

## Humour: As An Essential Device In Children Literature

Aafrina.B<sup>1</sup>, Dr. U.S. Akshara Govind<sup>2</sup>, Dr. D. Jaisankar<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Research Scholar, Sathyabama Institute of Science and Technology, Chennai.

<sup>2</sup> Assistant Professor of English, Faculty of Science and Humanities, Sathyabama Institute of Science and Technology.

<sup>3</sup> Professor of English, Vel Tech High Tech Dr.Rangarajan Dr.Sakunthala Engineering College, Chennai, India.

Email ID: [AafrinaAafrina@gmail.com](mailto:AafrinaAafrina@gmail.com) Email ID: [akshara.english@sathyabama.ac.in](mailto:akshara.english@sathyabama.ac.in)

Cite this paper as: Aafrina.B, Dr. U.S. Akshara Govind, Dr. D. Jaisankar, (2025) Humour: As An Essential Device In Children Literature. *Journal of Neonatal Surgery*, 14 (24s), 12-17.

### ABSTRACT

Children's literature encompasses various genres, including Horror, Tragedy, Adventure, Mystery, Science Fiction, and Comedy. Among these, Mystery is a favorite, as it offers thrilling and engaging experiences for young readers. Adventure is also a highly popular genre, providing exciting journeys into imaginative worlds. These elements contribute significantly to the richness of children's literature, with no recognition of the field being complete without them. They serve as the foundational pillars of this genre. When discussing children's literature, one cannot overlook the importance of Comedy. Humor is vital for individuals of all ages; a day feels incomplete without laughter. Laughter often arises from the presence of comedy and a sense of humour, which is equally necessary for children. They delight in watching comedic scenes and are drawn to comic books and funny stories. Consequently, humor emerges as an essential component in children's literature, alongside the other genres. This paper aims to demonstrate that humour plays a critical role in the realm of children's literature. Numerous researchers explore the benefits of humour for children and its effect on their reading habits. They examine this topic from various perspectives, but this study will specifically address how humor serves as a vital device in children's literature. Additionally, I will strive to fill the research gap by analyzing its comprehensive role within this genre.

**Keywords:** Pillars of children's literature, an essential quality, incredible parts, essential device, humor for children.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Children's literature creates a vibrant and imaginative world specifically tailored for young readers, offering them not only enjoyment but also opportunities for holistic development. This genre serves as a foundational space where children's minds can flourish, nurtured by stories that promote spiritual growth, moral values, and an understanding of beauty in life. The evolution of children's literature has been remarkable, expanding its reach and significance across the globe. Historically, children's literature traces its roots back to the fifteenth century, though it did not gain significant traction until later. It truly began to emerge as a distinct and recognized genre during the latter half of the eighteenth century. Prior to this period, literature for children existed only in a nascent form. The twentieth century marked an explosive growth in this genre, with an especially vibrant period from the late eighteenth century to the early twentieth century, often referred to as the golden era of children's literature. This era was characterized by a rapid increase in the publication of children's books, reflecting a growing recognition of the importance of literature for young audiences.

John Newbery, often hailed as the **"father of children's literature,"** played a pivotal role in this development. His works, such as **"A Little Pretty Pocket Book"** and **"A History of Little Goody Two Shoes,"** were groundbreaking. **"A Little Pretty Pocket Book"** was designed with children in mind—its compact size made it easy for small hands to manage, and its neat presentation attracted both children and adults alike. Meanwhile, **"A History of Little Goody Two Shoes"** holds the distinction of being recognized as one of the first children's novels in the world, paving the way for future narratives aimed at younger audiences.

Children's literature encompasses a wide array of genres, including fantasy, adventure, mystery, science fiction, horror, and humor. Among these, humor stands out as a vital element that appeals universally, transcending age barriers. Comedy is not only enjoyable for children; it plays a crucial role in their development. From the time they are toddlers, children delight in laughter, which is often sparked by humorous interactions, stories, and experiences. Humor manifests in various forms—through physical comedy, witty wordplay, and distinct character styles.

