stories to their own lives	4	2.2	Lower	2	2.7
			Upper	2	2.6
Total	180	100.0	Total	153	100.0

Participants who responded 'Yes' ($N=176$) were asked about the reasons why they help pupils relate the meaning of the story to their own lives. As can be seen in Table 5.16, the reason selected by most respondents (77.8%) was 'Children sometimes need support in relating the meaning of the story to their own lives'. Over half of the respondents (51.1%) selected 'It is important that children relate the meaning of the story to their own lives'. Only a small proportion (6.8%) selected 'Children do not do this naturally or without prompting'. There were no significant associations between the age group taught (Lower School or Upper School) and reason selections. 4% of respondents selected 'other' and provided a written response. Written responses focused on what children gain through engaging and relating to stories; respondents suggested that gaining experience through stories helps to develop perspective taking, empathy and resilience in pupils.

Table 5.16. Reasons for Relating the Meaning of Stories to Pupils' Lives.

This table shows the selections of all respondents ($N=176$), respondents who taught exclusively in the Lower School ($n=73$), and respondents who taught exclusively in the Upper School ($n=76$).

Reason	All Respondents ($N=176$)		Respondents from Lower School ($n=73$) or Upper School ($n=76$)		
	Freq	%	Lower or Upper	Freq	%
Children sometimes need support in relating the meaning of the story to their own lives	137	77.8	Lower	55	75.3
			Upper	59	77.6
It is important that children relate the meaning of the story to their own lives	90	51.1	Lower	33	45.2
			Upper	43	56.6

Children often do not understand that the meaning of the stories is relevant to them and their own lives	53	30.1	Lower	19	26.0
			Upper	28	36.8
Children do not do this naturally or without prompting	12	6.8	Lower	3	4.1
			Upper	9	11.8
Other	7	4.0	Lower	5	6.8
			Upper	2	2.6

The four participants who responded ‘No, pupils are not supported in relating the meaning of stories to their own lives’ were asked about why they do not help pupils relate the meaning of the story to their own lives. Two respondents suggested that time was a barrier, and two respondents selected ‘other’ and provided a written response. Both written responses explained that the respondents *do* help their pupils related the meaning of the story to their own lives, but not all of the time; one suggested that the time taken to do this was a barrier, the other suggested that they would only do this when teaching a story with a clear moral. None of the respondents selected ‘it is not important’.

Use of Reading-Related Activities Related to the Meaning of the Story

Participants were asked whether they use activities related to the meaning of the story. 90.0% of respondents to this question indicated that they use reading-related activities. As can be seen in Table 5.17, the relative proportion of Lower School and Upper School teachers who reported using reading-related activities after reading stories was similar.

Table 5.17. Teachers’ Use of Reading-Related Activities.

This table shows the selections of all respondents ($N=180$), respondents who taught exclusively in the Lower School ($n=75$), and respondents who taught exclusively in the Upper School ($n=78$).

Response	All Respondents ($N=180$)		Respondents from Lower School ($n=75$) or Upper School ($n=78$)		
	Freq	%	Lower or Upper	Freq	%
Yes, reading-related activities are used	162	90.0	Lower	66	88.0
			Upper	70	89.7
No reading-related activities are not used	18	10.0	Lower	9	12.0
			Upper	8	10.3
Total	180	100.0	Total	153	100.0

Participants who responded 'Yes' ($N=162$) were asked about why they use reading-related activities. Participants were asked to select which statements described their reasons for using reading-related activities. As can be seen in Table 5.18, the reason selected by the majority of respondents (92.0%) was 'to reinforce the meaning' of the story. Another reason selected by over half (56.8%) of all respondents was 'to evidence learning'. Less than half (35.8%) of all respondents selected 'For pupils' enjoyment/entertainment'. Three respondents (one Lower School; one Upper School; one Mixed Ages) selected 'other' and provided a written response. 'Other' reasons included enabling group discussion (Lower School teacher), providing opportunities to reflect on story characters and situations (Upper School teacher) and enabling pupils to 'take on different roles' (Mixed Ages teacher).

There was a significant association between age group taught (Lower School or Upper School) and responses to 'For pupils' enjoyment/entertainment' ($\chi^2(1) = 4.13, V=.17, p=.042$): 48.5% of Lower School teachers selected this reason, compared to 31.4% of Upper School teachers.

Table 5.18. Reasons for Using Reading-Related Activities.

This table shows the selections of all respondents ($N=162$), respondents who taught exclusively in the Lower School ($n=66$), and respondents who taught exclusively in the Upper School ($n=70$).

Reason	All Respondents ($N=162$)		Respondents from Lower School ($n=66$) or Upper School ($n=70$)		
	Freq	%	Lower or Upper	Freq	%
To reinforce the meaning	149	92.0	Lower	57	86.4
			Upper	66	94.3
To evidence learning (e.g. for ongoing assessment of learning)	92	56.8	Lower	38	57.6
			Upper	42	60.0
For pupils' enjoyment/entertainment	58	35.8	Lower	32	48.5
			Upper	22	31.4
Other	3	1.9	Lower	1	1.5
			Upper	1	1.4

Participants who indicated that they do not use reading-related activities ($n=18$) were asked to select which statements describe their reasons for not using reading-related activities.

47.1% selected 'There is usually no time for this' and 'This is not the main learning objective'

as reasons for not using reading-related activities. 29.4% of respondents selected 'other': two explained that writing activities may make learning "boring" for pupils and ruin the magic of the story. Others suggested that questioning and discussion when reading the story was enough, and that other stories could be used to follow-up on covered themes. No respondents selected 'It is not important' as a reason. There were no significant associations between age group taught (Lower School or Upper School) and reason selections.

When discussing their story-based character education approaches within the teacher interviews, nine interviewees, from all key stages, described how they used reading-related activities to reinforce or emphasise the message that they intend to teach through the story. Examples included using drama and role play, writing and art-based activities. Interviewees explained how reading-related activities are often used after reading or listening to a story. Interviewees explained that role play enables pupils to explore characters' actions and to empathise with characters – considering how they might be feeling – in a safe environment. Drama and role play were considered advantageous in helping to "make it more meaningful for them" (P133, Mixed Ages teacher). Encouraging pupils to write letters and diary entries from characters' perspectives – reflecting how characters might be feeling, and what they might be thinking – was also described.

I've done things like using kindness trees before and with the story reference. So, we've read a story about kindness and then we've talked about things that could be kind and then, when those children do kind things they get to colour in a hand or a leaf on the tree so it's a bit more of a reinforcing of that message.
P100, EYFS teacher

Also common among interviewees was the use of discussion about story characters and events. Findings related to discussion of story characters and events are described in more detail below.

Teaching and Learning Strategies

To further understand how teachers use stories to teach character education, participants were asked about specific teaching and learning strategies that they use when teaching story-based character education. In the teacher survey, participants were asked to select all of the statements that describe their approaches. As can be seen in Table 5.19, almost all of

the respondents (98.9%) reported that they encourage pupils to reflect on what characters may think and feel, 92.3% reported that they encourage pupils to discuss the problems or dilemmas that characters face, and between 80.0% and 90.0% reported that they encourage pupils to identify and describe story events and dilemmas faced by characters (87.9%); prompt pupils to reflect on the relevance of story events to their lives (84.1%); and, support pupils' understanding and development of key vocabulary (84.1%). There were no significant differences in how Lower School and Upper School teachers responded to the question.

Table 5.19. Teachers' Story-Based Character Education Strategies.

This table shows the selections of all respondents ($N=182$), respondents who taught exclusively in the Lower School ($n=76$), and respondents who taught exclusively in the Upper School ($n=78$).

Strategy	All Respondents ($N=182$)		Respondents from Lower School ($n=76$) and Upper School ($n=78$)		
	Freq	%	Lower or Upper	Freq	%
Encourage pupils to reflect on what characters may think and feel	180	98.9	Lower	75	98.7
			Upper	77	98.7
Encourage pupils to discuss the problems or dilemmas that characters face	168	92.3	Lower	69	90.8
			Upper	72	92.3
Encourage pupils to identify and describe the problems or dilemmas that characters face	160	87.9	Lower	67	88.2
			Upper	68	87.2
Encourage pupils to think about how the events in the story may be similar to their own lives	153	84.1	Lower	62	81.6
			Upper	66	84.6
Develop pupils' understanding of important vocabulary	153	84.1	Lower	64	84.2
			Upper	64	82.1

The teacher interviews provided further insight into the teaching and learning strategies used by primary school teachers. Interviewees commonly described using *questioning and discussion*, and *repetition and reminders*.

Questioning and discussion

Fourteen of the fifteen interviewees described using questioning and discussion in addition to reading the story. Interviewees explained how questioning and discussion are used to check pupils' understanding of story events, to encourage pupils to reflect on and explain what has happened in stories, and to consider why they think events have occurred.

The learning down here is very much a two way discussion... to have more of a holistic approach of “what do you think? Why do you think they're right?” rather than telling children that “this is right, this is wrong, this is what you should do”...I want them to have an active role in that, and I want to help them guide them to understand why we see particular behaviours as good and particular behaviours as bad.

P100, EYFS teacher

It's really integral in your storytelling to be asking, as you go along. And sort of more for sometimes comprehension, but also for trying to engage them and getting them to think about what's happening.

P209, EYFS teacher

Interviewees explained how they use questioning and discussion to “guide” pupils to understand a story’s intended message, rather than simply explaining the message or learning point to pupils. Many interviewees explained that they ask pupils to share their own opinions and interpretations. Interviewees explained that, through this approach, pupils are able to learn from each other and hear perspectives of others which may differ from their own; exposing pupils to different interpretations was perceived to be beneficial to pupils’ learning.

I wouldn't want to just tell them what the moral of the story is it would always be you know “What do you think? Talk to your partner”... obviously I kind of have in my head, well, I think the meaning of the story is but I’ve made sure that every child is valued and explore and delve deeper into you know why they think what they think... and yeah I just I would want them to sort of justify and explain the reasons. And you know, sometimes even I’ve thought something and, actually, a child has come up with something else.

P3, KS1 teacher

In most cases with Year six I can ask them about a character and they've done enough to be able to understand and to be able to say what they feel about a character, or what they think the character was thinking. So I don't have to state it – the children are able to tell me... So them sharing ideas is far more effective than me telling them what they should think from having watched or lead something.

P152, UKS2 teacher

Ten of the interviewees, from all key stages, explained that they use questioning and discussion to help pupils to empathise with characters and understand or relate to story contexts and themes.

Using book based [character education] and the conversations you get with the children. In they're able to relate to the characters in the text, to help understanding the characters'

feelings and then they can put it into their own views about themselves ... I think that's the best way they can relate to it.

P12, UKS2 teacher

At different points in the story, [I would ask about] how they [the characters] feel, then “Why do you think that is how they feel here? Why do you think that is?” and “How did they feel at the end proper?”. Then I try and link it to their own experience as well – “Is there any, has there been a time where you've shared something and how did that make you feel? Did you find it tricky?”

P3, KS1 teacher

Some interviewees also described additional techniques used to familiarise pupils with story contexts and aid their understanding. These included providing experiences by going on school trips, conducting internet and library-based research on the settings and/or themes of stories, and bringing in related resources for pupils to interact with.

Repetition and reminders

A further strategy used by a smaller proportion of interviewees to emphasise the intended teaching message was to repeat stories and to offer reminders about these. Five interviewees explained that they reminded pupils about story characters and events in the hours, days or weeks after first reading the story.

The follow up would be, and when we're doing something else “ Oh, but remember that person in that story”, you know it may be the next day or later on in the day, are we still trying to remember to be like that that person, you know, so it just be more in a brief reminder... sometimes it could be in a positive way that I do just keep wanting to reinforce that throughout the day.

P209, EYFS teacher

Although this strategy was used by both Lower and Upper School teachers, it was predominantly Lower School (specifically, EYFS) teachers who described offering reminders to pupils about stories they had read, or re-reading stories.

4. Summary of Main Findings

A summary of the main findings, which will be interpreted and discussed in the subsequent chapter, is provided below. The main findings are separated under two main headings

corresponding to RQ1 and RQ2, respectively: primary school teachers' *perceptions* of stories as a vehicle for teaching character education, and primary school teachers' *approaches* to story-based character education.

Primary School Teachers' Perceptions of Stories as a Vehicle for Teaching Character Education

1. Stories are highly valued by EYFS, KS1 and KS2 teachers as a vehicle for teaching character education. The median rating score for the value of stories in teaching character education (29.0) was significantly higher than the hypothesised median rating score (18.0; $T=24043.50$, $p<.000$, $r=.87$). Many respondents described stories as the *most useful* resource they have to teach character education.

2. There are multiple reasons why stories are highly valued for teaching character education. The main reasons that teachers intentionally select and use stories for character education are that: stories are a good gateway to discussion (selected by 94.5% of respondents to the teacher survey); stories provide pupils with a safe space to learn (92.9%); stories provide insight into characters' thoughts and feelings (91.2%). Additional reasons described by interviewees were that stories: are relevant to pupils' lives; enable pupils to see and understand abstract concepts by providing concrete examples and context; and, provide pupils with new experiences.

There were also some significant differences in the ways that Lower School and Upper School teachers responded to the question. A significantly lower proportion (84.2%) of Lower School teachers than Upper School teachers (96.2%) use stories because 'stories provide insight into characters' thoughts and feelings', $X^2(1) = 6.246$, $p=.012$. A significantly higher proportion of Lower School teachers (71.1%) than Upper School teachers (53.8%) use stories because 'story illustrations help to keep children engaged' ($X^2(1) = 4.854$, $p=.028$).

3. The story types valued most for teaching character education are picture books and fables. The mean usefulness score for picture books was 4.45 ($Mdn=5$); the mean usefulness score for fables was 4.22 ($Mdn=4$). Although all of the story types that participants were

asked to consider were rated highly in terms of how *useful* they are for teaching character education, picture books and fables stood out as the story types valued most of all – and consistently – by teachers across EYFS up to KS2. The two main reasons for the high value attributed to picture books and fables are that these story types are simple to understand and can engage pupils' attention. Some interviewees explained that these factors made teaching character education more straightforward.

4. Lower School teachers and Upper School teachers tend to differ in their perceptions of how useful biographical accounts and fairy tales are for teaching character education.

Upper School and Lower School teachers expressed some contrasting views. Within the teacher survey and teacher interviews, fairy tales were favourably regarded by Lower School teachers ($M=4.20$; $Mdn=4.0$), but significantly ($p<.001$) less so by Upper School teachers ($M=3.65$; $Mdn=4.0$). While some Lower School teachers suggested that pupils' enjoy fairy tales and that their simplicity aids pupils' understanding, some Upper School teachers described the nature of fairy tales as unsuitable for character education. In both the surveys and interviews, the value of biographical accounts was rated higher by Upper School teachers ($M=3.91$; $Mdn=4.0$) than Lower School teachers ($M=3.65$; $Mdn=4.0$). Although some Upper School teachers described the potential power of teaching character education using real-life biographical accounts, other interviewees – including teachers from the Upper School and Lower School – considered biographical accounts as least useful for teaching character education. The difficulty that some pupils have in understanding and relating to others' lives was cited as the main reason for this view.

5. The two phases of the research study revealed inconsistencies in how religious stories are valued for teaching character education. Despite the high ratings of the usefulness of religious stories in the teacher survey ($M=4.09$; $Mdn=4.0$), the teacher interviews highlighted some conflicting views, with interviewees describing religious stories as the least useful out of the story types provided. The difficulty that pupils may have in understanding the contexts of religious stories and relating to these were described as the main reasons for interviewees' responses. A preference for using non-religious stories was expressed.

6. Shorter and more simplistic stories, such as those contained in picture books and fables, are preferred for teaching character education. In the teacher survey, respondents highly rated the usefulness of picture books ($M=4.45$; $Mdn=5$) and fables ($M=4.22$; $Mdn=4$) for teaching character education and these story types were reported to be used by the highest proportions of respondents (78.6% for picture books and 62.6% for fables). In the teacher interviews, interviewees corroborated this finding, and explained that shorter and simpler stories were preferred for practical reasons – for example, because the attention of pupils can be sustained and a short story can be read and then expanded on, using the story as the basis for an activity or discussion.

7. Primary school teachers consider the age of the main character(s) in a story to be an important factor that can affect how useful a story is for teaching character education. The combination of responses to the teacher survey and elaborated responses provided in the teacher interviews revealed that the age of characters was considered to be an important factor by teachers across EYFS-KS2. 46.4% of respondents to the teacher survey indicated that story characters with a similar age to pupils would be most useful for teaching character education. In the teacher interviews, the majority of interviewees suggested that the age of main characters affects whether pupils are able to relate to the story. Stories in which characters are of a similar age to the pupils being taught are considered to be most useful for teaching character education.

8. Similarities between the story setting, theme or context and pupils' own lives/experiences is considered to be a vital factor for determining whether or not a story is useful for teaching character education. In the teacher survey, respondents expressed different perceptions regarding whether features of stories – such as the appearance of characters, or type of story setting – affected the usefulness of the story for teaching character education. However, the teacher interviews revealed a general view that, as long as pupils are able to make one connection to the story, for example sharing a similar experience to the main character or noticing a similarity in the story setting or context to their own lives, then the story can be useful for teaching character education. Similarities in experiences and/or context are considered to be more important than similarities in

characters' form or physical appearance.

Primary School Teachers' Approaches to Story-Based Character Education

9. The majority of primary school teachers intentionally use stories for teaching character education, and on a regular basis. 97.6% of respondents to the teacher survey reported using stories for the purpose of character education, and the majority of those who used stories to teach character education (87.9%) reported doing so intentionally.

10. Both the proportion of primary school teachers who intentionally teach story-based character education, and the frequency of teaching, differs according to the age of the pupils being taught. A significantly higher proportion of Lower School (97.4%) respondents than Upper School respondents (79.6%) intentionally choose and use stories to teach character education ($p < .001$). Overall, the majority of respondents reported teaching story-based character education at least once a week. However, the frequency with which Lower School teachers reported teaching story-based character education was noticeably higher than Upper School teachers. For example, 40.5% of Lower School respondents said that they teach about "good" character using stories at least once every few days; whereas 19.4% of Upper School respondents said that they teach about "good" character using stories at least once every few days.

11. Story-based character education is both integrated into subject lessons and taught in standalone lessons/assemblies, often in response to pupils' emerging personal and social needs. Interviewees explained that the main subject areas in which story-based character education is integrated are English and PSHE (or equivalent) lessons. Standalone lessons and assemblies are also used to teach story-based character education; interviewees explained that through these lessons they could address pupils' emerging needs and teach about character strengths that are deemed relevant for pupils at the time.

12. Picture books and fables are the story types used most to teach character education in primary schools. Picture books (78.6%), fables (62.6%) and religious stories (59.3%) are

reported to be used by most respondents to the teacher survey. Folklore (24.2%), biographical accounts (34.6) and popular fiction (35.7) are used by fewest respondents.

13. The story types used to teach character education varies dependant on the age group being taught. The teacher survey revealed that Lower School teachers mostly use picture books (92.1%), fairy tales (67.1%), fables (50.0%) and religious stories (50.0%), whereas Upper School teachers mostly use fables (69.2%), picture books (65.4%) and stories from history (65.4%). The story types used by under 20% of Lower School teachers are biographical accounts (17.1%), myths and legends (17.1%) and folklore (18.4%). Folklore is reported to be used by fewest Upper School teachers (28.2%) – all other story types are used by more than 40% of Upper School teachers.

