

**Language, Power, and Play: A Critical Discourse Examination of Judy Blume's Impact on Social Ideologies**

**Dr. Naeem Fatima**

**Associate Professor, College of Flying Training, PAF Academy Asghar Khan, Risalpur**

[fatimabeena1@cae.nust.edu.pk](mailto:fatimabeena1@cae.nust.edu.pk)

This study employs Ruth Wodak's Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) which is a framework in the domain of Critical Discourse Analysis for the investigation of ideologies embedded in Judy Blume's *Tales of a Fourth Grade Nothing*. DHA emphasizes the interplay between language, power, and historical context, and provides a comprehensive lens for analyzing how ideologies are constructed, perpetuated, and contested within the narrative. The research aims to elucidate the specific ideologies present in the text and assess their potential impact on shaping societal beliefs and attitudes. The analysis pays particular attention to the role of power relations and historical context in shaping the narrative's ideological underpinnings. The findings contribute to the broader discourse on the role of ideology in children's literature, emphasizing the importance of critical engagement with the messages conveyed in texts intended for young audiences. This study also explores more inclusive and socially conscious literature, highlighting the need for narratives that empower young readers and promote equity and justice through critical analysis of underlying ideologies.

**Keywords:** Children's Literature, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA), Ideology, Judy Blume

---

### **Introduction**

The study of children's literature has been an effective means to change the minds of young people while the book contains many ideologies that are present in society and its values. There are many children's books, but Judy Blume's *Tales of a Fourth-Grade Nothing* is a significant one. Notably, however, is the case with many texts within literature marketed to children. I argue Blume's work is not only a source of enjoyment but also some ideologies that are produced, promoted, and resisted in the discourse.

CDA is a potent perspective that assists in knowing how ideologies are produced and reproduced by the use of language. Fairclough (1989) thinks that CDA can be used to investigate the sociopolitical and economic conditions of the use of language. Likewise, van Dijk (1998) notes the importance of discourse in the formulation and reinforcing of ideologies, which makes CDA very relevant in the critical examination of the book *Tales of a Fourth Grade Nothing*.

Scholars, such as Zipes (1983) and Nodelman (2008), say that in children's literature, such voices are present Nodelman argues that such child-oriented literature conveys adult values that direct children on how to construe their realities. However, these findings are important in determining the perspectives of Blume's works that as Sarland (2006) points out are suitable for ideological analysis.

The present investigation utilizes this perspective and employs Ruth Wodak's Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) as a framework for investigating the different ideologies in *Tales of a Fourth Grade Nothing*. This method is essential because, as Wodak explains, any social structure is powered by language and historical content as changes to the structure can be reflected through language changes. It also looks at the contextual situation in which Blume

wrote it since the ideological aspects of the story may be a result of the norms and power relations that existed during that period.

Since young readers have been the emphasis of such studies, they have examined how audiences react to Blume's novels. For instance, in her work, Smith (2010) focused on the Grade 4 pupils' reactions to Blume's books, showing how children do not passively read texts, but instead interact with the themes that the book embodies. In a more recent example, Saeed (2024) analyzed the discourse critically regarding the ideology in class four stories which was helpful in the investigation of how these ideologies are constructed.

This study seeks to further address this issue by analyzing what beliefs, in particular, are contained in *Tales of a Fourth Grade Nothing* and how these beliefs affect the perceptions of young readers about the area. Using Wodak's DHA, this research seeks to reveal how the story conforms to and challenges the prevailing ideologies of the period under study, thus enriching the scholarship on ideology in children's literature.

In that regard, this paper also extends the developing research on CDA and children's literature by asserting the need for a more critical stance on the pieces of text, that distort the perceiving minds of children. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to highlight the ideologies present in the storyline of '*Tales of a Fourth Grade Nothing*' to create a body of literature that encourages young readers empowering them and creating a just society.

### **Research Question**

The research questions of the study are:

- I. What beliefs in Judy Blume's *Tales of a Fourth Grade Nothing* are influenced by power dynamics and historical context?
- II. How might the beliefs and ideas in *Tales of a Fourth Grade Nothing* shape young readers' views of society, and help or hinder social change?