Creating comedic narratives, however, is no simple task. While authors can weave stories filled with adventure or fantasy, crafting effective comedy requires a unique skill set. Including humor in storytelling is essential to engaging the audience,

particularly children, who naturally gravitate toward laughter. As Beverly Cleary posits, humor serves as a mechanism for alleviating anxiety; it allows children to feel a sense of triumph over their younger selves and reassures them of their growth (p. 560-561). Paul Danziger (1999) further emphasizes that humor connects with our emotions and provides comfort, acting almost like a gentle caress of understanding (p. 29). This insight highlights how humor captivates children's attention while enriching their reading and viewing experiences.

Children find joy and laughter in various settings—be it at home, school, parks, or shopping centers. Children's literature is rich in realistic themes and diverse comedic elements, making humor an indispensable tool for engaging young readers. Cart (1995) aptly notes *that "laughter is therapy. It is healing"* and that it serves as a remedy for emotional distress (p. 1-2). Understanding the importance of humor in children's literature sheds light on its role in fostering a healthy emotional landscape for young readers. This research explores not only the significance of humor but also delves into the artistry involved in constructing comedic narratives, showcasing the complete skill set needed to navigate the comic realm of children's literature. Through examining these elements, we gain a deeper appreciation of how humor shapes the reading experience for children, making literature an essential part of their lives.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Humor plays a significant role in enhancing both our happiness and various skill sets. Numerous research scholars have examined the impact of humor, particularly in the context of child development. One of the most notable scholars in this field, Dr. Paul McGhee, has conducted extensive studies on how humor develops in children. His research concludes that *"the more you support children's sense of humor at this early stage, the more likely they are to emerge into adolescence and adulthood with a well-developed set of humor skills."* This insight captures the essence of how pivotal humor is in shaping not only personality but also cognitive abilities as children mature.

In a literature review focused on humor's application in children's lives, experts from various disciplines—including humor theorists, early childhood specialists, and psychologists—point out that humor plays a crucial role in fostering developmental growth. As stated by Carol J. Aswegan Thornhill in August 2002, *"humor requires the same type of cognitive insight as creative problem-solving."* This observation emphasizes that humor is not merely a source of entertainment; it is intertwined with crucial cognitive processes.

Moreover, humor facilitates children's engagement with literature. For instance, Kathryn Au (1999) notes that *"something magical happens when students become engaged in reading"* (p. ix). She elaborates further by indicating that fostering engagement in reading is essential, *as it ties directly to students' motivation to become literate and to learn how to read effectively* (p. ix).

While many scholars and theorists have focused on the role of humor in children's lives and its effects on their reading habits, there is a notable gap regarding humor as a fundamental component of children's literature. However, the renowned author Don Nilson (1993) highlights the significance of humor, declaring that *"humor is a very important aspect of much of children and adolescents' literature"* (p. 262). This underscores the notion that humor is multifaceted, influencing various aspects such as reading, watching, and speaking, ultimately benefiting children in numerous ways.

Despite the vast research on humor in children's lives, there remains a tendency to overlook its importance within the realm of children's literature. It is essential to recognize that children are the very foundation of children's literature. Most studies have primarily explored how humor manifests in children's everyday experiences, but this paper aims to bridge the existing literature gap by providing a fresh perspective on the significance of humor in children's literature.

So, why do we label humor as a crucial tool? The answer lies in its remarkable ability to capture attention, spark creativity, and promote engagement, making it an invaluable element in cultivating both literacy and social skills among children. By appreciating and utilizing humor, we can enrich children's literary experiences and support their overall developmental journey.

## 3. HIDDEN TREASURE IN CHILDREN LITERATURE

The purpose of comedy is to amuse the audience and bring laughter. It entertains while also addressing social and personal issues such as corruption. Every story contains elements of humor. The importance of children's literature is enhanced when comedic scenes contribute to children's tales. Comedy is often considered a hidden genre within this literary category, yet it continues to develop and grow daily. Comedy is consistently cited as a favorite literature category among children. Despite its significance, it has received less attention compared to genres like fantasy or realism. Notably, *"comedy is not addressed by major children's literature textbooks, reference books, or awards committees as a domain comparable to fantasy or realism"* (Darrigan, Tunnell & Jacobs, 2002; Galda & Cullinan, 2002; Huck & Kiefer, 2004; Norton, 1999; Sutherland, 1997; Temple, Martinez & Yokota, 2002).