14. Teachers play a facilitatory role in supporting pupils' learning from stories and use reading-related activities to reinforce or emphasise the meaning of stories. Responses to the teacher survey indicate that the majority of primary school teachers use reading-related activities associated with the meaning of the story. 97.8% of respondents indicated that they help pupils to relate story meaning to their own lives. 90.0% of survey respondents reported using reading-related activities, and 92.0% of these respondents indicated that they do so to reinforce pupils' understanding of story meaning.

15. Teachers utilise a number of teaching and learning strategies to check and support pupils' understanding. The data collected by the teacher survey and teacher interviews suggests that teachers predominantly use questioning and discussion, and reinforcement through other reading-related activities such as drama or role play in order to check pupils' understanding and to guide pupils to understand story themes/messages. Teachers support pupils to reflect on characters' thoughts and feelings; identify, describe and discuss the problems faced by characters; and, relate story events to their own lives.

16. Story-based character education approaches are mostly influenced by training, school experience and the curriculum. Training, school experience and personal experience were described as the main influences on teachers' approaches to story-based character education. However, only 27.3% of respondents reported receiving training specifically on using stories to teach character education. For many interviewees, time constrictions caused

by curriculum demands and requirements are thought to impede the teaching of story-based character education.

CHAPTER SIX: INTERPRETATION AND DISCUSSION

1. Introduction

The review of the literature contained within Chapter Two and Chapter Three of this thesis revealed that although there is, and has been, much interest in the use of stories as a vehicle for teaching character education within a primary school context, the perceptions and approaches of primary school teachers in England have remained unexplored. Within this chapter, the main findings of the research study which aimed to fill this lacuna in the character education literature are interpreted and discussed. The chapter is broken down into three main sections. First, some of the limitations of the research study are outlined, and important clarifications are made regarding the generalisability of the research findings. Second and third, the main research findings relating to primary school teachers' perceptions and approaches are discussed and deliberated. The discussion of the findings is guided by the research questions and the findings are interpreted with the main limitations in mind. The discussion of primary school teachers' perceptions centres on the value attributed to stories, and the types and features of stories thought to influence pupils' learning; the discussion of primary school teachers' approaches centres on the teaching and learning strategies employed by primary school teachers when teaching story-based character education.

2. Limitations and Generalisability

The main strengths and limitations of the methodology were outlined in Chapter Four when discussing the research design and research instruments employed in this study. However, it is important to consider how limitations of the sampling and research methods might affect the generalisability of the data prior to interpretation of the findings.

The main sampling limitations concern the overall sample size ($N=220$) and the sample population drawn on for the teacher interviews in strand two of the research study. In total,

two hundred and twenty primary school teachers participated in the research study. The survey responses of all two hundred and twenty participants were analysed and fifteen participants, each of whom had completed the survey, also participated in semi-structured interviews. As was noted in Chapter Four, the population of primary school teachers in England is large and widely dispersed; at the time of data collection (November 2020 – August 2021) it is reported that 222,519 teachers worked in English primary schools and nurseries (DfE, 2021b).

The generalisability of research findings is considered to be a 'direct function' of their representativeness (Mrug, 2010, p. 1477). Although the use of randomised cluster sampling helped to ensure that the participant sample was broadly representative of the primary school teacher population – for example, 85.9% of the sample were female and 14.9% were male, in-keeping with figures in the UK primary school workforce (82.4% female; 17.6% male) (BESA, 2021) – caution must still be taken when generalising the findings to the wider population given the small sample size (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018). Furthermore, the sample was not large enough to reliably compare participant responses from each key stage (EYFS, KS1, LKS2, UKS2) (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018; Robson and McCartan, 2011). To enable comparisons to be made specifically between teachers of younger primary school children and teachers of older primary school children, participants were grouped into 'Lower School' teachers (teachers of children aged two to seven) and 'Upper School' teachers (teachers of children aged eight to eleven). This grouping ensured that there were adequate group sizes for comparison. Future research with a larger number of primary school teacher participants will be needed to enable comparisons to reliably be made between teachers of children in each of the primary school key stages (EYFS, KS1, LKS2, UKS2), and to compare other groups of teachers, for example those with differing levels of experience.

Although the number of interviewees was sufficient for achieving adequate code saturation (Guest, Bunce and Johnson, 2006; Hennink, Kaiser and Marcon, 2017), it is also important to consider the generalisability of the interview data. As was reported in Chapter Four, all interviewees had at least five years of teaching experience – most (66.7%) with between ten

and twenty years of teaching experience. In addition, all interviewees reported using stories to teach character education, and it is likely that their interest in the topic area acted as partial motivation for their participation in the interviews. To gain greater insight into the perceptions and approaches of primary school teachers in England, it will be important for any future research to also collect qualitative data from primary school teachers who are (a) relatively inexperienced, and (b) primary school teachers who do not use stories to teach story-based character education.

One of the other main limitations of the research resides in the self-report nature of the methods of data collection. Self-report surveys and semi-structured interviews were utilised to collect data on teachers' perceptions and approaches. The potential for social desirability and response biases to influence the validity of data, as well as the steps that were taken to minimise these, have already been discussed at length in Chapter Four. However, it is important to also note the potential for self-perception biases to influence the validity of data when using self-report methods. Self-perception biases are where participants give responses based on idealised or inaccurate self-perceptions which are therefore not a true reflection of their actions or behaviours (Gillham, 2005; Mrug, 2010). While participants' *perceptions* of the value of story-based character education may not be considerably influenced by self-perception biases, the reported *practice* (i.e. primary school teachers' self-reported approaches) of story-based character education may be affected. The exclusive use of self-report methods within the research study means that the potential influence of self-perception biases cannot be overlooked.

The limitations described above may affect the generalisability of the research findings to the wider population of primary school teachers, and caution must therefore be taken when interpreting the findings. However, the insight into primary school teachers' perceptions and approaches gained through the research study should not be underestimated. The research has extended existing knowledge in the field through studying an area that has been under researched. The research not only provides insight into how primary school teachers value and use stories as a vehicle to teach character education, but provides a useful platform on which to replicate and extend research in this area.

3. Primary School Teachers' Perceptions of Stories as a Vehicle for Teaching Character Education

RQ1 How and to what extent do primary school teachers in England *value* stories as a vehicle for teaching character education?

The review of historical and contemporary literature in Chapter Two and Chapter Three demonstrated how stories have long been valued as a useful and powerful vehicle through which to build character and teach about character virtues. The way in which Lower School teachers and Upper School teachers value stories for teaching character education was a key focus of the research study. Despite the existence of other potential methods of teaching character education, for example through direct instruction, or the use of poetry (e.g. Guttesen, 2022) and film, primary school teachers share in the longstanding belief that stories are highly useful and important resources – if not *the* most useful and important resources – for teaching about character and virtues in schools.

Potential differences in the way in which teachers of different primary school age groups value stories for teaching character education was a key interest of the research study. There is arguably more emphasis on the use of stories in the EYFS and KS1 curriculums than in KS2, and more opportunity to teach story-based character education in Lower School classrooms. Indeed, the findings of the teacher survey indicate that Lower School teachers are more likely to *intentionally* teach character education using stories (see Table 5.9), and do so more frequently than Upper School teachers (see Appendix H). Due to their more frequent use, it was anticipated that Lower School teachers would attribute more value to stories for the purpose of teaching character education in the classroom. Surprisingly, however, Lower School teachers rated the value of stories for teaching character education only minimally higher than Upper School teachers and there was no significant difference between the two groups (Lower School teachers $M=27.18$, $Mdn=29.0$; Upper School teachers $M=26.60$, $Mdn=28.0$; $p=.410$). Upper School teachers appear to consider stories equally as useful and important to teach character education, even though they may not do this as frequently in their classrooms.

RQ1a Why do primary school teachers value stories as a vehicle for teaching character education?

To be able to better understand how and to what extent primary school teachers value stories for teaching character education, it was important to collect data that enabled an understanding of the reasons *why* stories are valued in this way. The teacher survey and interviews provided this insight and highlighted some differences in the reasons why Lower School teachers *and* Upper School teachers highly value stories for teaching character education.

The findings suggest that there are a multitude of reasons why primary school teachers perceive stories to be beneficial for teaching character education. As can be seen in Table 5.2 and the key themes evident through the interviews, there were a number of reasons given by participants as to why stories are used as a vehicle for teaching character education. All seven of the set response options to question twenty-one were selected by at least 35.7% of respondents, and five of the seven response options were selected by over 80.0% of respondents. There appears to be no one stand-out reason as to why stories are used for teaching character education. The high response frequencies indicate that it is the variety of uses and the multiple effects that stories are perceived to have on pupils which makes them such a highly regarded resource for teaching character education in primary school.

From the findings, it is possible to discern three main reasons why stories are valued so highly as a vehicle for teaching character education in primary schools. First, stories provide unique insight for pupils. Second, stories provide pupils with a safe space to learn and reflect on their own lives. Third, stories are enjoyable, engaging and entertaining. Each main reason will be discussed in turn below.

Stories Provide Unique Insight for Pupils

The first main reason why stories are valued so highly as a vehicle for teaching character education in primary schools is that stories are thought to provide unique examples and insight for pupils. Although it might be argued that similar insight can be achieved through engaging with plays, films or poetry (Guttesen, 2022), interviewees were asked specifically

about the usefulness of stories for teaching character education in comparison to other potential methods (see Appendix E), and stories were highlighted as the most useful resource available to primary school teachers. There were multiple findings from the survey and interview data which can be seen to support the view that stories provide unique insight. In the teacher survey, 91.2% of respondents selected 'stories provide insight into characters' thoughts and feelings' as a reason for using stories to teach character education; and, 83.5% selected 'stories often provide good examples'. Examples were also indirectly indicated in respondents' selection of 'stories are a gateway to discussion'. 94.5% of respondents selected this reason. The word 'gateway' suggests that there is something, such as a theme, event or character in a story, that leads to further discussion; it was also evident from the teacher interview data that it is the *examples* and *insight* that stories provide which are perceived to make them useful for discussion: interviewees' descriptions of their approaches indicated that pupils' discussions would be based on story characters' actions – for example whether the characters' actions were right or wrong, or what characters' motivations were. While the strategy of discussion will be discussed later, it is important to note that the utility of stories in providing examples and topics for subsequent discussion appears to be an important reason why stories are perceived to be useful for teaching character education: out of all of the response options for question twenty-one, this reason was selected by the highest proportion of all respondents (94.5%), Lower School (92.1%) and Upper School (96.2%) teachers (see Table 5.2).

The insight afforded to pupils through reading and engaging with stories is an important contributor to their perceived value. Meek (2011) notes how, through the recruitment of children's imaginations, storytellers are able to present '...the familiar in a new guise' or '...[make] a 'logical' extension of the real' (p.14). Access to characters' internal states and the opportunity for pupils to engage with and understand characters' thoughts, feelings and motivations is a feature of stories that extends children's access beyond what may be possible in real-life contexts (Bohlin, 2005; Willows, 2017). Furthermore, it is suggested that readers benefit from being able to compassionately engage with characters (D'Olimpio and Peterson, 2018), and hone moral judgement (Carroll, 2000). Primary school teachers appear to acknowledge and value the unique experience and access that stories can provide. In the

teacher interviews, interviewees commonly mentioned how stories provide pupils with new experiences and that, through a story, pupils can experience an event or feeling that they may not otherwise experience or have access to. The example given by P115 of pupils being able to understand and experience through a story what it might feel like to be bullied illustrates this perception; teachers appear to value stories because they widen pupils' vision and enable pupils to experience scenarios in a unique way. The *uniqueness* of experiences provided through stories was also indicated in the survey responses: the high percentage (91.2%) of respondents who selected 'stories provide insight into characters' thoughts and feelings' when asked why they use stories to teach character education, indicates that access to the thoughts, feelings and motivations of story characters is considered to be an important feature.

Interestingly, a significantly higher proportion of Upper School teachers (96.2%) than Lower School teachers (84.2%) selected 'stories provide insight into characters' thoughts and feelings' ($p=.012$). This finding suggests that access to characters' internal states is a feature that is valued by more teachers of older primary school pupils. It would be reasonable to suggest that the books used in Upper School classrooms are more likely than those in Lower School classrooms to provide detailed insight into characters' thoughts, feelings and motivations. However, despite the existence of a significant difference in Lower School and Upper School teachers' responses to this question, the proportion of Lower School teachers (84.2%) who selected this reason was still very high, indicating that access to characters' thoughts and feelings is also an important consideration of Lower School teachers.

The relevance of the examples provided in stories also appears to be a feature highly valued by primary school teachers. While the teacher survey data indicated that stories are valued because of the "good" examples they provide, it was necessary to draw on teacher interview data for specificity on this point. In the teacher survey, 83.5% of respondents selected 'stories often provide good examples' as a reason for using stories to teach character education. However, on reflection, the phrasing used in this set response option was ambiguous and could have been interpreted in multiple ways by participants. To illustrate, some participants may have interpreted this as 'stories and story characters are "good"

examples for pupils' – whereby characters are viewed as exemplars of “good” character or set examples of expected behaviour; others may have interpreted this response option as ‘stories contain “good” examples of events or topics’ – i.e. those events or topics that are relevant and useful to focus on with primary school-age children. The analysis of the teacher interview data appears to offer clarification on this uncertainty. It was the *relevance* of the events and topics in stories which featured prominently within the teacher interviews: stories are valued because they often contain themes that are relevant to pupils’ lives and match pupils’ emerging social and emotional needs. As can be seen from the interview quotations used as examples within Chapter Five, some interviewees explained how they select stories depending on pupils’ needs and the “moral and social themes” (P201) that are relevant or may need addressing. Interviewees often referred to stories providing *examples* and *prompts* that could be related to pupils’ lives.

Surprisingly, the potential for story characters to be exemplars or set examples for pupils was not mentioned by interviewees. Stories and their characters are thought to provide examples of how to and how not to act and illustrate the consequences of vice and virtue (Carr and Harrison, 2015; MacIntyre, 1981). Furthermore, it is the role of characters as exemplars which Willows (2017) suggests can benefit readers; story characters can be the middle ground between *actual* and *hypothetical* exemplars and have the potential to be more attainable, relatable and realistic than other exemplars held up to pupils for emulation. Willows suggests that it is the ‘access to the internal states of virtuous agents’ (p. 337) that benefits readers. Despite Willows’ (2017) suggestion, primary school teachers do not appear to acknowledge the potential role of story characters as exemplars. The lack of acknowledgement may be due, in part, to the finding that primary school teachers prefer to use shorter and more simplistic stories to teach character education. For many teachers, the motivation for using stories to teach character education stems from a perceived need to address emerging issues in the classroom and to set expectations for behaviour. Interviewees explained how shorter and more simplistic stories provide examples that can be quickly read and then used as prompts for discussion and reflection. While shorter and more simplistic stories may be useful for introducing pertinent topics and setting expectations for behaviour, the depth and detail of story plot and characters can be limited

in short stories. It is possible that primary school teachers' tendency to use shorter and more simplistic stories may limit pupils' exposure to detailed fictional exemplars and limit the insight into characters' internal states.

Another common perception which became apparent through analysis of the teacher interview data was that stories are valued because they enable pupils to 'see and understand abstract concepts'. In the teacher interviews, interviewees discussed how, instead of telling pupils about a quality or virtue, they can use a story to *show* pupils instead. Interviewees described how pupils can face difficulty in understanding abstract concepts such as morals, feelings and emotions, and suggested that stories help to contextualise these for pupils. In this way, stories are thought to aid pupils' understanding by presenting abstract concepts in recognisable and relatable examples. This perception is also evident in the literature which was reviewed in Chapter Two and Chapter Three. Gould (1906; 1913), recognising that concrete examples help to sustain children's engagement and to see and understand abstract concepts, insisted that children should be provided with concrete illustrations, such as those provided in the form of biographical stories, folklore and classical and religious literature. Contemporary research exploring the role of stories in supporting children's understanding of virtues also highlights how stories support pupils' understanding of abstract concepts. Arthur *et al.* (2014) and Hart, Oliveira and Pike (2020) explain that stories help pupils to understand abstract concepts and suggest that pupils' understanding can be further supported by encouraging reflection on the applicability and relevance of fictional depictions to real-life contexts – an approach utilised by primary school teachers which will be further discussed later in this chapter. The longstanding perception cited in Gould's publications – that stories help children to "see" and better understand abstract concepts – appears to also be shared by primary school teachers and demonstrated in practice through their reported approaches.

Stories Provide Pupils with a Safe Space to Learn and Reflect on Their Own Lives

The second main reason why stories are valued so highly as a vehicle for teaching character education in primary schools is that stories provide pupils with a safe space to learn and in which to safely reflect on their own lives. In the teacher survey, 92.9% of respondents

indicated that they use stories to teach character education because ‘stories provide pupils with a safe space to learn’ (see Table 5.2). This survey response option was included because this was a common perception expressed within the reviewed literature (e.g. Arthur *et al.*, 2017b; Carroll, 2000; Guroian, 1998; Kidd and Castano, 2013; Kilpatrick, Wolfe and Wolfe, 1994; Nussbaum, 2001; Willows, 2017). The high proportion of respondents selecting this reason indicates that primary school teachers share in this perception. However, nuance in primary school teachers’ perceptions – which will be discussed below – became evident through the teacher interviews.

Despite there being no significant difference between how Lower School teachers and Upper School teachers selected this response option in the teacher survey, in the teacher interviews it was only Upper School teachers who referred to stories providing a “safe” context in which pupils can reflect on their own lives, behaviours and experiences. While one Lower School teacher (P3) did describe how it was easier for pupils to unpick morals evident in stories before encouraging pupils to reflect on their own behaviours, this interviewee appeared to be referring to the difficulty that they believed their young pupils have in reflecting on their own behaviours first: the interviewee suggested that by unpicking a moral in a story, pupils are able to better understand the moral and then be able to relate their own behaviours and experiences to this. Conversely, Upper School teachers described how their pupils may be reluctant to discuss their own behaviours – especially if the purpose of reading the story is to help to address a social or behavioural issue that has emerged in the classroom. It was suggested by Upper School interviewees that, through a story, pupils are able to “distance themselves” (P152) when discussing characters’ behaviours and “invest in a safe way” (P115), but are able to see a behaviour change in a character which is relevant to them. The apparent difference between Lower School and Upper School teachers in the emphasis placed on the provision of a safe context for their pupils may be due to perceived differences in pupils’ needs. It is possible that Lower School children are perceived to be less self-conscious about focusing on and discussing their own behaviour. However, as children get older, they may be less open to discussing their own behaviour openly. In Upper School classrooms, stories appear to be perceived as a useful alternative for discussion and reflection with peers.

Interestingly, despite the common perception that stories provide a safe space, there is an important difference between the perceptions expressed within the literature and the perceptions of primary school teachers reported in the research study. Within the existing literature (Arthur *et al.*, 2017b; Carroll, 2000; Guroian, 1998; Kidd and Castano, 2013; Kilpatrick, Wolfe and Wolfe, 1994; Nussbaum, 2001; Willows, 2017) stories have been said to provide *safety* or a *safe space* for pupils to reflect on and mentally rehearse characters' actions without the real-life consequences of those actions. The emphasis is placed on the way that readers can use stories as a "safe" context to hone and refine their moral judgement. In contrast, interviewees discussed safety for pupils in terms of pupils being able to discuss and reflect on virtues and behaviours without publicly discussing their own potential shortcomings. Primary school teachers appear to value story contexts as a safe vehicle for reflection as opposed to as a safe space to consider alternative courses of action and to exercise moral judgement without consequence.