### **Literature Review**

Children's literature is highly regarded as an avenue for dissemination, opposition, and preservation of ideology within society structures. For example, why are these ideologies so important in these texts, narrating how the children are socialized? This literature review attempts to provide answers to questions about the existing scholarship in the field at the crossroads of ideology, power, and children's literature by focusing on one of the works of Judy Blume - *Tales of a Fourth Grade Nothing*.

There is an established discourse on the ideologies in children's literature where Zipes (1983) and Nodelman (2008) are renowned who delving into the ideology that most children's literature is too socialized. Zipes (1983) asserts that even in children's literature, they tend to cloak and disguise ideologies that promote one way of thinking and exclude other ways of thinking from the children's cultural domain. Related to this, Zipes (1983) observes that there is such a thing as 'children's literature' most of which is ideologically designed for children's instruction.

Sarland (2006) seeks to further contribute to the debates above by addressing how the author's bias, embodied in children's literature, helps to reinforce or contravene social

ideologies. When analyzing the texts for children, Sarland, although stressing the importance of children's literature, raises how an ideological battle is fought within it. This critical tradition is important to comprehend in many ways, for example, books such as *Tales of a Fourth Grade Nothing* can entrench ideas of power, authority, and social relations in young readers' minds.

There has also been some engagement with the issue of how power relations and history shape the ideologies contained within children's literature. Fairclough (1989) and van Dijk (1998), however, claim that there is power in the use of language as a central tool or means of perpetuating dominance within any structure. In this contextual background, it is also observed that CDA is suitable for children's texts that are known to be infused with such ideologies, especially through language.

Schmidt (1993) goes further in this consideration by exploring the function of power within the theoretical framework of the narrative of children's literature. He asserts that the aforementioned texts incorporate power relations in a way that it looks society arrangement in which it was written and constituted legitimately. This angle is even more valid in the assessment of *Tales of a Fourth Grade Nothing* because it provides a critical understanding of how the narrative in the book helps perpetuate assumptions concerning family systems, power, and social orders. This statement is true in other words when social versus power relations are analyzed in other genres.

Wodak's Discourse–Historical Approach (2009) complements the existing definition of children's literature by introducing research on the evolution of CDA regarding shape, context, authors, etc. The present study intends to use this theory in investigating explanatory practice in children's literature with a sequential outlining of the ideological and historical background of '*Tales of a Fourth Grade Nothing*' and how it relates to the situation and feelings of the readers of today.

It is important to address the question of how young readers engage with or are affected by the ideologies that are built into the structures of children's literature. Smith (2010) investigated the academic reader responses of Grade 4 children towards Judy Blume's novels and identified that young readers are not merely passive consumers of the text's ideologies. The study of Smith indicates that children's meanings are not only constructed out of text but within sociocultural settings and personal experiences as well.

Instead, some recent studies like Rumfelt (2023) and Agustina, Sari, and Putri (2023) have looked at how the works of Judy Blume tackle significant themes such as faith and identity crisis or other sensitive subjects. The authors of the given studies note the importance of the works of Blume in forming the self-image and world perception of young readers. This site has opportunities for critical discussion on analysis with the help of various methods of analysis including critical discourse analysis of ideology in the book *Tales of a Fourth Grade Nothing*, the construction of specific ideological beliefs through the narrative of a book, and how such beliefs are sustained within the course of reading the book.

Recent years have witnessed a growing fascination among scholars regarding the ability of children's literature to instigate social transformation. According to Blume (2020), a new psychology that emphasizes community, equality, and love for the planet can emerge and

children's literature can significantly shift toward the dissemination of such ideas. Most notably, Fiammenghi (2022) investigates the ways the ideologies of the anti-vaccination movement and its conspiracy theories are verbalized, offering ways how such ideologies can be resisted through approaches seeking to understand written texts.

In the same vein, Blume (2022) studies the effectiveness of critical digital literacy as a defense against the voices of literature by children. As her research on local serious gaming and its use for critical literacy in the EFL classroom, children's literature is effective in provoking critical thinking aimed at social change.