Moreover, comedy for children lacks major book awards from the Children's Book Council. Despite this lack of recognition, over 70 percent of children aged 6 to 17 report that they seek out books that make them laugh. Additionally, according to the

Scholastic Kids and Family Report, "more than 50 percent of parents say they want their kids' books to be funny above all else." When humor is involved, families enjoy reading together more, leading to positive and uplifting interactions that encourage regular reading habits.

Baker states, "*students are engaged readers when they read frequently for interest, enjoyment, and learning*" (p. 2). This highlights that humor is a hidden treasure in children's literature, sparking interest in reading and providing relief from stress, anxiety, and depression, while also enhancing cognitive skills. However, we must not overlook the fact that children's literature has developed alongside the genre of humor, even if it remains somewhat concealed. In this chapter, we will discuss and clarify how stories and movies might not have gained popularity without the element of humor.

The most entertaining movie is Harry Potter, which children enjoy very much. Kids are influenced by this film. In recent years, the magic of Harry Potter (Rowling, 1997) has engaged children in reading. However, when teachers, parents, or publishers examine why a specific book has this power, the answer is hard to find. Children's writer Gordon Korman states, "*I believe that the true key to Harry Potter's popularity is not its fantasy, but its humor*" (Electronic Mail interview, 2002). This highlights the level of humor present in the Harry Potter films, a fact that many of us may not recognize. We often assume that Harry Potter is famous solely for its fantasy and adventures, but the underlying reality is its humor.

In "*Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*," we see the film become the funniest in the franchise, with director David Yates and the cast indulging in romantic comedy elements throughout much of the story. Jim Broadbent brings a goofy quality to Professor Slughorn that never crosses the line into over-the-top, while Harry and Ron's numerous interactions with the opposite sex provide plenty of comedic material, culminating in laugh-out-loud moments like the exchange about "*Hermione's nice skin*" during a nighttime chat. Daniel Radcliffe, Rupert Grint, and Emma Watson shine in these moments, and it feels as if they have been waiting the entire series to deliver these comedic beats.

Another beloved film is "*Baby's Day Out*," which is a timeless favorite among children filled with hilarious scenes. The story begins with a baby boy. Without uttering a word, this invincible and fearless infant becomes the star of "*Baby's Day Out*," a charming and funny comedy produced by John Hughes, known for "*Home Alone*." The movie features comical encounters between the baby and three bumbling thieves who are eagerly trying to kidnap him. However, they soon find that catching the baby is not as easy as they thought.. The entire story is a humorous take on the characters' foolishness. When the trio attempts to kidnap the baby, his escape gives everyone goosebumps. Traveling by handbag, taxi, and bus, this remarkably agile little one visits a department store, the zoo, and finally a construction site. There, the criminals suffer comical misfortunes: they have their feet flattened by a truck and their knuckles cracked by a gorilla, providing endless laughter for children.

Another outstanding comedy film is "*Home Alone*." Released in 1990, this American Christmas comedy was directed by Chris Columbus and written and produced by John Hughes. The story revolves around a boy who is accidentally left behind at home while the rest of his family goes on vacation.. This film tells the story of how a young boy escapes from burglars on a particular night. Every scene is filled with humor, making it a delightful holiday movie for Christmas. People watch and enjoy the hilarious moments that are hard to forget. One of the best scenes occurs when Kevin wakes up after wishing his family would disappear and joyfully yells this line. He is thrilled at the prospect of having the house to himself, and his excitement as he runs through the house is truly funny. Another highlight is when Kevin uses various traps on Marv and Harry in the first film. His ideas are quite original and ingenious, and seeing the robbers get their comeuppance is absolutely hilarious. These scenes make us laugh a lot. One wonderful comedy movie is "*Finding Nemo*", which beautifully portrays the true relationship between a father and son. In the story, Nemo goes missing, and Marlin, his father, sets out to find him. Throughout the film, there are many funny moments.