Stories are Enjoyable, Entertaining and Engaging

The third main reason why stories are valued so highly as a vehicle for teaching character education in primary schools is that stories are enjoyable to read and listen to, are entertaining, and engaging as a result. In the teacher survey, 84.1% of respondents selected 'stories are entertaining and enjoyable' when asked why they use stories to teach character education, and a substantial but considerably lower proportion of respondents (62.6%) selected 'story illustrations help to keep children engaged' (see Table 5.2). Pupils' enjoyment and entertainment was also a core theme evident in the interviews, and the way in which stories capture and hold the attention of pupils was highlighted. The findings suggest that primary school teachers are motivated to use stories for teaching character education at least in part because they recognise that stories are enjoyed by pupils, and that pupils' attention is captured and sustained when reading stories.

There have been various influences on the style and content of stories used to teach forms of character education since the eighteenth century, and the extent to which the entertainment and enjoyment of readers has been a priority of authors and educators has also varied. Unlike twenty-first century stories written for children, the entertainment of

readers was not a primary consideration in the early eighteenth century; in the early eighteenth century, stories characteristically emphasised the consequences of vice and the punishments awaiting children who sinned (Arthur, 2020). However, as the review of historical literature in Chapter Two attests, there were some early attempts to teach through both instruction and amusement (e.g. Newbery, 1770). Over time, the emphasis placed on entertainment increased and stories written for children still aimed to teach moral lessons, but through more engaging fictional contexts. Despite some fluctuation in the perception of fiction in the nineteenth century, there appears to have been a growing consensus by the late nineteenth century onwards that more imaginative and engaging fiction stories can be used to teach about character and virtue. The research study findings strongly indicate that current primary school teachers share in this perception and attribute high value to pupils' entertainment and enjoyment when aiming to teach character education through stories.

It is worth noting that Lower School teachers and Upper School teachers differed in the emphasis placed on using stories to engage pupils and hold their attention. The proportion of Lower School teachers (71.1%) and Upper School teachers (53.8%) who selected 'illustrations help to keep children engaged' significantly differed ($p=.012$). This finding may be reflective of the perceived needs of children at different ages; visual stimuli may help to engage younger children whose attention spans may be lower than their older peers'. Similarly, although interviewees from both the Lower School and Upper School explained how stories provide an effective "hook" for pupils, Lower School teachers emphasised that stories were especially important for capturing younger children's attention. When discussing the usefulness of picture books within the teacher interviews, interviewees explained that pupils engage more with picture books and that this is particularly relevant for younger children; teachers can sustain pupils' attention when teaching using picture books, and this was perceived to make teaching more effective. Combined, these findings indicate that pupils' entertainment and enjoyment during story-based character education is regarded as a factor influencing the efficacy of character education, and that Lower School teachers, in particular, highly value stories because of their ability to entertain pupils.

RQ1b Are there different story *types* that are perceived to be more useful for teaching character education?

The findings of the teacher survey indicate that primary school teachers consider *all* story types included in the survey to be at least moderately useful for teaching character education. The usefulness ratings differed significantly ($p < .000$) to hypothesised rating scores, and the mean of each was above 3.69 out of a possible maximum score of 5.0. Given the high scores, it is possible that primary school teachers consider all story types to be equally as useful. Indeed, the difficulty that two interviewees had in selecting *most* and *least* useful story types supports this idea. However, the analysis of the survey data revealed significant differences between the ratings of different story types, and significant differences between Lower School and Upper School teachers' ratings of different story types (see Table 5.4). The teacher interview data corroborated these findings. Overall, the findings suggest that: one, there is a general perception among primary school teachers that there *are* certain story types that are more useful than others for teaching character education; and two, that there *are* differences in the way that Lower School teachers perceive the usefulness of certain story types compared to Upper School teachers. The main findings are discussed and interpreted below.

Picture Books and Fables are the Most Highly Valued Story Types for Teaching Character Education

The story types which stood out from the data as being considered the most useful for teaching character education were picture books and fables. Picture books were rated significantly higher for usefulness than seven of the nine other story types, and fables were rated significantly higher than six of the nine other story types. When asked to indicate which story types they used to teach story-based character education, picture books and fables were selected by the highest proportions of respondents (see Table 5.13). Picture books and fables also stood out in the interviews as the story types perceived to be *most useful* for teaching character education by interviewees. Overall, the trends in the survey and interview data strongly indicate that picture books are considered to be the most useful story type for teaching character education in primary school, with fables in close second place.

Picture books were rated highest for usefulness by all respondents ($M=4.45$), and by Lower School teachers ($M=4.62$) and Upper School teachers ($M=4.32$). Primary school teachers appear to share in the perspective of Helterbran (2009) that the visual imagery in picture books aids pupils' understanding of fictional experiences. While there is no equal substitute to real-life experience when it comes to character-forming experiences, Helterbran (2009) suggests that the images contained within picture books provide a helpful *simulation* of real-life experience. Interviewees described how pupils engage more with picture books and how being able to see the story in front of them enables pupils to better access and understand the story and its content. The ability of picture books to engage the attention of pupils was also given as one of the main reasons for the high value attributed to them by both Lower School and Upper School teachers in the teacher interviews.

Interestingly, despite the high ratings, there was a significant difference ($p=.002$) in how Lower School teachers and Upper School teachers rated the usefulness of picture books, with the higher mean rating by Lower School teachers. The difference may be attributed to the perceived benefit of illustrations in books for younger children. As noted earlier, a significantly ($p=.012$) higher proportion of Lower School teachers (71.1%) than Upper School teachers (53.8%) use stories to teach character education because 'illustrations help to keep children engaged'. Helterbran (2009) also points to the essential importance of using books which captivate younger readers; picture books are naturally full of illustrations, and Lower School teachers may rate the usefulness of picture books for teaching character education higher due to the visual stimulus that picture books provide their pupils.

The other main reason given for the high value attributed to picture books was their simplicity, and this was also the main reason given for the high value attributed to fables. Interviewees explained how it is the simplicity of short stories which enables pupils to access and understand the story content. When discussing fables specifically, interviewees explained that fables contain clear morals which they believe can be easily discerned by pupils. Interviewees also pointed to the effect of the resolution or ending of fables on pupils, suggesting that a cognitive response is triggered in pupils when the moral becomes evident.

On the surface, it stands to reason that simplistic story plots, such as those characteristic of fables, would be easier for pupils to understand and learn from. The removal of confusing plot features has been seen to aid moral theme comprehension in children of younger primary school ages (Mares and Acosta, 2008); simplistic plots are likely to place less cognitive demand on readers and may be easier to comprehend as a result. However, as the discussion of factors influencing children's learning from stories in Chapter Three highlighted, young children find the abstraction of story themes challenging (Lehr, 1988; Mares and Acosta, 2008; Narvaez *et al.*, 1998; 1999; Whitney, Vozzola and Hofmann, 2005) and there are other story features which are characteristic of fables, such as anthropomorphism, that have the potential to be further detrimental to children's learning from stories. For example, some of the research studies discussed in Chapter Three indicate that anthropomorphism can negatively affect comprehension of story themes and transfer of learning to real-life contexts (e.g. Kotaman and Balci, 2017; Strouse, Nyhout and Ganea, 2018). While caution must be taken when interpreting the research study findings in isolation, the apparent contrast between teachers' perceptions and the implications of previous research findings raises some important questions for character educators to consider and for researchers to test empirically in future studies. It is also important to note that some story factors seen to be detrimental to children's learning and transfer may be mediated by teacher intervention: as will be discussed later in this chapter when considering primary school teachers' approaches to story-based character education, it is possible to facilitate moral comprehension through questioning and explanation prompts (Mares and Acosta, 2010; Walker and Lombrozo, 2017). It is therefore also important to consider the role and influence of teacher's *approaches* to story-based character education and how learning may be facilitated through teaching and learning strategies.

Shorter and More Simplistic Stories are Perceived to be More Useful for Teaching Character Education

The prominence with which short story types such as picture books and fables were discussed by interviewees and the high value attributed to these story types indicates that primary school teachers assign most value to shorter and more simplistic stories for teaching character education. Picture books and fables were also reported to be used by the highest

proportions of respondents (78.6% for picture books and 62.6%, for fables, see Table 5.13). Interviewees explained how shorter and more simplistic stories – those that are “short and sweet” (P115, LKS2 teacher) – are considered more useful for teaching character education. There therefore appears to be a functional reason underpinning the high value attributed to picture books and fables which will be further deliberated when discussing the apparent reactive nature of story-based character education later in this chapter. Teachers have limited time within the curriculum to teach character education; the attention of pupils is more likely to be sustained when reading shorter stories; and short stories allow time for story content to be quickly discussed or expanded on using a reading-related activity. Although it would not be unexpected for teachers of younger children in the Lower School to utilise short stories, such as picture books and fables, the finding that Upper School teachers also attribute higher value to short stories, and prefer to use short stories to teach character education for similar reasons is somewhat surprising considering the promotion of longer and more complex stories within historical and contemporary literature on story-based character education.

While shorter and more simplistic stories such as fables have long been used to influence character and teach morals in England (Lerer, 2008; Tandy, 1998), it is longer and more complex stories such as classic stories, biblical stories and Greek narratives that were advocated in planned and structured approaches in the early twentieth century (e.g. Adler, 1906; Gould, 1906; 1913). While considered useful for highlighting and developing pupils’ initial understanding of moral qualities in isolation, fables have featured more as a formative part of a progressive approach, wherein their use might precede more complex stories which contain the same moral qualities, but which also involve multiple other moral qualities in more complex plots (e.g. see Adler, 1906). In this way, short stories have been seen to provide the foundations of knowledge which are then built on by more complex stories. Lower School and Upper School teachers’ perceptions of the value of shorter stories, combined with the relative proportions of primary school teachers who report using shorter stories seen in Table 5.13 (such as picture books and fables) compared to longer and more complex stories (such as classic stories, religious stories and myths and legends) suggests

that primary school teachers assign greater value to shorter and more simplistic stories for teaching character education.

The types of stories valued most by primary school teachers also appear to be in contrast with the types and features of stories advocated as part of some contemporary character education approaches. Despite Carr's (2022) more recent suggestions that the most morally influential stories are "thin" fables and parables, most contemporary character education approaches (e.g. Arthur *et al.*, 2014; Carr and Harrison, 2015; Francis *et al.*, 2018; Hart, Oliveira and Pike, 2020) promote rich imaginative and classic literature, including works from literary greats such as Cervantes and Shakespeare as the main vehicles through which educators can teach about character and virtue. There could be many possible reasons underpinning primary school teachers' tendency to value and use shorter stories over longer and more complex stories, such as classic stories which have stood the test of time. Primary school teachers' tendencies could indicate that they are unaware of the potentially valuable opportunities that engaging with more complex classic stories might provide. Alternatively, this could indicate that – in practice – it is short stories that primary school teachers find most useful for conveying an underlying moral lesson or promoting a certain prosocial behaviour; for example by being less distracting in comparison to the "thick" detail provided in longer narratives (Carr, 2022). Other influences on primary school teachers' perceptions and choices might include the age of the children taught in primary school classrooms and the time constraints that interviewees mentioned when discussing barriers to teaching character education.

Certain Story Types are Valued Differently by Lower School Teachers and Upper School Teachers for Teaching Character Education

The findings of the teacher survey and interviews indicate that Lower School teachers and Upper School teachers differ in the value they attribute to fairy tales and biographical accounts for teaching character education. Analysis of the teacher survey data revealed a significant difference ($p < .001$) in the way in which Lower School teachers ($M=4.20$) and Upper School teachers ($M=3.65$) rated the usefulness of fairy tales. Correspondingly, a significantly higher proportion of Lower School teachers (67.1%) than Upper School teachers

(44.9%) reported using fairy tales to teach character education ($p=.005$) (see Table 5.13). In the teacher interviews, Lower School teachers offered reasons similar to those given for picture books and fables for why they highly value fairy tales: fairy tales are enjoyed by pupils, are simple to follow, and provide examples that young pupils can understand. Furthermore, interviewees suggested that clear distinctions between right and wrong are often made in fairy tales and they consider this advantageous to teaching character education in Lower School classrooms. The high value attributed to fairy tales by Lower School teachers reflects a longstanding theme evident within the character education literature. Fairy tales were advocated by Adler (1906) and are the primary focus of the later works of Guroian (1996; 1998) – both of whom believed that fairy tales can stimulate young children’s moral imaginations and provide them with vicarious experiences.

Differences between Lower School teachers and Upper School teachers were also observed for perceptions of biographical accounts. The mean rating score for the usefulness of biographical accounts was 3.65 for Lower School teachers and 3.91 for Upper School teachers. The difference between the rating scores for Lower School and Upper School teachers was not statistically significant ($p=.080$). However, there was a significant difference between the proportion of Lower School teachers and Upper School teachers who reported using biographical accounts to teach character education ($p<.001$): almost half (48.7%) of Upper School teacher respondents reported using biographical accounts, whereas only 17.1% of Lower School teachers reported the same (see Table 5.13). Similarly, within the teacher interviews it was only Upper School teachers who suggested that biographical accounts were some of the most useful story types. In the teacher interviews, two Upper School interviewees who suggested that biographical accounts were some of the *most useful* story types explained that hearing about others’ lives can have a “powerful” (P219) “hard-hitting” (P115) effect on their pupils. It may be that the observed difference between Lower School teachers and Upper School teachers is due to the perceived maturity of pupils in teachers’ classrooms and/or the perceived ability of pupils to understand the relevance of others’ lives and actions.

It must be noted that, in comparison to other story types, the value attributed to biographical accounts was relatively low: the mean usefulness rating score for all respondents was 3.86, which was the eighth highest mean rating score out of the ten story types in the survey (see Table 5.3). Furthermore, within the interviews, biographical accounts were more commonly selected as *least useful* for teaching character education. The main reasons given for the low rating scores for biographical accounts relative to other story types related to the perceived difficulty that pupils face in understanding and relating to another person's life. In the teacher interviews, primary school teachers explained that fictional story characters and settings often share some similarities with pupils. It was suggested that one similarity, such as the sharing of a similar interest or experience, would be enough for pupils to be able to relate to the story. It is possible that the lives of real-life individuals depicted in biographical accounts are perceived by teachers to be less relevant and applicable to pupils in comparison to fictional alternatives; biographical accounts may be based on individuals in unfamiliar settings, at a different time in history, or based on events perceived to be too far removed from pupils' lives.

There is Uncertainty Regarding the Value of Religious Stories for Teaching Character Education

There was incongruence in the findings regarding how religious stories are valued and used as a vehicle for teaching character education. Despite the high ratings in the teacher survey for the usefulness of religious stories for teaching character education ($M=4.09$, $Mdn=4.0$), the teacher interviews highlighted contrasting perceptions. Although two interviewees discussed religious stories when asked to select the *most useful* story types for teaching character education, five interviewees selected religious stories as *least useful*. The main reasons for choosing religious stories as *least useful* were related to pupils' engagement with religious stories and the availability of non-religious alternatives that interviewees suggested are available. Interviewees explained how pupils are likely to have heard religious stories before; find it difficult to relate to religious stories; and, have limited understanding of religious story contexts. Some interviewees explained that there is an abundance of stories available to teachers which contain similar morals, but which are not linked to religion.

The incongruity in the findings of the teacher survey and teacher interviews may be illustrative of a dissociation between the *potential* usefulness of religious stories, and the perceived usefulness of religious stories in interviewees' school contexts. As noted by some of the interviewees, pupils may have already been exposed to certain religious stories inside and outside of the classroom. For example, P12 noted that in their school "we listen to the same sort of [religious] stories year on year...and they [already] know the answer". It stands to reason that while primary school teachers may believe that religious stories can be very useful for teaching character education, pupils who have previously encountered these and know the answer may not engage and learn to the same extent as pupils encountering the story for the first time. Some primary school teachers may not use religious stories to teach character education as a result.

Religious stories have featured prominently within historical approaches to forms of moral education. Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the majority of the books and stories written for children either contained stories from the Bible or included Christian teachings. Although more humorous and less moralising stories of adventure had become more popular and prominent by the twentieth century (Bailey, 2016), the value of religious stories was still recognised by early twentieth century groups promoting structured and intentional approaches to moral instruction. For example, the MIL considered religious stories to be valuable moral stories which had stood the test of time (Berard, 1984). Members of the MIL such as Gould recognised that the Bible was generally perceived as a 'valuable source of ethical teaching' (Berard, 1984, p. 60) and suggested that sacred scripture, such as the Bible and Koran, should be used as part of a secular approach to moral instruction (Gould, 1913). The inclusion of sacred scripture by the MIL illustrates a perception that religious stories can be highly useful for teaching moral virtues, even when isolated from their 'theological foundations' (Arthur, 2020, p. 121); a perception mirrored by Carr and Harrison (2015) who suggest that the rich 'moral and spiritual lessons' (pp. 55-56) depicted in religious stories can be taught without teaching doctrines of that religion.

The findings from the teacher interviews indicate that although primary school teachers in England today also recognise the potential usefulness of religious stories for teaching about

character and virtue, some teachers prefer not to *use* religious stories with their pupils. Interviewees highlighted the range of alternative – nonreligious – stories at their fingertips which “portray an equally good” moral (P129) to religious stories. It appears that some primary school teachers prefer to use non-religious and modern alternatives. Some interviewees noted the difficulty that their pupils have in understanding and relating to religious stories; modern alternatives are more likely to be set in more familiar contexts, with more perceptual similarities between characters’ and pupils’ lives.

While it is not surprising within a secular culture that teachers would seek other choices to convey similar messages, it is interesting to note that some interviewees expressed a tendency to avoid the use of religious stories altogether, despite the statutory requirement to teach RE. This discrepancy may be explained by the confines of the interview question which asked about using stories for teaching character education. While some teachers may not intentionally use religious stories for character education, they are likely to be using religious stories as part of the statutory curriculum, which outlines a statutory requirement to teach religious education at all key stages (see DfE, 2013), and pupils are therefore likely to be exposed to the moral teachings contained within these stories whether taught intentionally or incidentally.

RQ1c Are there different story *features* that are perceived to be more useful for teaching character education?

The discussion above has highlighted that primary school teachers are conscious of the difficulty that some pupils have in *relating to* and *understanding* the lives and contexts of different story characters, such as in the case of biographical accounts and religious stories. In this section, other features of story characters and contexts that are perceived to affect the usefulness of stories for teaching character education are outlined and discussed, including the perceived age of story characters, the appearance of story characters and settings, and similarities between stories and pupils’ lives.

The Age of Story Characters Relative to Readers

The findings of the teacher survey and teacher interviews suggest that the age of the main characters within stories is regarded by many primary school teachers as an important factor

contributing to how useful a story is for teaching character education. The percentage of respondents indicating that they believed the age of story characters *is* influential stands out from other factors explored through the survey. High proportions of respondents indicated that that they did not think that the type (79.4%, see Table 5.5) and physical appearance of story characters (69.4%, see Table 5.6), or type of story setting (62.7%, see Table 5.8) affects the usefulness of a story. Whereas, when asked about the *age* of story characters, less than half (49.8%) shared the same perception (see Table 5.7). The findings indicate that the age of story characters – at least in comparison to other story factors – is considered by many primary school teachers to affect the usefulness of a story for teaching character education.

Furthermore, in the teacher interviews, age was commonly highlighted by interviewees as an influence on pupils' engagement and ability to see or understand the relevance of the story to their own lives. Interviewees did not assert that story characters had to be exactly the same age as pupils, but rather that, in order to be useful for teaching character education, the age of characters should not be too far removed from the age of pupils. It was particularly interesting to note that primary school teachers' perceptions on the age of story characters reflect the recommendations of Helterbran (2009, p. 71) who recommends that teachers should use stories which have main characters 'of a similar age (or slightly older) to the children in the classroom'. While Helterbran does not explain *why* teachers should look for this this feature, interviewees highlighted that the age of story characters influences whether pupils perceive stories to be relevant to them. Research into analogical reasoning may help to explain this finding. It has been suggested that perceptual similarities between two contexts can facilitate analogical reasoning and transfer between two contexts (Brown, 1989; Daehler and Chen, 1993). If story characters are perceived by pupils to be too much younger or older than them, pupils may not see the relevance of the story to their own lives; as a result, pupils may not transfer learning from the story to real-life contexts, may not be able to see themselves in the characters' shoes, and may not engage with the story to the same extent. However, if pupils *are* able to identify that they share similarities with story characters, they may be more likely to notice other similarities, supporting their learning from stories.