Literature addressing ideology in children's literature, more specifically that of Zipes, Nodelman, and Sarland, helps the present study, especially in the analysis of '*Tales of a Fourth Grade Nothing*.' By attempting discourse analysis as well as the Discourse-Historical Approach, this study seeks to explore the ideologically loaded aspects of Blume's story and understand the possible effects her narrative may have on children. Children's attitudes that were directed to and reflected in the 'or perhaps ideologies' can, as earlier studies of Smith (2010), Saeed (2024), and others have noted, be influenced by how the interrelation of text, context, and philosophers' personal experiences. The broader context has also been that this particular study has not been done from the political and ideological perspectives in children's literature. This adds further affirmation to the claims about the ideologies embodied within children's literature.

### **Methodology**

This study adopts a qualitative research design, employing Ruth Wodak's Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) within the framework of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). The data source for this study is Judy Blume's *Tales of a Fourth Grade Nothing*. The text was carefully selected due to its prominence in children's literature and its potential to influence young readers' beliefs and attitudes. The analysis focuses on key passages within the text that reflect or construct specific ideologies, with particular attention given to dialogues, character interactions, and narrative descriptions that reveal underlying power dynamics and historical context. The data analysis is conducted using the three-dimensional framework of DHA

- I. Text Analysis
- II. Interdiscursive Analysis
- III. Contextual Analysis:

This methodological approach allows for a comprehensive and critical examination of the ideologies embedded in *Tales of a Fourth-Grade Nothing*. By employing Ruth Wodak's Discourse-Historical Approach, the study not only uncovers the power dynamics and historical context that shape the text but also contributes to the broader discourse on the role of ideology in children's literature. The findings are expected to provide valuable insights into how such texts can shape societal beliefs and attitudes, with implications for the promotion of more inclusive and socially conscious literature.

## Data Analysis

**Table 1: Analysis of Beliefs in *Tales of a Fourth Grade Nothing* Influenced by Power Dynamics and Historical Context**

Aspect	Textual Example	Power Dynamics	Historical Context	Beliefs Conveyed
Authority and Control within the Family	"But Mom," I said, "he'll ruin everything. He always does."	Peter's autonomy is overruled by parental authority.	Reflects the hierarchical family structure of the 1970s.	Children's desires are secondary to parental control.
Parental Expectations	"Warren, you have to do something about Fudge," Mom said. "He's been impossible all day."	Mrs. Hatcher appeals to Mr. Hatcher to restore order, reinforcing his authority.	Gender roles where the father is the disciplinarian and the mother manages emotional labor.	Fathers are ultimate problem-solvers; mothers are caregivers.
Patriarchal Authority	"Okay, Fudge, if you don't stop this right now, we're leaving. No more shoes today."	Mr. Hatcher's decisions are final and unquestioned.	Patriarchal authority within the family reflects societal norms.	Fathers are the enforcers of discipline and family order.
Consumer Culture and Identity	"I had Dribble for two whole years. I loved him. And now he was gone."	Peter's identity is tied to his possession of Dribble.	Reflects the 1970s consumer culture where possessions equate to identity.	Material possessions are integral to personal identity and status.
Gender Roles and Domesticity	"Let's not make a fuss, dear," Mom said. "He'll settle down in a minute."	Mrs. Hatcher's role is to maintain harmony and manage Fudge's behavior.	Reinforces traditional gender roles of the 1970s.	Women are responsible for emotional labor within the family.
Resistance to Authority	"Sometimes I wish my mother and father would let me do what I want. Just once."	Peter's desire for autonomy reflects resistance to parental control.	Reflects growing discourse on individual rights in the 1970s.	Desire for autonomy and questioning of established authority.

Impact on Young Readers	"I don't understand why they always think Fudge is so cute when all he does is mess things up!"	Peter's frustration reflects the unfairness of power dynamics in the family.	Encourages critical thinking about fairness and authority.	Promotes questioning of traditional roles and power structures.
-------------------------	---	--	--	---

### Text Analysis: Power Dynamics in Family Relationships

Within *'Tales of a Fourth Grade Nothing'*, the power relations in the Hatcher family are shown in the course of communication between Peter and the other members of the family, Fudge and parents in particular. Even a short extract from the quote clearly illustrates this: it is when Peter's mother is telling him that he must take Fudge to his friend's birthday party despite Peter's objections:

*"But Mom, I said, he'll ruin everything. He always does."*

Peter's dispute over the issue is brought to an end as soon as it is made by Peter's mother who blames Peter for the misconduct of Fudge. This instance highlights an important power equation that exists in the family. Even though Peter is a senior member who can think for himself most of his views do not stand due to his parents' authority. This highlights the fact that children do not fall on their assumptions but on above parental rules, a frequent incidence in the family setting in the decade of 1970.