Marlin and Dory are high on the list of iconic duos, which includes Woody and Buzz, Mike and Sulley, and Carl and Russell. Their first meeting is always a hilarious moment—except for Mike and Sulley, who were already roommates at the start of "*Monsters, Inc.*", but we see their initial meeting in the prequel, "*Monsters University*".

Bruce, the ominous great white shark, has a humorous twist; he's the mechanical shark from "*Jaws*". Bruce and his friends don't want to eat anyone—not even fish, which they are biologically inclined to eat, let alone people. Their motto is, "*Fish are friends, not food*." The idea of bloodthirsty sharks adopting a vegetarian diet is quite funny to everyone.

Other great films in the comedy genre include "*Honey, I Shrunk the Kids*", "*Luca*", "*Encanto*", "*The Secret Life of Pets*", "*The Mitchells vs. The Machines*", "*Shrek*", and "*Daddy Day Care*". There are many funny movies for children. It's important to note that regardless of the genre, humor is an essential part of any film. Without humor, it can be difficult to enjoy a movie. Laughter is vital for our enjoyment, especially since many of us often feel overwhelmed or depressed. Humor acts as a hidden treasure in films, just as it does in children's literature. It plays a crucial role in engaging children with books.

When there are hilarious scenes in fairy tales, adventure stories, or even horror tales, children are more likely to pay attention and want to read. Without amusing elements, it becomes challenging for children to connect with literature.

#### 4. BLACK HUMOR

Black comedy is a comedic style that addresses tragic or distressing subject matter in a humorous way. It is also known as dark comedy or dark humor, and is characterized by gallows humor. Other terms related to black humor include satire, mockery, irony, ridicule, sarcasm, and wit. Writers and comedians often use black humor as a tool for conveying complex messages, revealing that behind every instance of black humor lies untold pain. Many instances of black humor serve to enhance our understanding of various issues and can even stimulate children's learning.

A clear example of the classic use of dark humor in children's literature can be seen in the picture book *"Zombie in Love"* by Kelly DiPucchio and Scott Campbell. This story features an iconic character from the horror genre placed in a helpless romance narrative. Jon Klassen's book *"I Want My Hat Back"* is another noteworthy example, demonstrating his mastery of subtle dark humor.

Black humor can also convey moral lessons for children. A well-known story featuring Akbar and Birbal illustrates this point. This witty tale helps children develop their own sense of humor while instilling moral values. The stories of Akbar and Birbal are particularly famous because of their humor, making humor a prominent tool in children's literature.

Afflerbach (1996) notes, *"Students may also use what they comprehend through engaged reading to solve problems, to create artistically, and to reflect on the value of reading"* (p. 193). This conveys that children can solve problems through reading, and one major factor that stimulates their interest in reading is humor. The clever wit found in Akbar and Birbal's stories can significantly benefit children.

For example, in the story *"The Crows of the Kingdom,"* Emperor Akbar asks Birbal how many crows are in the kingdom. Birbal responds wittily, stating that there are *"ninety thousand two hundred and forty-nine crows."* When Akbar asks what would happen if there were more crows, Birbal cleverly replies that if there were more, they must have come from a neighboring kingdom, and if there were fewer, it means some have gone on vacation. This exchange showcases Birbal's wit and humor, demonstrating how he conveys messages through humor, often reflecting frustrations in life.

In the Victorian era, childhood death increased, leading many writers of that time to create works that portrayed death and its tragedies, often appealing to young readers. However, some critics believe that black humor is primarily for adults and should be approached with caution in children's literature.

One notable example of black humor in film is Charlie Chaplin's *"The Kid"* (1921), which draws from his own childhood experiences. This film tells the story of Chaplin becoming a surrogate father to an abandoned child, illustrating his struggles through a blend of humor and drama. It begins with a distraught mother who, unable to care for her baby, contemplates ending her life but is stopped by the child's presence. Ultimately, the baby is thrown into the garbage by thieves, and Chaplin's character rescues him, embracing both parental roles. The film beautifully balances comedy and drama, conveying pain through humor while providing entertainment for children.