The research study findings may have important implications for the types and characteristics of stories promoted and used as part of story-based character education. While some stories written specifically for teaching character education, such as Liz Gulliford's *Can I Tell you About...* series of stories on gratitude, hope, forgiveness, compassion and courage include school-age characters, some of the classic stories and biographical stories promoted as part of historical approaches (e.g. Gould, 1913) and contemporary story-based character education research studies (e.g. Arthur *et al.*, 2014) contain adult protagonists. On the other hand, picture books and fables – the story types valued and used most by primary school teachers – tend to include child characters or characters whose ages are non-discernible due to anthropomorphism. It is clear that further research into the age of story characters and how this might influence the efficacy of story-based character education is needed to understand both the perceived and actual influence of this factor on children's learning.

The Appearance of Story Characters and Settings

The review of the research literature highlighted how children of primary school age are better able to discern story themes and transfer learning to real-life contexts when reading stories which bear a closer resemblance to reality (Lehr, 1988; Walker, Gopnik and Ganea, 2015). Furthermore, perceptual similarities between two contexts, such as a story context and a pupil's context, make it easier for children to successfully make analogies and transfer learning from one context to another (Brown, 1989; Daehler and Chen, 1993; Gobet, Chassy and Bilalić, 2011). While the age of story characters was considered by a large proportion of respondents to influence how useful a story can be for teaching character education, there was no general consensus regarding the perceived influence of the type and appearance of story characters, or story settings. Respondents to the survey and interviewees expressed mixed views on whether these factors influenced the usefulness of the story and the ability of children to relate to and learn from the story. As already outlined above, the majority of survey respondents suggested that the type and physical appearance of story characters, and type of story setting does not affect the usefulness of a story. The majority of interviewees expressed a similar perception – that the appearance of characters, including their gender, does not affect pupils' ability to relate to and learn from stories. However, two

interviewees did indicate that they have made a conscious effort to diversify the stories that they use so that pupils can see characters with similar physical attributes to themselves.

Interestingly, there was a significant difference ($p=.017$) between the way that Upper School teachers and Lower School teachers responded to the question about the type of story character: a higher proportion of Upper School teachers (19.4%) than Lower School teachers (5.0%) reported that stories containing human characters are more useful for teaching character education. Similarly, although there was no significant difference ($p=.101$) in the way in which Lower School teachers and Upper School teachers responded to the question, a higher proportion of Upper School teachers (41.8%) than Lower School teachers (27.5%) reported that real-life settings are most useful for teaching character education. Although it is acknowledged that these perceptions were expressed by small to moderate proportions of respondents, these findings indicate that real-life stories and stories in which there are human protagonists are more likely to be considered more useful for teaching character education by Upper School teachers than Lower School teachers. While the findings do not offer insight into *why* this may be the case, it is possible that differing perceptions stem from the age and maturity of the children being taught in Lower School classrooms compared to Upper School classrooms.

The research study also revealed contrasting perceptions about the physical appearance of story characters in regard to fantastical features such as anthropomorphism. While three Lower School interviewees explained how they find that pupils engage more with stories containing animal characters, two other Lower School interviewees expressed a preference for using human characters, explaining that they believe that pupils are more able to see themselves in stories with human characters. Interestingly, the form and physical appearance of story characters has been shown to influence the ability of young children to comprehend story themes (Kotaman and Balci, 2017; Larsen, Lee and Ganea, 2017; Richert *et al.*, 2009). Similarly, other fantastical content, such as the story settings in which the laws of reality are broken, has been shown to limit the transfer of knowledge to new contexts – especially with very young children (Walker, Gopnik and Ganea, 2015). Ultimately, the research findings reviewed in Chapter Three suggest that children of primary school age

selectively transfer information from stories, and that factors such as anthropomorphism and fantastical story content influences this. However, the survey data suggests that the potential influence of the type of story characters and settings on children's learning is either not recognised by the majority of primary school teachers, or that this influence is not considered to affect the usefulness of using stories to teach character education. This finding highlights an important area for future investigation. While there may be other factors which are considered to mediate the effect of fantastical story content, such as teacher intervention through teaching and learning activities, it will be useful to understand the reasons underpinning teachers' perceptions. Should the potential detrimental influence of fantasy story content not be acknowledged by primary school teachers, the development of training and resources for teachers may be beneficial.

The Importance of Perceived Similarities Between Stories and Pupils' Lives

While the teacher survey enabled insight into the factors that are perceived to affect the usefulness of stories for teaching character education, the set question responses did not allow participants to add clarification to their responses. However, the semi-structured nature of the teacher interviews provided this opportunity. Importantly, the interviews allowed interviewees to discuss the relative impact that each of the factors are perceived to have on the usefulness of stories for teaching character education. An overarching theme evident from the interview data was that the stories perceived to be most useful for teaching character education are those with which pupils have familiarity and can relate to – stories which contain a familiar social settings or experiences. Interviewees suggested that similarities between characters' and pupils' experiences were more important than similarities in physical appearance. Interviewees explained that pupils need to be able to see themselves in stories – imagining themselves in the place of characters – and gave examples of settings and experiences in stories that would be familiar to their pupils such as school and family settings.

The suggestion by primary school teachers that one perceived similarity between a story and a pupil's life, can make the story useful for teaching character education indicates that it is not the existence of factors such as anthropomorphism which determines how useful a story

is for teaching character education. Rather, that it is the *combination* of factors which influences usefulness. This finding suggests that – in practice – teachers do not consider unfamiliar settings or characters to be barriers to pupils’ learning as long as there is at least one similarity with which pupils can identify. This finding highlights an important area to for future study: to determine which combination of story factors is most conducive to teaching character education effectively, further empirical research is needed. Another area to consider is how teachers’ teaching and learning approaches might moderate the influence of different story factors. For example, teachers’ input may support pupils’ understanding of story themes and transfer of learning to real-life contexts.

4. Primary School Teachers’ Approaches to Story-Based Character Education

RQ2 How and to what extent do primary school teachers in England use stories as a vehicle for teaching character education?

Prior to the research study it was not known whether, or to what extent, primary school teachers in England utilise stories as a vehicle for teaching character education. In this section, the findings from strand one and strand two of the research study which relate specifically to primary school teachers’ reported practice of story-based character education are interpreted and discussed.

Intentionality and Frequency of Story-Based Character Education in Primary School

The findings of the teacher survey and interviews suggest that story-based character education is an intentional and regular part of teaching and learning within primary schools in England and across Lower and Upper School classrooms. The overwhelming majority (97.6%) of respondents reported using stories to teach character education and 87.9% of these respondents reported doing so *intentionally* (see Table 5.9). The findings make clear that stories are not only perceived to be a useful vehicle for teaching character education, but that the majority of primary school teachers who participated in this study utilise stories to teach character education in practice.

Unfortunately, it is not possible to determine why a minority of teachers do not teach story-based character education, nor why 12.1% of respondents who *do* teach story-based character education do not do so *intentionally*; no respondents who selected these response options in the survey answered the invitation to interview. However, it is likely that some of the reasons are related to the barriers to story-based character education – such as time pressures and other curriculum priorities – which were mentioned by some interviewees and which will be discussed later in this chapter.

Lower School Teachers and Upper School Teachers

Analysis of the teacher survey revealed that Lower School teachers were more likely to *intentionally* teach character education using stories, and did so more frequently than Upper School teachers. In comparison to Lower School teachers, a lower proportion of Upper School teachers were found to intentionally use stories for the purpose of teaching character education (see Table 5.9), and the difference was found to be significant ($p < .001$). Of those participants who reported using stories to teach character education, 79.6% of Upper School teachers reported doing so *intentionally*, and the remaining 20.4% reported teaching this incidentally. Conversely, almost all Lower School teachers (97.4%) reported intentionally using stories to teach character education. Furthermore, Lower School teachers were found to teach story-based character education more frequently than Upper School teachers: higher proportions of Lower School teachers than Upper School teachers reported using stories to teach morals (40.5% Lower School; 18.4% Upper School), “good” character (40.5% Lower School; 19.4% Upper School) and “good” behaviour (41.8% Lower School; 19.4% Upper School) at least every few days (see Appendix H).

Differences between Lower School and Upper School teachers may be explained by differences in the perceived needs of pupils, curriculum goals and general use of stories across the curriculum. Greater emphasis appears to be placed on personal, social and emotional development in the Lower School compared to the Upper School, and this is likely to be informed by the differing developmental needs of pupils lower down the school. Three of the seventeen Early Learning Goals (ELGs) in the *Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage* (DfE, 2021a) focus on personal, social and emotional development and

each of these ELGs are broken down into three statements which describe EYFS pupils' expected levels of development in these areas. Furthermore, personal, social and emotional development is highlighted as a prime area which is 'particularly important for building a foundation for igniting children's curiosity and enthusiasm for learning, forming relationships and thriving' (DfE 2021, p. 8) in EYFS. Although schools are required to 'make provision for personal, social, health and economic education' in KS1 and KS2 (DfE, 2013, p. 5), the KS1 and KS2 *National Curriculum in England* arguably places less emphasis on personal, social and emotional development than the *EYFS Framework*. The use of stories across the curriculum may also differ. Although stories are regularly used across EYFS, KS1 and KS2 as the basis of teaching and learning, it may be that stories are used more frequently in Lower School classrooms. As was noted by P100 in the teacher interviews, stories are "woven throughout the day" in EYFS. It is likely that there are more opportunities to integrate story-based character education in Lower School classrooms as a result. It therefore stands to reason that the higher frequency and intentionality of story-based character education reported by Lower School teachers are due in part to the opportunities for Lower School teachers to teach story-based character education and the alignment of character education with the ELGs for personal, social and emotional development.

Although a lower proportion of Upper School teachers intentionally choose and use stories to teach character compared to their Lower School counterparts, the proportion of Upper School respondents (79.6%) who reported intentionally teaching story-based character education is still high. The finding is of particular interest given the author's experience and knowledge of the curriculum and time pressures facing Upper School teachers. The finding indicates that, despite fewer opportunities to teach story-based character education relative to their Lower School counterparts, the majority of Upper School teachers plan for and intentionally teach character education through stories.

Integrated, Stand-Alone and Reactive Story-Based Character Education

To gain deeper insight into primary school teachers' approaches to story-based character education, it was necessary to understand the format and context in which stories are used for this purpose. The findings from the analysis of the teacher interviews suggest that

primary school teachers teach story-based character education within subject lessons and in one-off *standalone* lessons or assemblies. While Lower School teachers explained that story-based character education is usually taught across the curriculum, the subject areas most commonly mentioned by interviewees as those in which they taught story-based character education were English and PSHE or SMSC lessons.

It is not surprising that character education would feature within PSHE and SMSC lessons given the overlapping themes associated with pupils' personal development. However, the choice of primary school teachers to use of stories to teach character education as part of these lessons further highlights the common utilisation of stories as a vehicle for teaching character education in primary schools. The integration of story-based character education within English lessons is also logical given the emphasis placed on reading and general literacy development in primary schools (Helterbran, 2009), and the high frequency with which English reading and writing lessons feature in all primary school classrooms.

Interviewees also noted that story-based character education was easily integrated within English lessons. As P3 indicated, in texts used in English lessons "...there's always going to be something that you can pull out and discuss and usually linked to character education". The findings indicate that English lessons not only provide convenient opportunities to teach story-based character education, but that the stories used within primary school English lessons are often well-suited for character education.

Interviewees also commonly suggested that they teach story-based character education through standalone lessons. However, Upper School teachers and Lower School teachers appear to use standalone lessons differently. Whereas Lower School teachers reported teaching through standalone lessons regularly, Upper School teachers described how they would usually only teach standalone lessons in reaction to a social issue or emerging need identified within their class that they could quickly address through a story. The findings indicate that story-based character education is often taught in *response to* emerging issues, and that it is the availability of shorter and more simplistic stories, which contain appropriate themes, that enables them to use stories in this way.

The reactive nature of story-based character education was a common theme for both Lower School and Upper School teachers. Interviewees described how they can “choose reading material that would really be tailored to an issue” (P201) and acknowledged the ease with which they can “nip to the bookcase, [and] pick an appropriate book” (P129). The tendency for Upper School teachers to only teach standalone story-based character education in response to pupils’ emerging needs may be partly due to differences in curriculum goals and pupils’ needs at different developmental ages. Lower School teachers may regularly plan for and teach story-based character education which targets ELGs related to personal, social and emotional development – for example through teaching about character qualities such as friendship, teamwork, resilience and perseverance. Whereas Upper School teachers might not feel the need to plan for story-based character education in standalone lessons – they appear to teach standalone story-based character education *in reaction to* emerging needs, as and when they become evident.

RQ2a What are the approaches used by primary school teachers to teach story-based character education?

The teacher survey and interview data offer insight into how primary school teachers use stories to teach story-based character education and some of the underlying reasons and motivations underpinning their approaches. Many of the approaches were found to be congruent with the reasons given as to *why* stories are considered a useful vehicle for teaching character education. Interestingly, a review of the survey findings reveals that higher proportions of respondents selected response options associated with the *pedagogic value* of stories than those associated with *entertainment value*. Over 90% of respondents selected options associated with pedagogic value: ‘stories are a good gateway to discussion’, ‘stories provide pupils with a safe space to learn’, and ‘stories provide insight into characters’ thoughts and feelings’. In contrast, relatively lower proportions selected options associated with entertainment value: 84.1% selected ‘stories are entertaining and enjoyable’ and only 62.6% selected ‘story illustrations help to keep children engaged’ (see Table 5.2). The findings indicate that primary school teachers may attribute more weight to the pedagogic value of stories than to the entertainment value of stories for teaching character education. That is, while stories are indeed valued because they are enjoyed by pupils, it is

the potential ways in which pupils can learn from stories which primary school teachers appear to value most.

Teachers are believed to be pivotal in guiding children's learning from stories through pedagogical intervention (Bohlin, 2005; D'Olimpio and Peterson, 2018). A noteworthy finding which emerged from the research study is that primary school teachers aim to facilitate pupils' learning from stories; primary school teachers do not read stories in isolation and expect pupils to understand the intended meaning by chance. The main approaches used by primary school teachers to facilitate pupils' learning from stories include prompting pupils to explain their understanding of story characters and events, stimulating discussion through questioning, reinforcement of story meaning through reading-related activities, and supporting pupils to reflect on and relate story themes to their own lives. While some of the main approaches are discussed separately below, it is important to acknowledge that interviewees did not always discuss these approaches independently of one another; the interview data showed that it was common for interviewees to discuss approaches which overlapped. For example, P3 explained how they use questioning to check pupils' comprehension, to encourage them to think about characters' feelings and to reflect on the relevance of characters' situations to their own lives. It is likely that in practice primary school teachers employ a range of overlapping approaches to teach story-based character education.

Questioning, Explanation and Discussion of Story Characters and Events

The findings outlined in Chapter Five suggest that teacher questioning is used in various ways to support pupils' learning. Primary school teachers who teach story-based character education use questioning to check pupils' understanding of the meaning of stories and to stimulate subsequent pupil-pupil discussion of story characters and events. Overall, 92.8% of respondents who intentionally teach story-based character education reported that they encourage pupils to explain story events in their own words: 37.2% encourage pupils to explain what has happened in the story and why, and 55.6% reported that they encourage pupils to explain what has happened in the story, and why, but also provide pupils with a "correct" account if they feel that the meaning of the story has been misunderstood (see

Table 5.14). Furthermore, 87.9% reported that they encourage pupils to identify and describe the problems or dilemmas that characters face (see Table 5.19).

While some respondents to the survey indicated that they would explain the meaning of the story to pupils, most suggested that they would only do so if the meaning had been misunderstood. Interviewees also offered some clarification by explaining that they would only correct pupils if their interpretation was considered harmful or detrimental.

Interviewees explained how pupils can interpret stories in different ways and that, by prompting pupils to share and discuss their interpretations, other pupils are concurrently exposed to others' perspectives. The sharing of ideas among pupils was suggested to be a more effective approach than didactic teaching of story meaning – as noted by P152 “...them sharing ideas is far more effective than me telling them what they should think”. This quotation is illustrative of a general perception among interviewees that peer-learning holds more potential than direct instruction.

The efficacy of questioning and prompting pupils to explain their understanding can be inferred through consideration of some of the research findings outlined in Chapter Three. Walker and Lombrozo (2017) found that prompting young children to explain their understanding of story events positively influenced moral theme comprehension from a short story. Furthermore, the effect of explanation on children's comprehension in Walker and Lombrozo's study was even more pronounced than when telling children the moral theme in the pedagogy condition of the study. It is possible that the process of explaining influences children's learning. Explaining is thought to alter the way in which information is evaluated (Lombrozo, 2016); when asked to explain, learners generate hypotheses that could reasonably account for the events, and these are prioritised dependent on their simplicity, breadth and alignment with prior knowledge (Walker *et al.*, 2016; Walker and Lombrozo, 2017). Primary school teachers' prompting of pupils to explain their understanding may benefit learning through encouraging pupils to make connections between story content and prior knowledge in the generation of plausible explanations.

The stimulation of discussion amongst pupils was found to be one of the main strategies used by primary school teachers who intentionally teach story-based character education. In

the teacher survey, 92.3% respondents who teach story-based character education indicated that they encourage pupils to discuss the problems or dilemmas that characters face (see Table 5.19) and 94.5% reported using stories because they consider stories to be a good gateway to discussion (see Table 5.2). Almost all interviewees mentioned a form of questioning and discussion when describing how they teach story-based character education. As with the use of questioning and encouragement of pupils to explain their understanding of story events, primary school teachers appear to use discussion to expose pupils to different interpretations and to guide pupils toward the intended meaning through peer learning. When elaborating on their approaches, interviewees emphasised how questioning and discussion are used to guide pupils to understand the story meaning and how, by sharing and discussing their own interpretations, pupils are able to learn from one another. Although interviewees did not explain how they believed pupils can learn more from hearing and discussing each other's interpretations than through being told the intended story meaning, it is likely that primary school teachers see the benefit in pupils listening to and considering the different interpretations of others, including those of pupils who may be more perceptive or who have interpreted information in different ways. The finding may relate to the role of the more knowledgeable other within Vygotsky's (1978) concept of the zone of proximal development. Through hearing the interpretations of others, pupils are exposed to ideas and information that they may not have previously considered; conversations with more knowledgeable peers may help to move learners through the zone of proximal development, supporting their understanding.

Reinforcing Story Themes Through Reading-Related Activities

In Chapter Two, some of the different perceptions about story-based character education approaches were highlighted. One point on which there have been contrasting views is whether story themes and messages should be reinforced. While some twentieth century authors and educators, such as Bates (1900), outlined activities that can be used to explicitly emphasise the morals being taught through moral stories, others advised against impressing the moral meaning of stories on children through fear of spoiling the story's effect (e.g. Adler, 1906; Chesterton, 1905; Gould, 1906). Proponents of story-based character education in the late twentieth century literature also appear to advise against intervention on the part

of the teachers: for example, Bennett (1993) and Kilpatrick, Wolfe and Wolfe (1994), suggest that the morals contained in their stories are self-evident, and indicate that the moral of a story should not be reinforced or explained.

As was outlined in Chapter Three, the assumption that pupils can learn story meaning through reading or listening to moral stories has been tested and subjected to criticism; research by Narvaez *et al.* (1998; 1999), and Mares and Acosta (2008) indicates that when left to interpret story meaning independently, children often miss the intended meaning. The findings of the current research study indicate that primary school teachers are mindful that not all pupils will comprehend story meaning independently. Primary school teachers seek to support pupils' learning and use reading-related activities to reinforce story themes. 90.0% of survey respondents who intentionally teach story-based character education reported using reading-related activities concerning the meaning of stories (see Table 5.17). Of these respondents, 92.0% indicated that they do so in order to reinforce the meaning for pupils (see Table 5.18), and this motivation was also corroborated by interviewees.

The survey findings and examples of story-based character education described by interviewees indicate that primary school teachers use a range of reading-related activities for this purpose. In addition to pupil discussions, other activities including drama and role play, diary writing from characters' perspectives, and art are commonly used. The majority of respondents to the survey who intentionally teach story-based character education (98.9%) reported that they encourage pupils to reflect on what characters think and feel (see Table 5.19), and interviewees explained that drama and role play activities are beneficial because of the way in which pupils can explore characters' actions and reflect on characters' thoughts and feelings. Similarly, pupils are encouraged to empathise with story characters through writing diary entries from characters' perspectives.

In addition to empathising with story characters, primary school teachers use reading-related activities to encourage pupils to reflect on the relevance of story meaning to their personal contexts. The majority of respondents to the teacher survey who intentionally teach story-based character education (97.8%) indicated that they support pupils in relating the meaning of stories to their own lives (see Table 5.15). Interviewees explained how

questioning and discussion are used to encourage pupils to reflect on and relate to story contexts; for example, pupils are asked to think about and discuss times when they felt the same way as story characters or faced similar experiences.

The research findings indicate that primary school teachers' story-based character education approaches target some of the capacities that are considered foundational to virtue literacy development. Arthur *et al.* (2014), Carr and Harrison (2015) and Hart, Oliveira and Pike (2020) outline approaches which extend beyond the reading of stories, to include reading-related activities aimed at supporting pupils to develop virtue literacy. As part of these approaches, reading-related activities encourage pupils to identify relevant virtues depicted in stories, empathise with story characters, and to relate story meaning to personal contexts. However, while the approaches described by interviewees overlap with some of the approaches documented in Chapter Three, primary school teachers' approaches appear to focus predominantly on only two of the three main components of virtue literacy. Virtue literacy has been defined as consisting of *virtue perception*, *virtue knowledge and understanding*, and *virtue reasoning* (Jubilee Centre, 2022) (see Chapter Two). Kristjánsson (2018, p. 555, emphasis added) describes virtue literacy as both a 'cognitive understanding' and 'ability to *apply*' virtues to new and relevant contexts. The approaches described by interviewees appear to target a cognitive understanding of virtues, whereby two components are focused on: *virtue perception* and *virtue knowledge and understanding*. While interviewees indicated that they encourage pupils to consider the *relevance* of story meaning to personal contexts, the extent to which primary school teachers aim to develop *virtue reasoning* and support pupils to *apply* their understanding is unclear. Virtue reasoning is understood as the ability to make reasoned judgements concerning virtues, for example when virtues conflict (Jubilee Centre, 2022). Although there were some indications in the survey responses that primary school teachers encourage pupils to discuss the dilemmas faced by characters (see Table 5.19), there was little to no evidence from the interviews that reading-related activities are used to encourage pupils to *reflect on* and *deliberate about* competing virtues in story or personal contexts.

There are several possible reasons why approaches associated with the development of virtue reasoning were not apparent within the interview data. One reason could be that the interview question – which asked interviewees to describe a typical example of how they teach character education using stories (see Appendix E) – was limiting, or framed too broadly. When describing their approaches, interviewees may not have described all aspects and may have prioritised more general features of their approaches, such as the use of questioning and discussion.

A second possible reason could be that primary school teachers do not typically seek to develop reasoning and deliberation about virtues when teaching story-based character education. While they do encourage pupils to identify, describe and discuss characters' problems and dilemmas, primary school teachers may stop short of Carr and Harrison's (2015) suggestion that pupils can be encouraged to exercise moral reflection and deliberation of fictional examples in personal contexts. Primary school teachers may ultimately not go as far as encouraging pupils to consider whether actions are right or wrong, or how and why they would act if they faced similar predicaments to characters. This could be explained by Carr and Harrison's (2015) and Jónsson *et al.*'s (2019) suggestions that the understanding of virtue terms is considered a prerequisite for engagement in discussion and deliberation of moral concepts. On this understanding, virtue perception and knowledge and understanding foreground an ability to *apply* understanding through deliberation. Teachers of children of primary school age may prioritise the more foundational components of virtue, aiming to develop virtue perception, and virtue knowledge and understanding, but not aiming to develop virtue reasoning to the same extent.

A third possible reason could be that the story types reported to be valued and used by primary school teachers to teach story-based character education may not be as conducive to developing virtue reasoning as some of the story types advocated within the character education literature. Arthur *et al.* (2017b) suggest that it is the complexity of characters and plots in stories which are advantageous for developing virtue literacy as these provide opportunities for pupil discussion and debate. Carr and Harrison (2015) point to the educative potential of rich imaginative literature, such as classic Greek literature,

Shakespearian tragedies and religious stories which engage readers' imaginations and are perfused with detailed examples of vice and virtue. Furthermore, it is specifically longer and more complex stories which may provide the detailed examples which enable readers to exercise and hone moral judgement (Carroll, 2000).

However, as discussed earlier in this chapter, the stories reportedly preferred and used by primary school teachers are those that are short and relatively simplistic, such as picture books and fables. These story types may not always provide complexity of plot and rich narrative descriptions that are believed to provide the opportunities for pupils to develop moral reasoning and judgement through the moral imagination (Bohlin, 2005). While shorter and more simplistic moral stories may provide opportunities for pupils to see virtues in action, and opportunities to identify with characters and their situations, short moral stories are unlikely to provide the rich contexts and rich psychological portraits of characters that Bohlin (2005) suggests enable readers to exercise moral rehearsal and develop moral judgement. If opportunities to develop virtue reasoning and other capacities associated with the moral imagination are currently being missed as result of the story types used in primary schools, it is possible that training and development opportunities could be used to influence teachers' approaches. Examples and training which highlight the potential benefits of using stories that offer rich descriptions and imaginative insight, and ways in which pupils can be encouraged to reflect on and deliberate about virtue conflicts in fictional and real-life contexts, may have the potential to positively influence primary school teachers' practice.

RQ2b What has influenced primary school teachers' approaches to story-based character education?

The research study findings indicate that primary school teachers' approaches to story-based character education are primarily influenced by previous experience in using stories for this purpose. An additional factor thought to influence the frequency and format of story-based character education for some teachers is time pressure caused by curriculum demands.

In the teacher interviews, training, personal and school-based experience were commonly cited as influences on practice. Interviewees explained how their approaches had developed over time, indicating that primary school teachers adapt and refine their story-based

character education approaches according to feedback on the perceived efficacy of approaches. Colleagues were also mentioned as sources of influence who could be drawn on for advice in selecting appropriate stories to use, and personal interests were cited as sources of influence on some primary school teachers' approaches.

It was notable that only 27.3% of respondents reported that they had received training in using stories to teach character education. Despite this low percentage, respondents reported moderate to high confidence levels in using stories to teach character education (see Table 5.11). While this finding could be taken to indicate that primary school teachers are already confident in using stories for this purpose, the existence of a significant difference ($p=.002$) between respondents' confidence in using stories to teach character education ($Mdn=12$) and confidence in using stories as a vehicle for teaching reading and writing skills ($Mdn=13$) indicates that there is the potential for growth and development in primary school teachers' confidence in teaching story-based character education.

The constraints on time caused by curriculum demands was highlighted as both a barrier to story-based character education and a concern of many of the interviewees. While respondents to the teacher survey indicated that using stories to teach character education is both useful and important, prioritisation of core subject areas may be impeding approaches to story-based character education. It is possible that the reported format and delivery of story-based character education, and the frequency of story-based character education (see Appendix H) are influenced by curriculum demands and available time. Further research is needed to uncover how primary school teachers in both the Lower School and Upper School might approach story-based character education if time were not an influence. An understanding of how primary school teachers might approach story-based character education if not impeded by perceived barriers would provide further insight into perceptions of effective practice in this area.

5. Summary

In this chapter, the potential limitations of the research methodology were outlined, and the main findings of the research study were interpreted and discussed. Where relevant, findings were related back to core themes emerging from the review of historical approaches to story-based character education in Chapter Two, and the review of theory and research into how children are thought to learn from stories in Chapter Three. In the subsequent chapter, the main implications of the research, and suggested areas for further research and development are outlined.

CHAPTER SEVEN: THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

1. Introduction

Within this thesis, different perceptions of, and approaches to, story-based character education have been outlined and analysed. In addition to a review of the available historical, theoretical and research literature on the topic of story-based character education, this thesis contains a research study which aimed to draw together the perceptions and approaches of a broad sample of primary school teachers in England. The data collected through this study offers new insight into how stories are valued and used for the purpose of teaching character education in a primary school context, and it is primarily through the examination of this data that this thesis advances knowledge and understanding in the field of character education. To the author's knowledge, primary school teachers' perceptions of, and approaches to, story-based character education have not previously been documented.

The research study has enabled an understanding of how primary school teachers' perceptions and approaches connect to those outlined in the existing literature. Most notably, however, the examination, interpretation and discussion of the data has offered original insight into the practice of story-based character education in English primary schools. The research study: (i) confirms and further illuminates some of the existing themes evident within the literature; (ii) documents the perceptions and approaches of primary school teachers in twenty-first century classrooms; and, (iii) indicates that there may be potential to advance the existing practice of story-based character education in primary schools. As such, the research study has a number of implications for character education theory, practice and future research which will be discussed in this final chapter.

2. Advancing Insight into Story-Based Character Education and Informing Future Research

The research study revealed that many of the assertions made within the literature, which hold stories up as a prominent and potentially powerful vehicle for teaching character education (Bennett, 1993; Bohlin, 2005; Carr and Harrison, 2015; Edgington, 2002) are realised in practice. The research study offers support for the assumption that exposure to stories provides a unique means through which to cultivate character. While the impact of primary school teachers' approaches on pupils' character development was not measured within the study, and caution must be taken in generalising the findings to the wider population of primary school teachers, the findings offer strong indications that stories are regarded as a unique and powerful vehicle through which to teach character education. Despite the range of means and technologies available to primary school teachers in twenty-first century classrooms, stories are far from being regarded as an outdated resource; stories are highly valued and are regularly used by primary school teachers to teach pupils about character and virtue. Furthermore, stories are held by many primary school teachers to be *the most valuable* vehicle through which to teach for this purpose.

The research study findings offer confirmation of some of the core themes expressed within the existing literature, but also add clarification to and extend existing knowledge. The findings help to confirm that stories are valued because of their ability to capture the attention of pupils (Carr and Harrison, 2015; Lickona, 1991); to offer vicarious access to experiences beyond pupils' personal contexts (Gregory, 2009; Kieran, 1996; Mar and Oatley, 2008; Popova, 2015); and to offer unique insight for pupils into characters' thoughts, feelings and motivations (Bohlin, 2005; Carr and Harrison, 2015; D'Olimpio and Peterson, 2018; Willows, 2017). However, the research study findings also offer clarification to existing perceptions of why and how stories are so highly valued by primary school teachers. For example, the research study found that Upper School teachers value stories as a way of providing pupils a safe context in which to reflect on actions that are relevant to them, but without directly discussing their own perceived shortcomings. This finding offers clarification to previous suggestions that stories provide a "safe space" for pupils to rehearse how they might act in similar circumstances (Arthur *et al.*, 2017b; Guroian, 1998; Kidd and Castano,

2013; Kilpatrick, Wolfe and Wolfe, 1993; Nussbaum, 2001; Willows, 2017). Furthermore, despite previous suggestions that story characters can act as exemplars or role models for pupils (Berkowitz, 2011; Carr and Harrison, 2015; Willows, 2017), the research study findings indicate that primary school teachers either do not recognise the potential of story characters to fulfil this role in the same way, or do not regard story characters as viable exemplars in the stories that they utilise. The research study therefore raises questions concerning the *practice* of story-based character education and highlights areas requiring further exploration.

Other areas highlighted by the research study which have implications for character education practice and future research include the need to better understand the influence of story-level factors on children's learning. The research study showed that similarities between stories and pupils' lives are believed to be needed in order for stories to be useful for teaching character education; similarity between the age of story characters and age of pupils was also highlighted as an important factor. The review of the research literature in Chapter Three highlighted how story-level factors such as fantastical story settings and anthropomorphism (Hopkins and Weisberg, 2017; Kotaman and Balci, 2017; Richert *et al.*, 2009; Strouse, Nyhout and Ganea, 2018; Walker, Gopnik and Ganea, 2015), and child-level factors such as the age and prior experience of pupils (Narvaez, 2001; 2002; Narvaez *et al.*, 1998; 1999; Whitney, Vozzola and Hofmann, 2005), can affect the ability of children to learn and transfer information from story contexts to real-life contexts. These factors have rarely been discussed in the character education literature until now. For example, beyond Helderbran's (2009) suggestion that when using stories for character education story characters should be of a similar age to pupils being taught, there has been limited attention given to the impact of different story types and features. The insight provided by this research study has thus helped to outline the types and features of stories believed by primary school teachers to be best-suited to story-based character education, and which future research studies should test empirically to better understand the effects of such factors on children's learning.

Furthermore, while this research study has shown that teachers are mindful of *some* of the factors that may influence pupils' learning, it revealed uncertainty amongst teachers concerning the influence of other features, such as anthropomorphism. Although a small number of studies in developmental psychology have indicated that story features such as anthropomorphism and other fantastical content can influence moral theme comprehension and transfer of learning to real-life contexts (Kotaman and Balci, 2017; Larsen, Lee and Ganea, 2017; Richert *et al.*, 2009; Strouse, Nyhout and Ganea, 2018; Walker, Gopnik and Ganea, 2015), this thesis has highlighted a lack of knowledge and understanding relating to understanding the impact of these factors on children's learning, specifically in the context of character education approaches.

The critical analysis of existing theory and research literature contained within Part One of this thesis has also highlighted two further areas that will be essential for researchers to understand. Future research studies should aim to understand how teachers' *approaches* to story-based character education might (i) facilitate children's learning from stories, and (ii) mediate any influence of story-level factors on children's learning. It is possible that pupils' comprehension of story themes and transfer of learning to personal contexts can be facilitated through teacher intervention, for example through questioning (Walker and Lombrozo, 2017), simplification of confusing plot features (Mares and Acosta, 2010) and use of reading-related activities (Arthur *et al.*, 2014; Francis *et al.*, 2018; Hart, Oliveira and Pike, 2020; Jónsson *et al.*, 2019). Understanding how different story features influence learning, and how any effects might be mediated through teachers' approaches, will be essential if story-based character education practice is to be optimised.

3. Advancing Practice, Policy and Training Related to Story-Based Character Education

Despite the existence of some historical and contemporary guidance on using stories to teach forms of character education, the ways in which primary school teachers use stories for this purpose were previously undocumented. The research study has revealed that, even though some proponents of story-based character education (Adler, 1906; Bennett, 1993;

Chesterton, 1905; Kilpatrick, Wolfe and Wolfe, 1994) have previously expressed caution about reinforcing or explaining a story's moral, primary school teachers do not leave the moral of short stories to be imparted by chance, and seek to reinforce this. Primary school teachers typically use short stories as examples and content for further analysis. Teachers *facilitate* children's learning through questioning, pupil-pupil and teacher-pupil discussion, and engagement of pupils in reading-related activities which not only aim to help pupils to develop their knowledge and understanding of character virtues and their relevance, but aim to encourage pupils to empathise with and understand story characters' situations.

The findings of the research study help to confirm assertions expressed within the character education literature (Arthur *et al.*, 2014; Davison *et al.*, 2016; Francis *et al.*, 2018; Hart, Oliveira and Pike, 2020; Jónsson *et al.*, 2019) that opportunities for pupils to reflect on and understand the relevance of story themes to real-life are regarded as an essential part of story-based character education practice. However, while the approaches described by primary school teachers in the study appear to develop some components of virtue literacy – namely virtue perception, and virtue knowledge and understanding – there are indications that opportunities to develop virtue reasoning are currently overlooked in primary school contexts. Primary school teachers express a preference for using short stories, raising questions about teachers' selection of stories in the classroom. If pupils are not given opportunities to engage with more complex narratives, to read critically, to reflect on characters' motivations and actions, and to consider how they would respond if facing similar circumstances, valuable opportunities to develop the *application* of knowledge through virtue reasoning may be missed. The lack of emphasis placed by some primary school teachers on using religious stories also raises questions for teachers working in religious schools, where we might expect religious stories to feature as a core vehicle for teaching about character and virtues.

The findings of this research study could be combined with the recommendations gleaned from the existing literature with a view to advancing character education practice. For example, it is possible that also teaching story-based character education with longer, more complex stories, and encouraging pupils to reflect on and evaluate characters' motivations

and actions, could be beneficial. Analysis and deliberation about characters' motivations and actions, including reflection on how pupils may act if facing similar situations in their own lives, may provide opportunities for pupils to *apply* their knowledge and understanding and to develop capacities associated with virtue reasoning.

The research study also offers a new perspective on the story types valued and used for teaching character education in primary schools. While all story types included in the study appear to be perceived by primary school teachers as potentially useful for teaching character education, differences were observed between Lower School teachers and Upper School teachers, indicating that (i) primary school teachers may choose different story types based on the age and interests of their pupils; and, (ii) that any guidance and support aimed at enhancing story-based character education practice will need to account for differences in story types used across primary school age ranges.

Of particular relevance when considering the *practice* of story-based character education, the types of story valued and used more prominently by primary school teachers for teaching character education differ somewhat from those advocated within some of the more recent character education literature (e.g. Arthur *et al.*, 2014; Bohlin, 2005; Hart, Oliveira and Pike, 2020). While short stories such as picture books and fables are cited within the character education literature, it tends to be classic and religious stories (Arthur *et al.*, 2014; Carr and Harrison, 2015; Jónsson *et al.*, 2019), and more complex narrative literature (Bohlin, 2005; Francis *et al.*, 2018; Hart, Oliveira and Pike, 2020) which have been advocated for teaching character education. As such, there is limited guidance concerning how teachers might *use* short stories such as picture books and fables to teach character education effectively. For example, beyond the assumption that moral stories speak for themselves (Kilpatrick, Wolfe and Wolfe, 1994), and that fables can be used to precede engagement with more complex moral stories (Adler, 1906), there appears to have been limited exploration of the ways in which these story types might be used effectively to teach story-based character education.

The findings of this research study, which collected data specifically on primary school teachers' approaches to story-based character education, therefore help to fill a void in the

character education literature. Dissemination of the findings through teacher training may help to support primary teachers' approaches through not only describing *how* study participants use stories to teach character education, but by explaining *why* these story types and approaches are considered to be useful for this purpose. Although the scope of this research study is relatively small, and further research would be needed to capture additional approaches, the findings discussed in this thesis offer helpful support and guidance that can be built on through future research in this area, and which may inform training.

The need for professional development in story-based character education has also been highlighted through the findings of the research study, yet very few teachers have been trained in using stories to teach character education. Although primary school teachers appear to be confident in using stories for this purpose, self-perceptions of practice do not necessarily mean that practice is optimal. Training and development, informed by the considerations outlined above, and which highlights the *value* attributed to stories for teaching character education, may also help to overcome the perceived time constraints facing primary school teachers and tip the balance to prioritise time and space in the curriculum in pursuit of this important endeavour.