Carlo Collodi's *"The Adventures of Pinocchio"* (1883) and his other work *"Good Little Folks"* also reflect this style, revealing the macabre sensibilities of their time while incorporating humor. These works serve as excellent examples of black humor in children's literature.

#### 5. STRATEGY OF COMEDY WORLD

Comedy is a valuable quality that enhances our positive thoughts and decreases negative ones, contributing to a healthier life. It serves as a social skill that can be learned and utilized to alleviate feelings of anxiety for both oneself and others during social interactions. It involves intellectual thought that evokes amusement and laughter, helping to reduce stress and aid cognitive learning; in essence, it is a form of intellectual play (Webster, p.472).

However, mastering comedy is not easy. It doesn't solely rely on words; body language plays a crucial role as well. Therefore, we need strategies to learn it. Over the years, numerous researchers have argued for the importance of comedy as a vital aspect of children's literature, but it has not received much attention from the critical community.

There are three main theories of humor: **\*\*relief\*\***, **\*\*incongruity\*\***, and **\*\*superiority\*\***. The relief theory highlights the benefits of humor, while the incongruity theory focuses on unexpected or inappropriate perceptions. The superiority theory examines the joy derived from jokes. Many researchers use Piaget's stages of cognitive development to understand children's humor and their process of recognizing different humor strategies, particularly the works of McGhee (1977) and Arter (2019).

Comedy encompasses thirteen types, each providing pleasure to audiences in various ways. First, it is essential to define what comedy is: it acts as a stress relief tool, accessible to people at all times through various mediums such as radio, television, film, books, and literature. **\*\*Slapstick comedy\*\***, made famous in the twentieth century by figures like Charlie Chaplin and the Three Stooges, relies heavily on physical humor and facial expressions. **\*\*Dark comedy\*\***, also known as black comedy, appears in works by Kurt Vonnegut and Charlie Chaplin's film *"The Kid"* (1921); it often conveys themes of pain through double entendre. **\*\*Self-deprecating humor\*\*** relies on the specific character or performer's portrayal. **\*\*Romantic comedy\*\*** blends romantic love with humor, notably used by William Shakespeare in plays like *"The*



**Merchant of Venice**" (1596) and **"Twelfth Night"** (1601). **\*\*High comedy\*\*** features satirical wit, exemplified in Oscar Wilde's **"The Importance of Being Earnest"** (1895). **\*\*Tragicomedy\*\*** combines serious subjects with humor.

Timing is a crucial strategy in comedy; if it is missed, the humor can fall flat. A comedian's ability to deliver a punchline at the right moment can greatly enhance its impact on the audience.

Children are particularly influenced by comedy. Understanding their expectations is vital; comedians should deliver content that resonates with children to truly engage them. Body humor, another effective quality, draws children's attention through exaggerated body language. McGillis (2009) emphasizes body humor as a significant resource in children's literature. Children are often captivated by gestures like blinking, shaking hands, tonal variations, walking patterns, and overall posture. An example is Olaf from the movie **"Frozen"** (2013); the character's long nose, big eyes, and twig hands elicit laughter from children without them even realizing it.

Writers frequently use animals in children's comedy to entertain and amuse. Movies like **"The Lion King"** and **"The Jungle Book"** exemplify this approach. All these elements represent strategies to capture and retain children's attention through humor.

## 6. THE BENEFIT OF COMEDY

Children find relief from various disorders in the world of comedy. They forget their troubles while watching and enjoying humorous content. Humor has been shown to develop self-esteem, increase cognitive ability, foster curiosity for learning, enhance reading skills, empower problem-solving, and improve social interactions. Recent studies by researchers such as Bainum, Lounsbury, Polio, Bariand, Bender, Hollingsworth, and Rutter have demonstrated that children, educators, and parents benefit from the use of humor.