Finally, this thesis also has implications for education policy in England and beyond. Given the prominence with which stories are used as a vehicle for teaching character education in primary schools, and the relative importance placed on character education in relation to pupils' personal development in contemporary schooling (DfE, 2019; Ofsted, 2019), it stands to reason that guidance and policy for teachers should reflect practice. As was noted in Chapter Two, there is only limited mention of stories within existing DfE guidance on character education (2019), featuring within Annex B of the document. Future publications and guidance will likely benefit from highlighting stories as a key resource through which to teach character education. The description and dissemination of teachers' approaches uncovered through this research study – including explanations of *how* and *why* these approaches are thought to contribute positively to character development – may help to

advance character education provision in primary schools and may serve as a platform on which to review practice in secondary and tertiary education settings in the future.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Benchmarks from the *Character Education Framework Guidance* (DfE, 2019, pp. 4-6).

The Six Character Benchmarks

A. What kind of school are we?

- How clearly do we articulate the kind of education we aspire to provide?
- How do we ensure that all members of the school community (e.g. staff, pupils, parents/carers, governing body) understand and share our aims?
- How effectively do we create a sense of pride, belonging and identity in our school?

B. What are our expectations of behaviour towards each other?

- Are we clear on the importance of discipline and good behaviour in school life? How do we promote this understanding?
- How well do we promote consideration and respect towards others (pupils and adults), good manners and courtesy?
- How well do we promote a range of positive character traits among pupils?

C. How well do our curriculum and teaching develop resilience and confidence?

- Is our curriculum ambitious for our pupils? Does it teach knowledge and cultural capital which will open doors and give them confidence in wider society?
- Is our curriculum logically organised and sequenced, including within subjects, and taught using effective pedagogy, so pupils gain a strong sense of progress and grow in confidence?

D. How good is our co-curriculum ?

- Does it cover a wide range across artistic, creative, performance, sporting, debating, challenge, team and individual etc. so all pupils can both discover new interests and develop existing ones?
- Do we make use of or promote local, national or international programmes or organisations? (e.g. uniformed organisations, Duke of Edinburgh, National Citizen Service etc.)

- Is provision of high quality and does it challenge pupils and build expertise? Is participation sustained over time?
- Are there ample opportunities for pupils to compete, perform etc., and is success acknowledged and celebrated?

E. How well do we promote the value of volunteering and service to others?

- Are age-appropriate expectations of volunteering and service to others clearly established?
- Are opportunities varied, meaningful, high-quality and sustained over time?
- Do volunteering and service opportunities contribute to breaking down social barriers? Are they effective in making pupils civic-minded and ready to contribute to society?

F. How do we ensure that all our pupils benefit equally from what we offer?

- Do we understand and reduce barriers to participation (e.g. cost, timing, location, logistics, confidence, parental support etc.)?
- Do we enable young people from all backgrounds to feel as if they belong and are valued?
- Is our provision, including our co-curricular provision, appropriately tailored both to suit and to challenge the pupils we serve?

Appendix B: Survey Considerations and Revisions Following the Survey Pilot and Feedback.

Question	Point raised by participants of the pilot	Outcome
6	The question originally asked which year group was taught 'predominantly' and gave set choices (Year 1; Year 2; Year 3 etc.), including an 'Other, please specify' option for mixed-age classes (e.g. Year 5/6). However, it was noted that many primary schools employ subject specific teachers or teachers as cover for class teachers' preparation, planning and assessment (PPA) time. These teachers teach multiple classes each week.	A further option was added to the list of possible responses in order to capture this information: 'I do not have my own class. I teach multiple classes across age groups'
12b	It was suggested that question 12b was very similar to question 12a. Question 12a asked participants to rate 'how useful' stories could be for different purposes. Question 12b asked participants to rate 'how important' it was for teachers to use stories for the same purposes.	An important aim of the research was to understand how teachers value stories as a vehicle for character education. Question 12a tapped into how <i>useful</i> participants believed stories were for different purposes; whereas question 12b was included to understand how <i>important</i> participants thought it was for <i>teachers</i> to use stories for the same purposes. While it is likely that a participant rating stories as 'not at all useful' would rate the corresponding importance as 'not at all important', the same could not be said for participants rating stories as 'extremely useful' in question 12a. Question 12b asked specifically how important it was for <i>teachers</i> to use stories for these reasons. To illustrate, participants may have viewed stories as a useful vehicle for "teaching moral lessons" but may not necessarily have viewed it as <i>important</i> for teachers to use stories in this way. An example of this would be a participant who believed that stories were 'very useful' for teaching morals, but believed this to solely be a parent's responsibility, responding to 12b with 'not at all important'. Both questions were kept in the survey in order to collect data on the two different concepts: 'usefulness' and 'importance'.
15	One participant queried the inclusion of 'picture books/	Although 'picture books' is not a distinct genre, picture books can be regarded as a <i>type</i> of story –

	<p>storybooks' in question 15, suggesting that this option covered multiple genres.</p>	<p>the classification of the book is based on its format as opposed to genre. The inclusion of picture books was considered justified by other participants: picture books are regularly used within primary schools, across year groups, and many do not fit a set genre.</p> <p>The question was kept the same as this was worded carefully and did not suggest that the list was of story genres, nor that the list was comprehensive.</p>
19b	<p>The question originally asked participants to indicate how frequently they used stories for different reasons during an average week. Possible responses were as follows: 0 times a week; 1 or 2 times a week; 3 or 4 times a week; 5 times a week; More than 5 times a week.</p> <p>Four participants indicated that they found this question difficult to answer, with some explaining that they use stories in these ways "every so often" e.g. once a term, but if forced to choose for an average week, they would have selected '0 times a week'. Others suggested that it was difficult because they used stories in "blocks" and that it was difficult to suggest a weekly average.</p>	<p>It was decided that the original wording of the question and possible responses may have led to responses which did not reflect the true frequency of teachers' story use.</p> <p>For this reason, and through consultation with participants of the pilot, the wording of the question was edited. The revised question asked: 'Approximately how often do you use stories for the following reasons' and participants could choose from the following options: At least once a day ; Once a day; Once every few days; Once a week; Once every two weeks; Once a month; Once every half term; Once every term; Once every year.</p>
27b	<p>Question 27b asked participants to indicate <i>why</i> they asked children to take part in follow-up activities relating to the meaning of the story. Two participants selected 'other' for their response to this question and explained that they did so in order to evidence learning for the purpose of ongoing assessment.</p>	<p>It was judged likely that other participants would respond similarly. For this reason, a further option was added to the list of possible responses: 'To evidence learning (e.g. for ongoing assessment of learning)'</p> <p>The option to select 'Other – please specify' was maintained in order to capture other possible reasons.</p>
Introduction text for Section B, Section C	<p>One participant explained that they found it difficult to answer certain questions relating to perceptions and approaches in Section B, Section C and Section D</p>	<p>When designing the survey it was acknowledged that perceptions and approaches might vary depending on the age group of the children being taught – insight into this was actively sought after through a sampling method which aimed to gather</p>

<p>and Section D.</p>	<p>because they had previously taught across key stages and would use stories in different ways dependent on the ages of the children taught.</p>	<p>teacher responses across primary school age groups. It was anticipated that the sample range would provide data across age groups.</p> <p>In order to gain insight into the current or most recent pedagogy and practice, and to keep the survey concise, participants were asked to answer questions based on their current setting and year group as opposed to reflecting on how they may have perceived and used stories with other year groups.</p> <p>It was anticipated that most teachers would answer according to their current practice; however, additional guidance was incorporated into the survey following the pilot to ensure that this was made clear. The additional guidance was provided at the start of Section B, Section C and Section D:</p> <p>“Please answer questions based on your current school setting. For example, if you are currently a Year 3 teacher, please answer the questions in relation to this year group.”</p>
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Appendix C: Survey Questions.

How Teachers Use and Value Stories in EYFS, KS1 and KS2

Survey Flow

Information and Consent
Overview
Unique ID
Section A: About You
Section A: About You Continued
Section B: Stories and Education
Section C: Using Stories
Section C: Using Stories (continued)
Section C: Using Stories (continued)
End of Survey Information

How Teachers Use and Value Stories in EYFS, KS1 and KS2

You have been invited to complete a short online survey as part of research conducted within the School of Education at the University of Birmingham. The research seeks to understand how, and the extent to which, stories are used and valued as a vehicle for education in the Early Years Foundation Stage, Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2.

The survey should take no longer than 15 minutes to complete. You will be asked questions about: the types and characteristics of stories used in schools, how stories are used, for what purpose(s) stories are used, and the importance or value placed on stories.

For more information about the survey and how your data will be used, please click the arrow at the bottom of the page.

Why take part?

Your participation in the survey will provide important insight into how stories are used for teaching and learning.

Who can take part?

Teachers who are currently employed by schools in England and who teach children in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), Key Stage 1 (KS1) or Key Stage 2 (KS2) i.e. teachers who teach children in the age range of 3-11.

Your details and responses:

Your survey responses are important to this research and may be included in any analysis and any subsequent publications. For this reason, you are asked to give your consent to your data being used on the next page. Your survey responses will be treated confidentially. You will create a unique ID known only to you and the researcher, and you will not be identifiable by any content from the survey included in material for publication. All data will be stored securely on University of Birmingham premises or in password-protected electronic systems. The data, once totally anonymised, will be made available to relevant public databases, in line with University policy. You will not be identifiable from this information. Should you wish to be kept informed about the research findings, or to participate further, you will be given the opportunity to share your contact details at the end of the survey.

Your right to withdraw:

You have the right to withdraw from this research without giving reason. Should you wish to withdraw, any data already gathered will be destroyed. However, once data has been included in any analysis or material for publication, withdrawal will not be possible. For this reason the deadline for withdrawal will be 1 month after the completion of this survey.

If you have any questions about the research, please do not hesitate to contact the researcher, Paul Watts [REDACTED].

If you are happy to proceed, please complete the consent form on the **next page**.

Page Break

Consent Form

Please read the following statements and indicate your acceptance by selecting the appropriate option below: I confirm that I have read and understood the information about the survey; I have had the opportunity to consider the information and I am happy to volunteer my participation; I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw within one month of completing this survey, without giving reason or explanation; I understand that data collected from the survey may be looked at by all members of the research team, where it is relevant to my taking part in this research. I give permission for these individuals to have access to these data; I understand that my name and distinguishing features will not be included in any material for publication.

I have read the information and I agree to participate in the study:

Yes (1)

No (2)

Skip To: End of Survey If Consent Form Please read the following statements and indicate your acceptance by selecting the ap... = No

End of Block: Information and Consent

Start of Block: Overview

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research. The survey should take no longer than 15 minutes to complete and asks questions about how stories are used as a vehicle for education, i.e. how stories are used as a resource with which to teach and learn.

When answering the questions, think about how stories are broadly used within the school. For example, when using a story as the basis of a lesson, reading with a whole class or group, during assemblies or within interventions.

Within this research, a story is defined as:

a written or oral narrative, such as those contained within storybooks, picture books, children's novels, oral retellings and stories from history, which can be used within the home or school for the purpose of education or entertainment. This includes short, simple stories and those which are longer and more complex.

The survey is made up of the following sections: **Section A: About You** - a set of demographic questions **Section B: Stories and Education** - questions on how stories are perceived as a vehicle for education **Section C: Using Stories** - questions about how and why you use stories in the classroom or school setting **Section D: Pedagogy** - questions about how you teach children about

the content, meaning or message of a story Please take your time to carefully consider the questions, answering honestly and accurately.

Thank You

End of Block: Overview

Start of Block: Unique ID

ID

Please use the box below to **create your own unique ID**. This could be any combination of letters and/or numbers, or a pseudonym (e.g. Wilson676 or TY89).

Please make a note of your unique ID. If you choose to withdraw your data from the study, you will need to contact the researcher with your unique ID.

Type in the box below to **create a unique ID**:

End of Block: Unique ID

Start of Block: Section A: About You

Section A: About You



Q1 1. What is your age?

Q2 2. What is your gender?

- Female (1)
 - Male (2)
 - Prefer not to say (3)
 - Other (please specify) (4) _____
-

Q3 3. For how many years have you been a teacher?

- Less than 1 year (4)
 - 1-2 years (5)
 - 2-5 years (6)
 - 5-10 years (7)
 - 10-20 years (8)
 - More than 20 years (9)
-

Q4a 4a. At which school do you currently teach?

- School name (enter below) (1) _____
 - Prefer not to say (2)
-

4b 4b. In which County do you currently teach?

▼

Q5 5. Is the school you teach at a (please tick **all** that apply)

- State School (1)
- Private School (2)
- Academy School (3)
- Faith School (4)
- Free School (5)
- State Boarding School (6)
- Special School (7)
- Other (please specify) (8) _____

Q6 6. Which year group do you teach predominantly? If you teach a mixed-age class (e.g. Year 5/6) please select 'other' and specify in the box provided.

- I do not have my own class. I teach multiple classes across age groups (10)
- Nursery (1)
- Reception (2)
- Year 1 (3)
- Year 2 (4)
- Year 3 (5)
- Year 4 (6)
- Year 5 (7)
- Year 6 (8)
- Other (please specify) (9) _____

End of Block: Section A: About You

Start of Block: Section A: About You Continued

Section A: About You (continued)

Q7a **7a.** Which of the following options best describes you?

I am a...

- Trainee Teacher (1)
 - Newly Qualified Teacher (NQT) (2)
 - Qualified Teacher (3)
 - Unqualified Teacher (4)
 - Other (please specify) (6) _____
-

Q7b **7b.** Which of the following options best describes you?

I am a...

- Class Teacher (1)
 - Class Teacher with Middle-Management responsibilities e.g. phase leader (2)
 - Class Teacher with Senior Management responsibilities e.g. Assistant Headteacher/ Deputy Headteacher (3)
 - Other (please specify) (4) _____
-

Q8 8. If you are a subject leader in the school, which subject(s) do you lead? (please tick **all** that apply)

- I am not a subject leader (1)
 - Art and Design (2)
 - Computing (3)
 - English (4)
 - Geography (5)
 - History (6)
 - Mathematics (7)
 - Modern Foreign Languages (MFL) (8)
 - Music (9)
 - Physical Education (PE)/ Sport (10)
 - PSHE (or equivalent)/ Citizenship Education (11)
 - Religious Education (RE) (12)
 - Science (13)
 - Other (please specify) (14) _____
-

Q9 9. Are you familiar with the term “character education”?

- I am not familiar with the term “character education” (1)
- I have heard the term “character education” but don’t really know what it means (2)
- I am familiar with the term “character education” and know what it means (3)

Page Break

Q10a **10a.** To your knowledge, does your school have a policy related to character education? (E.g. moral education, values education etc.)

- Yes (1)
- No (2)
- Don't know (3)
-

Q10b **10b.** Does your school follow a scheme of work related to character education? (E.g. moral education, values education etc.)

- Yes (1)
- No (2)
- Don't know (3)

End of Block: Section A: About You Continued

Start of Block: Section B: Stories and Education

Section B: Stories and Education

This section focuses on how you view stories as a vehicle for education. Please answer questions in relation to your current school setting. For example, if you are currently a Year 3 teacher, please answer the questions with this year group in mind.

Within this research, a story is defined as:

a written or oral narrative, such as those contained within storybooks, picture books, children's novels, oral retellings and stories from history, which can be used within the home or school for the purpose of education or entertainment. This includes short, simple stories and those which are longer and more complex.

Stories might be used with whole classes or groups, during specific lessons, assemblies or within interventions.

Q11 11. Have you ever received training on how to use stories to teach children in the following areas:

	Response	
	Yes (1)	No (2)
Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural (SMSC) development (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Character Education (also including 'moral education' and 'values education') (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Citizenship Education (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Page Break

In this survey,

Morals / Moral Lessons are taken to be underlying moral principles, or lessons, which can be conveyed to individuals e.g. "Don't lie", "Treat others as you would wish to be treated" etc.

"Good" Character is taken to be the personal qualities that are considered "good" for a person to have e.g. *kindness, honesty* etc.

"Good" Behaviour is taken to be behaviours that are considered "good" to demonstrate and that help to maintain positive relationships with others e.g. *sharing, helping, listening to others* etc.

Q12a **12a.** Please rate how **useful** you think **stories** are to:

	Not at all useful (1)	Slightly useful (2)	Moderately useful (3)	Very useful (4)	Extremely useful (5)
Develop reading fluency, recall and comprehension (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Teach about morals/ moral lessons (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Teach about specific reading and/or writing skills (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Teach about "good" character (6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Teach about relevant curriculum knowledge (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Teach about "good" behaviour (7)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q12b 12b. Please rate how **important** you think it is for **teachers to use stories** in order to:

	Not at all important (1)	Slightly important (2)	Moderately important (3)	Very important (4)	Extremely important (5)
Develop reading fluency, recall and comprehension (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Teach about morals/ moral lessons (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Teach about specific reading and/or writing skills (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Teach about "good" character (6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Teach about relevant curriculum knowledge (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Teach about "good" behaviour (7)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Page Break

In this survey,

Morals / Moral Lessons are taken to be underlying moral principles, or lessons, which can be conveyed to individuals e.g. "Don't lie", "Treat others as you would wish to be treated" etc.

"Good" Character is taken to be the personal qualities that are considered "good" for a person to have e.g. *kindness, honesty* etc.

"Good" Behaviour is taken to be behaviours that are considered "good" to demonstrate and that help to maintain positive relationships with others e.g. *sharing, helping, listening to others* etc.

Q12c **12c.** How **confident** do you feel **using stories** in order to:

	Not at all confident (1)	Slightly confident (2)	Moderately confident (3)	Very confident (4)	Extremely confident (5)
Develop reading fluency, recall and comprehension (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Teach about morals/ moral lessons (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Teach about specific reading and/or writing skills (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Teach about "good" character (6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Teach about relevant curriculum knowledge (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Teach about "good" behaviour (7)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

End of Block: Section B: Stories and Education

Start of Block: Section C: Using Stories

Section C: Using Stories

This section focuses on how you use stories as a vehicle for education within the school. Stories might be used with whole classes or groups, during specific lessons, assemblies or within interventions.

Please answer questions in relation to your current school setting. For example, if you are currently a Year 3 teacher, please answer the questions with this year group in mind.

Q13a **13a.** In which curriculum areas **do you currently use** stories as part of your teaching practice?
(please tick **all** that apply)

- Art and Design (1)
 - Computing (2)
 - English (3)
 - Geography (4)
 - History (5)
 - Mathematics (6)
 - Modern Foreign Languages (MFL) (7)
 - Music (8)
 - Physical Education (PE)/ Sport (9)
 - PSHE (or equivalent)/ Citizenship Education (10)
 - Religious Education (RE) (11)
 - Science (12)
 - Other (please specify) (13) _____
 - I do not use stories in any curriculum area (14)
-

Q13b 13b. How do you select stories to use with children in your class? Please choose the option which **best describes** how stories are selected

- Only I select the stories that I use with children in my class (1)
- I don't select the stories that I use. Stories are selected by others or are based on set schemes of work (2)
- Most stories are selected by me, but some are selected by others or are based on set schemes of work (3)
- Most stories are selected by others or are based on set schemes of work, but I select some of the stories (4)
- Approximately half of the stories are selected by me; half are selected by others, or are based on set schemes of work (15)

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In the next question you are asked whether you teach about certain concepts using stories within the school context. For example, this might be when using a story with a whole class or group, during specific lessons, assemblies or within interventions.

This might be the **main reason for reading the story or something that is taught incidentally** when reading a story for other reasons.



Q14 **14.** Do you ever teach about any of the following when reading stories with children, or when using a story as the basis of a lesson? (please tick **all** that apply)

I do not teach about any of these (25)

Compassion (1)

Courage (2)

Equality (3)

Fairness (4)

Faith (5)

Following the rules (6)

Forgiveness (7)

Friendship (9)

Generosity (10)

Gratitude (11)

Helping (12)

Honesty (13)

Humility (14)

- Kindness (15)
- Listening to parents or adults (16)
- Loyalty (17)
- Perseverance (18)
- Resilience (19)
- Respect (20)
- Responsibility (21)
- Self-control (22)
- Sharing (23)
- Teamwork (24)

Page Break

Story Types

Stories can be used to teach about:

Morals / Moral Lessons - underlying moral principles, or lessons, which can be conveyed to individuals e.g. "Don't lie", "Treat others as you would wish to be treated" etc.

"Good" Character - the personal qualities that are considered "good" for a person to have e.g. *kindness, honesty* etc.

"Good" Behaviour - the behaviours that are considered "good" to demonstrate and that help to maintain positive relationships with others e.g. *sharing, helping, listening to others* etc.

The next 2 questions ask you to think about various types of story:

Fables: traditional short stories that teach moral lessons, especially ones with animals as characters

Biographies/ Autobiographies: stories of a person's life/ life events

Classic stories: timeless classics recognised for their quality or exemplary features

Fairy tales: stories about magic, magical beings or in fantasy settings

Folklore: the traditions and stories of a culture or community

Stories from history: stories about important real-life historical events or people

Myths and legends: stories from ancient times about people and events that may or may not be true

Picture books/ storybooks: stories in books for young children with lots of pictures

Popular fiction: stories in books that fit a well-liked genre that is popular with the masses

Religious stories: stories originating from or connecting to a particular faith

Q15a **15a.** Please rate how **useful** you think the following **types of story** are to teach about **any** (one, some or all) of the areas bullet-pointed in **blue** above

	Not at all useful (1)	Slightly useful (2)	Moderately useful (3)	Very useful (4)	Extremely useful (5)
Fables (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Biographies/ Autobiographies (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Classic stories (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Fairy tales (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Folklore (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Stories from history (6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Myths and legends (8)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Picture books/ Storybooks (9)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Popular fiction (10)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Religious stories (12)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



Q15b **15b.** Now **rank** the **types of story** according to **how useful** you think they are to teach about any (one, some or all) of the areas bullet-pointed in **blue** above.

Please rank the **top 6**, in order of usefulness by dragging and dropping into the right-hand column and ordering your choices (1 = the most useful)

Most Useful (top 6)
_____ Fables (1)
_____ Biographies/Autobiographies (2)
_____ Classic stories (3)
_____ Fairy tales (4)
_____ Folklore (5)
_____ Stories from history (6)
_____ Myths and legends (8)
_____ Picture books/ Storybooks (9)
_____ Popular fiction (10)
_____ Religious stories (12)

End of Block: Section C: Using Stories

Start of Block: Section C: Using Stories (continued)

Section C: Using Stories (continued)

Story Features

Stories can be used to teach about:

Morals / Moral Lessons - underlying moral principles, or lessons, which can be conveyed to individuals e.g. "Don't lie", "Treat others as you would wish to be treated" etc.

"Good" Character - the personal qualities that are considered "good" for a person to have e.g. *kindness, honesty* etc.

"Good" Behaviour - the behaviours that are considered "good" to demonstrate and that help to maintain positive relationships with others e.g. *sharing, helping, listening to others* etc.

Q16a 16a. Type of Story Characters

Which do you think makes stories **more useful** to teach about the areas bullet-pointed above?

- Stories with human characters (1)
 - Stories with animal/ non-human characters (2)
 - Whether characters are human or animal/ non-human does not affect how useful a story is or can be (3)
-

Q16b 16b. Characters' Physical Appearance (e.g. clothes, hair, skin tone etc.)

Which do you think makes stories **more useful** to teach about the areas bullet-pointed above?

- Stories with main characters who are similar in physical appearance to the children being taught (1)
 - Stories with main characters who are different in physical appearance to the children being taught (2)
 - The physical appearance of the main characters does not affect how useful a story is or can be (3)
-

Q17 17. Age of Story Characters

Which do you think makes stories **more useful** to teach about the areas bullet-pointed above?

- Main characters who are younger than the children being taught (4)
 - Main characters of a similar age to the children being taught (1)
 - Main characters who are older than the children being taught (3)
 - The age of the main characters does not affect how useful a story is or can be (2)
-

Q18 18. Story Setting

Which do you think makes stories **more useful** to teach about the areas bullet-pointed above?

- Real-life settings (1)
- Fantasy settings (2)
- The type of setting does not affect how useful a story is or can be (3)

End of Block: Section C: Using Stories (continued)

Start of Block: Section C: Using Stories (continued) 3

Section C: Using Stories (continued)

This question asks you whether you use stories to teach about any (one, some or all) of the following areas:

Morals / Moral Lessons - underlying moral principles, or lessons, which can be conveyed to individuals e.g. "Don't lie", "Treat others as you would wish to be treated" etc.

"Good" Character - the personal qualities that are considered "good" for a person to have e.g. *kindness, honesty* etc.

"Good" Behaviour - the behaviours that are considered "good" to demonstrate and that help to maintain positive relationships with others e.g. *sharing, helping, listening to others* etc.

Q19a **19a**. Do you **ever** teach about any of the areas bullet-pointed above when using stories? This might be the main reason for reading the story or something that is taught incidentally when reading a story for other reasons.

- Yes (1)
- No (2)
- I don't know (3)

Skip To: End of Block If 19a. Do you ever teach about any of the areas bullet-pointed above when using stories? This might... = No

Stories can be used to teach about:

Morals / Moral Lessons - underlying moral principles, or lessons, which can be conveyed to individuals e.g. "Don't lie", "Treat others as you would wish to be treated" etc.

"Good" Character - the personal qualities that are considered "good" for a person to have e.g. *kindness, honesty* etc.

"Good" Behaviour - the behaviours that are considered "good" to demonstrate and that help to maintain positive relationships with others e.g. *sharing, helping, listening to others* etc.

Q19b **19b**. Approximately **how often** do you use stories to:

	At least once a day (3)	Once a day (4)	Once every few days (8)	Once a week (9)	Once every 2 weeks (11)	Once a month (12)	Once every half term (13)	Once a term (14)	Once a year (15)
Teach about morals/ moral lessons (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Teach about "good" character (6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Teach about "good" behaviour (7)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Bullet points

The following question asks you about why you use stories to teach about any (one, some or all) of the following areas:

Morals / Moral Lessons - underlying moral principles, or lessons, which can be conveyed to individuals e.g. "Don't lie", "Treat others as you would wish to be treated" etc.

"Good" Character - the personal qualities that are considered "good" for a person to have e.g. *kindness, honesty* etc.

"Good" Behaviour - the behaviours that are considered "good" to demonstrate and that help to maintain positive relationships with others e.g. *sharing, helping, listening to others* etc.

Q20a **20a**. Do you ever intentionally choose and use stories to teach about any of the areas bullet-pointed above? For example, choosing a book specifically in order to teach about honesty to pupils.

- Yes (1)
- No, I only teach about these areas incidentally, when reading a story for other reasons (2)

Skip To: End of Block If 20a. Do you ever intentionally choose and use stories to teach about any of the areas bullet-poin... = No, I only teach about these areas incidentally, when reading a story for other reasons

Page Break

Stories can be used to teach about:

Morals / Moral Lessons - underlying moral principles, or lessons, which can be conveyed to individuals e.g. "Don't lie", "Treat others as you would wish to be treated" etc.

"Good" Character - the personal qualities that are considered "good" for a person to have e.g. *kindness, honesty* etc.

"Good" Behaviour - the behaviours that are considered "good" to demonstrate and that help to maintain positive relationships with others e.g. *sharing, helping, listening to others* etc.

Q21 **21.** Why do you use stories to teach about the areas bullet-pointed above? (please tick **all** that apply)

- Stories provide children with a safe space to learn which is removed from their own personal context (e.g. children can reflect on the actions of characters, not their own) (1)
 - Stories are entertaining and enjoyable for children (2)
 - Stories provide insight into characters' thoughts and feelings – children can understand a lot from this (3)
 - Story illustrations help to keep children engaged (4)
 - Stories often provide good examples that can be used (5)
 - Books and resources containing stories are abundant in schools; there are many stories that can be used (6)
 - Stories are a good gateway to discussion (8)
 - Other (please specify) (7) _____
-

Q22

Stories can be used to teach about:

Morals / Moral Lessons - underlying moral principles, or lessons, which can be conveyed to individuals e.g. "Don't lie", "Treat others as you would wish to be treated" etc.

"Good" Character - the personal qualities that are considered "good" for a person to have e.g. *kindness, honesty* etc.

"Good" Behaviour - the behaviours that are considered "good" to demonstrate and that help to maintain positive relationships with others e.g. *sharing, helping, listening to others* etc.

The next question asks you to think about various types of story:

Fables: traditional short stories that teach moral lessons, especially ones with animals as characters

Biographies/ Autobiographies: stories of a person's life/ life events

Classic stories: timeless classics recognised for their quality or exemplary features

Fairy tales: stories about magic, magical beings or in fantasy settings

Folklore: the traditions and stories of a culture or community

Stories from history: stories about important real-life historical events or people

Myths and legends: stories from ancient times about people and events that may or may not be true

Picture books/ storybooks: stories in books for young children with lots of pictures

Popular fiction: stories in books that fit a well-liked genre that is popular with the masses

Religious stories: stories originating from or connecting to a particular faith

22. Which of the following **types of story** do you tend to use to teach about the areas bullet-pointed in **blue** above? (please tick **all** that apply)

- Fables (1)
- Biographies/Autobiographies (2)
- Classic stories (3)
- Fairy tales (4)
- Folklore (5)
- Stories from history (6)
- Myths and legends (8)
- Picture books/ Storybooks (9)
- Popular fiction (10)
- Religious stories (12)
- Other (please specify) (13) _____

Page Break

Section D: Pedagogy

The following questions relate specifically to how you use stories to teach children about one, some or all of the following areas:

Morals / Moral Lessons - underlying moral principles, or lessons, which can be conveyed to individuals e.g. "Don't lie", "Treat others as you would wish to be treated" etc.

"Good" Character - the personal qualities that are considered "good" for a person to have e.g. *kindness, honesty* etc.

"Good" Behaviour - the behaviours that are considered "good" to demonstrate and that help to maintain positive relationships with others e.g. *sharing, helping, listening to others* etc.

Please answer questions in relation to your current school setting. For example, if you are currently a Year 3 teacher, please answer the questions with this year group in mind.

Q23 **23**. Which of the following statements describe how you use stories to teach children about the areas bullet-pointed in blue (please tick **all** that apply)

- I try to develop the children's understanding of important vocabulary e.g. honesty, friendship etc. (1)
- I encourage the children to reflect on what characters may think and feel in the story (2)
- I encourage the children to think about how the events in the story may be similar to their own lives (3)
- I encourage the children to identify and describe the problems or dilemmas that characters face (5)
- I encourage the children to discuss the problems or dilemmas that characters face, e.g. to discuss the "right thing to do" (6)
- None of the above (4)

Q24 **24.** When using stories to teach children about the areas bullet-pointed in **blue**, do you use any of the following terms with the children? (please tick **all** that apply)

- Morals (1)
- Values (2)
- Virtues (3)
- Strengths (or 'Character Strengths') (4)
- Traits (5)
- I don't use any of these terms (6)

Page Break

Section D: Pedagogy (Continued)

The following questions relate specifically to how you teach children about the meaning or message of the story.

For example, if there is a clear moral message contained in the story, how do you teach about this? Or, if there is not a clear moral message to the story, but there is meaning that can be taken from certain events, how do you teach about this?

Q25 **25.** How do you convey the meaning of a story to the children?

Please tick the option ***which best describes your pedagogy.***

- I reinforce or emphasise the meaning during or at the end of the story (1)
 - I allow children to take their own meaning from the story (2)
 - I allow children to take their own meaning from the story, but I emphasise what I feel to be the “correct” meaning if I feel that this has not been properly understood (3)
 - Other (please specify) (4) _____
-

Q26 **26.** How do you check the children's understanding during/after the story?
Please tick the option **which best describes your pedagogy**,

- I explain to the children what has happened in the story and why (1)
 - I encourage the children to explain what has happened in the story and why (2)
 - I allow children to take their own meaning and understanding from the story; I do not provide an explanation or ask children to explain (3)
 - I encourage the children to explain what has happened in the story and why, but I offer a "correct" account if I feel that this has not been properly understood (4)
 - Other (please specify) (5) _____
 - I don't check the children's understanding (6)
-

Q27a **27a.** When possible, do you ask children to take part in follow-up activities relating to the meaning of the story? (e.g. partner work, worksheets, whiteboard activities). Please tick the option which **best describes your pedagogy**.

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Skip To: Q27c If 27a. When possible, do you ask children to take part in follow-up activities relating to the mean... = No

Q27b **27b.** Why do you ask children to take part in follow-up activities relating to the meaning of the story? (please tick **all** that apply)

- To reinforce the meaning (1)
- For the children's enjoyment/ entertainment (2)
- To evidence learning (e.g. for ongoing assessment of learning) (6)
- Other (please specify) (3) _____
- Don't know (4)

Q27c **27c.** Why don't you ask children to complete or listen to follow-up activities relating to the meaning of the story? (please tick **all** that apply)

- It is not important (1)
- There is usually no time for this (2)
- This is not the main learning objective (3)
- I would not know what to do/ how to do this (4)
- Other (please specify) (5) _____

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Q28a **28a.** During or after the story, would you say that you encourage or help children to relate the meaning of the story to their own lives? (e.g. by asking the children to think about and reflect on similar situations/issues that they have faced or will face). Please tick the option **which best describes your pedagogy.**

Yes (1)

No (2)

Skip To: Q28c If 28a. During or after the story, would you say that you encourage or help children to relate the m... = No

Q28b **28b.** Why do you encourage or help children to relate the meaning of the story to their own lives? (please tick **all** that apply)

Children often do not understand that the meaning of the stories is relevant to them and their own lives (1)

Children sometimes need support in relating the meaning of the story to their own lives (2)

Children do not do this naturally or without prompting (3)

It is important that children relate the meaning of the story to their own lives (4)

Other (please specify) (5) _____

Don't know (6)

Skip To: End of Block If 28b. Why do you encourage or help children to relate the meaning of the story to their own lives?... = Children often do not understand that the meaning of the stories is relevant to them and their own lives

Skip To: End of Block If 28b. Why do you encourage or help children to relate the meaning of the story to their own lives?... = Children sometimes need support in relating the meaning of the story to their own lives

Skip To: End of Block If 28b. Why do you encourage or help children to relate the meaning of the story to their own lives?... = Children do not do this naturally or without prompting

Skip To: End of Block If 28b. Why do you encourage or help children to relate the meaning of the story to their own lives?... = It is important that children relate the meaning of the story to their own lives

Skip To: End of Block If 28b. Why do you encourage or help children to relate the meaning of the story to their own lives?... = Other (please specify)

Skip To: End of Block If Condition: Other (please specify) Is Not Empty. Skip To: End of Block.

Skip To: End of Block If 28b. Why do you encourage or help children to relate the meaning of the story to their own lives?... = Don't know

Q28c **28c.** Why don't you encourage or help children to relate the meaning of the story to their own lives? (please tick **all** that apply)

- The children do not need me to do this – they do this naturally (1)
- It is not important (2)
- There is usually no time for this (3)
- This is not the main learning objective (4)
- I would not know what to do/ how to do this (5)
- Other (please specify) (6) _____

End of Block: Section C: Using Stories (continued) 3

Start of Block: End of Survey Information

End of Survey Information:

Thank you for taking part in this survey. Your responses are very important to this research and provide valuable insight into how stories are used within the school. **To submit your responses, please click the arrow at the bottom of the page.**

Further participation

In the next strand of this research, a small number of teachers will be invited to take part in a short interview about how they use stories. The interviews will provide valuable information about how stories are used and will help to understand the reasons underpinning the results of the survey. If you would be happy to be contacted about the possibility of further participation in this research, please tick the relevant box and provide a contact email address below:

Please contact me about further participation in this research (the interview) using the following email address: (1) _____

Please do not contact me about further participation (3)

Keeping in touch about the findings

If you would be happy to be contacted and kept informed about the findings and any subsequent publications, please tick the relevant box and provide a contact email address below.

Please select from the following options:

I would like to be kept informed about this research and its findings. Please contact me using the following email address: (2) _____

Please do not contact me (3)

Appendix D: Main Revisions Made to the Semi-Structured Interview Schedule Following the Interview Pilot and Feedback.

Question	Point raised by participants of the pilot	Outcome
3	The original question 'Are there any barriers to using stories for character education in your school?' was not fully understood. Participants of the pilot asked for clarification and suggested that the word 'barrier' was problematic.	The wording of the question was changed, in consultation with participants, to: 'Is there anything that prevents you from teaching character education through stories in your school?'
6 and 7	<p>The original questions asked (6) 'Do you think there any features or characteristics of story characters that make them more useful for character education? For example, the age and appearance of characters'. The next question (7) asked the same, but instead focused on the story setting. Both participants had trouble understanding the intended meaning of these questions. The questions aimed to uncover whether teachers think that certain features of stories make them more useful for character education, or make it easier for pupils to relate to and learn from stories.</p> <p>It was suggested that an additional question would help participants to understand the meaning. The follow-up question could then ask specifically about character features and setting features.</p>	<p>The question (6): 'Do you think pupils are able to relate to the stories that you use? Why?' was added to encourage participants to think about the features of stories that help pupils to learn from them.</p> <p>The wording of the subsequent questions (formerly 6 and 7) was simplified and combined (7) 'Are there any features that make characters more relatable? (E.g. age – gender - and appearance of characters). What about the story settings? (E.g. fantasy settings/ real life)'. These questions were asked to help to understand whether character appearance and story setting were deemed to have an impact on children's learning.</p>

Appendix E: Semi-Structured Interview Schedule.

Interview Questions

1. How **useful** do you think stories can be for teaching character education? Can you explain why you think this? What about in comparison to other methods?
2. Can you tell me about **how you select the stories** that you use for character education? Can you provide any examples?
3. Is there anything that **prevents** you from teaching character education through stories in your school?
4. What story types do you think are most useful for story-based character education? Can you explain why you think this?
Supplementary question prompt: Why do you think picture books may be perceived as more useful in comparison to other story types?
5. What story types do you think are least useful for story-based character education? Can you explain why you think this?
Supplementary question prompt: Why do you think 'popular fiction' may be perceived as less useful in comparison to other story types?
6. Do you think **that pupils are able to relate** to the stories that you use? Why is this?
7. Are there any features that make **characters** more relatable? (E.g. age – gender - and appearance of characters). What about the story **settings**? (E.g. fantasy settings/ real life)
8. Do you think that the **length or complexity** of stories affects how useful they are for character education?
9. When you teach character education using stories, does this tend to be in stand-alone lessons (e.g. in story time/ circle time, character lessons etc.), integrated into existing lessons/curriculum areas, or a combination of both?
What is/are the reason(s) for this?
10. Do you ever reinforce the moral or message of a story, for example through a follow-up activity, or by "spelling this out" to the children?

Can you explain why you do/do not do this?

Supplementary question prompt: If a child does not understand the main learning point, what would you do?

11. Can you give me an example of **how you typically use stories** for character education?

Can you take me through the session?