Researcher Michele Landsberg (1992) states, ***"Children, like all the powerless, find their best release and choicest weapon in humor; they are always ready to drop an armload of tension or anger to indulge in a liberating shout of laughter. And as teachers are well aware, laughter is the reward that lures the most reluctant reader"*** (p.34). This highlights how children use humor as tool to cope with their problems. After school, many children turn to cartoons as a way to relax and prepare for their next tasks. In classrooms, teachers often incorporate humor into their lessons, which helps to foster reading habits.

Baker, Dreher, and Guthrie (2000) state that reading engages three areas: cognitive, motivational, and social interaction. There are five key reasons why children should engage with humorous literature. First, young people can develop friendships by sharing laughter with their peers. Second, humorous literature motivates critical learning and raises awareness about the nuances of sarcasm, distinguishing between right and wrong. Third, humor provokes new ideas. Fourth, it allows children to feel free and reduce frustrations. Lastly, comedic books reflect the realities of life.

However, the challenge lies in whether we use humor in a positive and productive manner. Humor plays a crucial role in people's physical, social, and psychological well-being. As children grow and mature, their understanding of humor evolves, making it essential for healthy cognitive, physical, social, and emotional development (Brown, 1990, 1991).

The benefits of humor include stress relief, relaxation of muscles, potential reduction of blood pressure, calorie burning, brain stimulation, pain relief, strengthening of the immune system, regulation of blood sugar, and the building of relationships.

## 7. CONCLUSION

Garvey (1977) stated, ***"young children enjoy humor."*** Comedy is not only appreciated by children but also by adults. This research aims to provide a brief overview of humor in children's literature. Although many qualities of humor remain hidden, works like **\*Winnie the Pooh\*** (Milne, 1926) exemplify its use. This fantasy story, filled with animal characters, serves as a pastoral comedy that allows us to escape from reality through its humorous scenes.

As noted in earlier studies, humor guides children in understanding the real world and teaches them what it entails. The purpose of this paper is to emphasize the importance of humor in children's literature. Humor facilitates reading, fosters social interactions, and provides relief from suffering. However, we often consume comedy without considering these elements.

There are numerous contributions of humor to children's literature. Engaging narratives, developmental benefits, and overall enjoyment are vital for children. No other literary genre can provide these elements as effectively as comedy. Without humor, children's literature can feel barren and unappealing. If there is a lack of humor, children may be disinclined to read these books. Therefore, it is easy to understand the significance of humor. This paper aims to demonstrate that humor is an essential component of children's literature..

## REFERENCES

- [1] Bainum, K., Lounsbury, K. & Pollio, H. (1984). The development of laughing and, smiling in nursery school children. *child development*,55. 1946-1957.
  - [2] Brown, I.(1993). Young children's explanations of pictorial humor: A preliminary study. *Early child development and care*, 93,35-40)
  - [3] Foot, Hugh C., Smith, Jean R. and Chapman, Antorj J. 'Individual Differerxes in Children's Social Responsiveness in Humour Situations.' in: A. J. Chapman and H. C. Foot, *It' s A Funny Thing, Himour*, Pergaiton Press, Oxford (1977).
  - [4] Freud, Sigmund. 'On Humor.' *Psychoanalytic Review*, 15, 85-86 (1928).
  - [5] Fry, William F., Jr. 'The World of Comedy: Introduction to Syirposiurn.' in: A. J Chapman and H. C. Foot (Eds.), *It' s a Funny Thing, Humour*, Perganon Press, Oxford (1977).
  - [6] (-iosh, R. 'An Experimental Study of Humor.' *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 9, 98-99 (1939).
  - [7] Goldstein, Jeffrey H. and McGhee, Paul E. (Eds.). *The Psychology of Humor*. ademic Press, New York (1972).
  - [8] Goldstein, Jeffrey H. 'Cross-O.iltural Research: Humor Here and There.' in: A. J. Chapman and H. C. Foot (Eds.), *It's A Funny Thing, Humour*, Perganon Press, Oxford (1977).
-