12. Do you think anything has influenced your approach to teaching character education through stories? (training, experience etc.)

Can you tell me more about this?

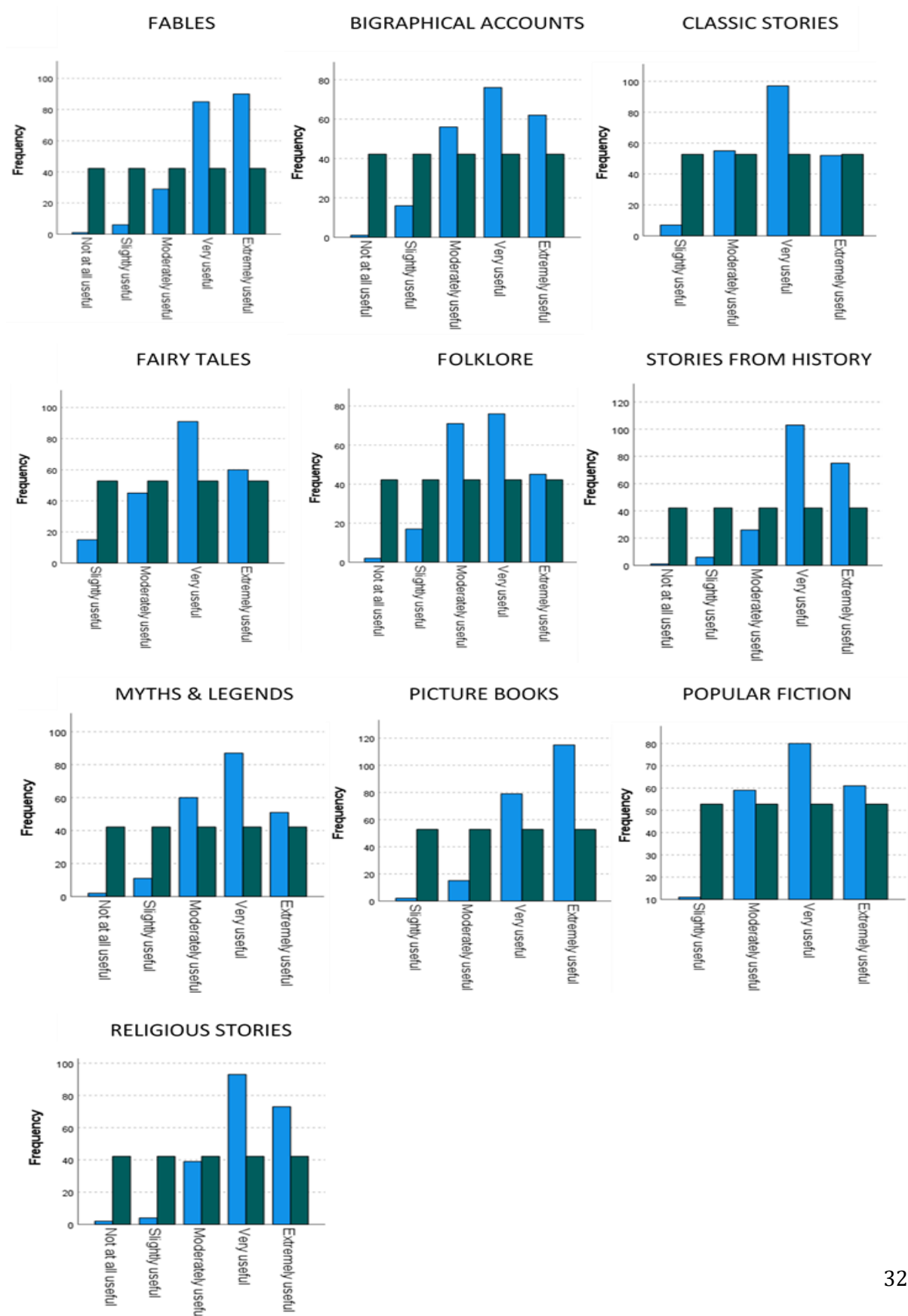
13. Do you ever use stories to teach about different cultures?

Can you tell me more about this?

14. Is there anything you'd like to add?

Appendix F: Data Distributions Corresponding to One-Sample Chi-Square Tests.

Note: dark green bars indicate hypothesized data distribution; blue bars indicate observed data distribution.



Appendix G: The Value of Different Story Types for Character Education. Pairwise Comparisons.

Pairwise comparisons indicated whether there was a significant difference between the perceived usefulness of each story type (see table below). To correct for error, significance values were adjusted by the Bonferroni correction (Adj. Sig). Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Pairwise Comparisons					
Sample 1-Sample 2	Test Statistic	Std. Error	Std. Test Statistic	Sig.	Adj. Sig. ^a
RATE How Useful is Folklore for character education?- RATE How Useful are Myths and Legends for character education?	-.438	.295	-1.487	.137	1.000
RATE How Useful is Folklore for character education?- RATE How Useful are Biographical accounts for character education?	.611	.295	2.074	.038	1.000
RATE How Useful is Folklore for character education?- RATE How Useful are Popular Fiction stories for character education?	-.680	.295	-2.307	.021	.947
RATE How Useful is Folklore for character education?- RATE How Useful are Classic Stories for character education?	.746	.295	2.532	.011	.510
RATE How Useful is Folklore for character education?- RATE How Useful are Fairy Tales for character education?	.858	.295	2.910	.004	.163
RATE How Useful is Folklore for character education?- RATE How Useful are Religious stories for character education?	-1.472	.295	-4.992	.000	<.000***

RATE How Useful is Folklore for character education?- RATE How Useful are Stories from History for character education?	-1.718	.295	-5.828	.000	<.000***
RATE How Useful is Folklore for character education?- RATE How Useful are Fables for character education?	1.893	.295	6.423	.000	<.000***
RATE How Useful is Folklore for character education?- RATE How Useful are Picture Books for character education?	-2.626	.295	-8.907	.000	<.000***
RATE How Useful are Myths and Legends for character education?-RATE How Useful are Biographical Accounts for character education?	.173	.295	.587	.557	1.000
RATE How Useful are Myths and Legends for character education?-RATE How Useful are Popular Fiction stories for character education?	-.242	.295	-.820	.412	1.000
RATE How Useful are Myths and Legends for character education?-RATE How Useful are Classic Stories for character education?	.308	.295	1.045	.296	1.000
RATE How Useful are Myths and Legends for character education?-RATE How Useful are Fairy Tales for character education?	.419	.295	1.423	.155	1.000

RATE How Useful are Myths and Legends for character education?-RATE How Useful are Religious stories for character education?	-1.033	.295	-3.505	.000	.021*
RATE How Useful are Myths and Legends for character education?-RATE How Useful are Stories from History for character education?	1.280	.295	4.341	.000	.001**
RATE How Useful are Myths and Legends for character education?-RATE How Useful are Fables for character education?	1.455	.295	4.936	.000	<.000***
RATE How Useful are Myths and Legends for character education?-RATE How Useful are Picture Books for character education?	-2.187	.295	-7.420	.000	<.000***
RATE How Useful are Biographical Accounts for character education?-RATE How Useful are Popular Fiction stories for character education?	-.069	.295	-.233	.816	1.000
RATE How Useful are Biographical Accounts for character education?-RATE How Useful are Classic Stories for character education?	-.135	.295	-.458	.647	1.000
RATE How Useful are Biographical Accounts for character education?-RATE How Useful are Fairy Tales for character education?	-.246	.295	-.836	.403	1.000

RATE How Useful are Biographical Accounts for character education?-RATE How Useful are Religious stories for character education?	-0.860	.295	-2.918	.004	.158
RATE How Useful are Biographical Accounts for character education?-RATE How Useful are Stories from History for character education?	-1.107	.295	-3.754	.000	.008**
RATE How Useful are Biographical Accounts for character education?-RATE How Useful are Fables for character education?	1.282	.295	4.349	.000	.001**
RATE How Useful are Biographical Accounts for character education?-RATE How Useful are Picture Books for character education?	-2.014	.295	-6.833	.000	<.000***
RATE How Useful are Popular Fiction stories for character education?-RATE How Useful are Classic Stories for character education?	.066	.295	.225	.822	1.000
RATE How Useful are Popular Fiction stories for character education?-RATE How Useful are Fairy Tales for character education?	.178	.295	.603	.547	1.000
RATE How Useful are Popular Fiction stories for character education?-RATE How Useful are Religious stories for character education?	-.791	.295	-2.685	.007	.326

RATE How Useful are Popular Fiction stories for character education?-RATE How Useful are Stories from History for character education?	1.038	.295	3.521	.000	.019*
RATE How Useful are Popular Fiction stories for character education?-RATE How Useful are Fables for character education?	1.213	.295	4.116	.000	.002**
RATE How Useful are Popular Fiction stories for character education?-RATE How Useful are Picture Books for character education?	1.945	.295	6.600	.000	<.000***
RATE How Useful are Classic Stories for character education?-RATE How Useful are Fairy Tales for character education?	-.111	.295	-.378	.706	1.000
RATE How Useful are Classic Stories for character education?-RATE How Useful are Religious stories for character education?	-.725	.295	-2.460	.014	.625
RATE How Useful are Classic Stories for character education?-RATE How Useful are Stories from History for character education?	-.972	.295	-3.296	.001	.044*
RATE How Useful are Classic Stories for character education?-RATE How Useful are Fables for character education?	1.147	.295	3.891	.000	.004**

RATE How Useful are Classic Stories for character education?-RATE How Useful are Picture Books for character education?	-1.879	.295	-6.375	.000	<.000***
RATE How Useful are Fairy Tales for character education?-RATE How Useful are Religious stories for character education?	-.614	.295	-2.082	.037	1.000
RATE How Useful are Fairy Tales for character education?-RATE How Useful are Stories from History for character education?	-.860	.295	-2.918	.004	.158
RATE How Useful are Fairy Tales for character education?-RATE How Useful are Fables for character education?	1.036	.295	3.513	.000	.020*
RATE How Useful are Fairy Tales for character education?-RATE How Useful are Picture Books for character education?	-1.768	.295	-5.997	.000	<.000***
RATE How Useful are Religious stories for character education?-RATE How Useful are Stories from History for character education?	.246	.295	.836	.403	1.000
RATE How Useful are Religious stories for character education?-RATE How Useful are Fables for character education?	.422	.295	1.431	.152	1.000

RATE How Useful are Religious stories for character education?-RATE How Useful are Picture Books for character education?	1.154	.295	3.915	.000	.004**
RATE How Useful are Stories from History for character education?-RATE How Useful are Fables for character education?	.175	.295	.595	.552	1.000
RATE How Useful are Stories from History for character education?-RATE How Useful are Picture Books for character education?	-.908	.295	-3.079	.002	.093
RATE How Useful are Fables for character education?-RATE How Useful are Picture Books for character education?	-.732	.295	-2.484	.013	.584
Each row tests the null hypothesis that the Sample 1 and Sample 2 distributions are the same. Asymptotic significances (2-sided tests) are displayed. The significance level is .050.					
a. Significance values have been adjusted by the Bonferroni correction for multiple tests.					

Appendix H: Frequency of Story-Based Character Education.

1. Frequency of Story-Based Character Education: All Respondents.

Participants were asked how frequently they used stories to teach about (a) morals/moral lessons, (b) “good” character, and (c) “good” behaviour. This table shows the ‘frequency selections’ of all respondents ($N=208$).

Taught	(a) Morals/Moral Messages			(b) "Good" Character			(c) "Good" Behaviour		
	Freq Selected	%	Accumulative %	Freq Selected	%	Accumulative %	Freq Selected	%	Accumulative %
At least once a day	9	4.3	4.3	9	4.3	4.3	11	5.3	5.3
Once a day	10	4.8	9.1	9	4.3	8.7	10	4.8	10.1
Once every few days	41	19.7	28.8	43	20.7	29.3	39	18.8	28.8
Once a week	56	26.9	55.8	51	24.5	53.8	49	23.6	52.4
Once every two weeks	28	13.5	69.2	31	14.9	68.8	29	13.9	66.3
Once a month	30	14.4	83.7	33	15.9	84.6	32	15.4	81.7
Once every half term	27	13.0	96.6	22	10.6	95.2	27	13.0	94.7

Once a term	7	3.4	100.0	8	3.8	99.0	9	4.3	99.0
Once a year	0	0.0	100.0	2	1.0	100.0	2	1.0	100.0
Total	208	100.0	100.0	208	100.0	100.0	208	100.0	100.0

2. Frequency of Teaching Morals/Moral Messages Using Stories: Lower and Upper School Respondents.

This table shows the 'frequency selections' of respondents who taught exclusively in the Lower School ($n=79$), and respondents who taught exclusively in the Upper School ($n=98$).

	Morals/Moral Messages					
	Lower School			Upper School		
Taught	Freq Selected	%	Accumulative %	Freq Selected	%	Accumulative %
At least once a day	4	5.1	5.1	3	3.1	3.1
Once a day	5	6.3	11.4	1	1.0	4.1
Once every few days	23	29.1	40.5	14	14.3	18.4
Once a week	23	29.1	69.6	26	26.5	44.9
Once every two weeks	8	10.1	79.7	16	16.3	61.2
Once a month	11	13.9	93.7	15	15.3	76.5
Once every half term	5	6.3	100.0	17	17.3	93.9
Once a term	0	0.0	100.0	6	6.1	100.0
Once a year	0	0.0	100.0	0	0.0	100.0
Total	79	100.0	100.0	98	100.0	100.0

3. Frequency of Teaching About “Good” Character Using Stories: Lower and Upper School Respondents.

This table shows the ‘frequency selections’ of respondents who taught exclusively in the Lower School ($n=79$), and respondents who taught exclusively in the Upper School ($n=98$).

	“Good” Character					
	Lower School			Upper School		
Taught	Freq Selected	%	Accumulative %	Freq Selected	%	Accumulative %
At least once a day	4	5.1	5.1	4	4.1	4.1
Once a day	5	6.3	11.4	1	1.0	5.1
Once every few days	23	29.1	40.5	14	14.3	19.4
Once a week	18	22.8	63.3	27	27.6	46.9
Once every two weeks	12	15.2	78.5	15	15.3	62.2
Once a month	11	13.9	92.4	16	16.3	78.6
Once every half term	5	6.3	98.7	13	13.3	91.8
Once a term	0	0.0	98.7	7	7.1	99.0
Once a year	1	1.3	100.0	1	1.0	100.0
Total	79	100.0	100.0	98	100.0	100.0

4. Frequency of Teaching About “Good” Behaviour Using Stories: Lower and Upper School Respondents.

This table shows the ‘frequency selections’ of respondents who taught exclusively in the Lower School ($n=79$), and respondents who taught exclusively in the Upper School ($n=98$).

	“Good” Behaviour					
	Lower School			Upper School		
Taught	Freq Selected	%	Accumulative %	Freq Selected	%	Accumulative %
At least once a day	5	6.3	6.3	5	5.1	5.1
Once a day	6	7.6	13.9	1	1.0	6.1
Once every few days	22	27.8	41.8	13	13.3	19.4
Once a week	21	26.6	68.4	20	20.4	39.8
Once every two weeks	9	11.4	79.7	15	15.3	55.1
Once a month	9	11.4	91.1	20	20.4	75.5
Once every half term	4	5.1	96.2	17	17.3	92.9
Once a term	1	1.3	97.5	7	7.1	100.0
Once a year	2	2.5	100.0	0	0.0	100.0
Total	79	100.0	100.0	98	100.0	100.0

5. Frequency of Teaching Story-Based Character Education – Average selections of Lower and Upper School Respondents.

This table shows the average ‘frequency selections’ of respondents who taught exclusively in the Lower School ($n=79$), and respondents who taught exclusively in the Upper School ($n=98$). Average frequency values were calculated by averaging the number of respondents who selected each option for (a) morals/moral lessons, (b) “good” character, and (c) “good” behaviour.

	Average					
	Average Lower School			Average Upper School		
Taught	Av Freq	%	Accumulative %	Av Freq	%	Accumulative %
At least once a day	4.3	5.5	5.5	4.0	4.1	4.1
Once a day	5.3	6.8	12.2	1.0	1.0	5.1
Once every few days	22.7	28.7	40.9	13.7	13.9	19.0
Once a week	20.7	26.2	67.1	24.3	24.8	43.9
Once every two weeks	9.7	12.2	79.3	15.3	15.6	59.5
Once a month	10.3	13.1	92.4	17.0	17.3	76.9
Once every half term	4.7	5.9	98.3	15.7	16.0	92.9
Once a term	0.3	0.4	98.7	6.7	6.8	99.7
Once a year	1.0	1.3	100.0	0.3	0.3	100.0
Total	79	100.0	100.0	98	100.0	100.0

Appendix I: The Character Qualities Taught Using Stories.

This table shows the selections of all respondents ($N=217$), respondents who taught exclusively in the Lower School ($n=83$), and respondents who taught exclusively in the Upper School ($n=100$). Chi-Square tests indicate whether there was a significant association between the age group taught (Lower School or Upper School) and the selection of each character quality. Note. $*p < .05$, $**p < .01$, $***p < .001$.

Characteristic/ quality	All Respondents ($N=217$)		Respondents from Lower School ($n=83$) and Upper School ($n=100$)			Chi-Square Test		
	Freq	%	Upper or Lower	Freq	%	χ^2	V	p
Friendship	198	91.2	Lower	75	90.4	.022	.01	.882
			Upper	91	91.0			
Kindness	191	88.0	Lower	75	90.4	1.186	.08	.276
			Upper	85	85.0			
Respect	181	83.4	Lower	65	78.3	.970	.07	.325
			Upper	84	84.0			
Courage	178	82.0	Lower	67	80.7	.338	.04	.561
			Upper	84	84.0			
Honesty	176	81.1	Lower	69	83.1	1.057	.08	.304
			Upper	77	77.0			
Resilience	172	79.3	Lower	65	78.3	.078	.02	.779
			Upper	80	80.0			
Helping others	170	78.3	Lower	73	88.0	8.56	.22	.003**
			Upper	70	70.0			
Teamwork	166	76.5	Lower	70	84.3	4.562	.16	.033*
			Upper	71	71.0			
Compassion	165	76.0	Lower	62	74.7	.041	.02	.839
			Upper	76	76.0			
Following the rules	165	76.0	Lower	69	83.1	.489	.16	.027*
			Upper	69	69.0			
Forgiveness	163	75.1	Lower	60	73.3	.068	.02	.795
			Upper	74	74.0			
Fairness	162	74.7	Lower	62	74.7	.168	.03	.681
			Upper	72	72.0			
Equality	160	73.7	Lower	59	71.1	.355	.04	.551
			Upper	75	75.0			
Responsibility	160	73.7	Lower	61	73.5	.006	.01	.940
			Upper	73	73.0			

Perseverance	158	72.8	Lower	63	75.9	.357	.04	.550
			Upper	72	72.0			
Sharing	154	71.0	Lower	65	78.3	4.467	.16	.035*
			Upper	64	64.0			
Faith	152	70.0	Lower	62	74.7	1.292	.08	.256
			Upper	67	67.0			
Gratitude	138	63.6	Lower	55	66.3	.762	.07	.383
			Upper	60	60.0			
Listening to parents or adults	130	59.9	Lower	55	66.3	2.003	.11	.157
			Upper	56	56.0			
Self-control	119	54.8	Lower	46	55.4	.003	.00	.954
			Upper	55	55.0			
Generosity	113	52.1	Lower	46	55.4	1.00	.07	.317
			Upper	48	48.0			
Humility	77	35.5	Lower	27	32.5	.124	.03	.725
			Upper	35	35.0			
Loyalty	86	39.6	Lower	29	34.9	.705	.06	.401
			Upper	41	41.0			