The reader can easily spot Mr. Hatcher with the heads of his family responsibilities in several actions, for instance, when he takes over the situations that might have been messed up by Fudge. For instance, there is a situation when Fudge simply refuses to eat and the family has a standoff. In reaction to Fudge's stubbornness, Mr. Hatcher decides to use the principles of reverse psychology in this case and finally lets Fudge chew his feed wherever he wants without the table etiquette restrictions.

*"Okay, Fudge, my father said, you want to eat under the table, go ahead. But you'll have to stay there until you've finished every bite."*

This suggests that Mr. Hatcher is in charge in this particular household—he makes the rules and takes responsibility for them regardless of how bizarre they are. It also reconfirms that this father figure is the one who will solve all the problems – it is quite a repeat of a scenario and model of a family in which the father is the head of the family and every word he says is followed by the letter.

Mrs Hatcher's position in the family follows the societal conventions about women's roles in a comparable manner. It is not surprising to know that she is mostly the one in charge of the children, as we can see when she tries to calm down Fudge who rarely takes Peter's side. For instance, after Fudge wreaked havoc at the shoe store, instead of reprimanding him, Mrs Hatcher tries to comfort him:

*Oh, Fudgey, Mommy's little boy... Don't cry. We'll get you another pair of shoes."*

This response is illustrative of Mrs Hatcher's role in child rearing and more so, demonstrates the stereotype that mothers are more concerned with nurturing and affection as opposed to

discipline. As a result, the expectation of women as the primary caregivers for children is reinforced in the text.

### **Historical Context: Reflection of 1970s American Society**

An underlying thread that permeates the storyline of *Fourth Grade Nothing* and its sequels is the consumer culture of the 1970s and how it affected children. The affection of Peter for his pet turtle, Dribble, may be viewed as a complete betrayal since it illustrates the materialistic ideals that were so prevalent during that time. The people viewed not only their spirits as possessions but also their identity. This becomes poignantly apparent when Dribble dies and Peter feels more than the loss of a pet, it is about the loss of something that flags his identity and his standing.

*I had Dribble for two whole years. I loved him. And now he was gone."*

Understanding Peter's grief makes it easier to understand how much of his personality is constructed around his own Dribble and his possession of him. The image of Western ideas mirrors consumerism prevailing in the mentioned period when the young peoples' status was determined not by their personality but by the number of things they owned. Dribble's absence does not simply mean the loss of a friend to Peter, it signifies a loss of his status and dominance, two elements that further represent materialism and are nauseous and appalling.

The patriarchal factors that governed parental roles, more particularly of the parents within the family also extend to the period of the 1970's. These include Mr. Hatcher's 'breadwinner' and decision-maker status while Mrs. Hatcher is left with the role of the homemaker. This division of labor is subliminally emphasized in the rest of the text as when Mr. Hatcher, after a long tiring day at work, wishes to take everyone out to dinner, and West Hatcher, therefore, has to control the children's anxiety through food:

*Warren, you have to do something about Fudge,"Mom said. He's been impossible all day."*

This interaction emphasizes the gender division of duties within the family, with the mother constantly engaged with the children and the father making all the plans, such as where to go and when to eat. They think that these roles are, for some reason, important for the well-being of the family, which can be traced back to the general opinion of the surrounding society at that time: a well-defined "place" for everyone within the household.

### **Interdiscursive Analysis: Connecting to Broader Discourses**

Throughout the novel, one of Peter's carrying experiences is his conflict between being a child with a sense of independence and inner power while fully giving into parental expectations of 'how a child ought to behave.' Such bestaat ki peter. While there is evidence that Peter is capable of making his own choices and grasping the details in complex situations, more often than not, he has to bow down to his parents' authority – particularly in their desire to prioritize Fudge's concerns and well-being over Peter's wants. This is supported by the incidents when Peter is made to cancel his plans, due to Fudge's intervention, as captured in the following quote:

*Peter, I need you to watch Fudge while I take care of a few things,"Mom said.*

Someone expects that this will be Peter's main part in the operations of the parents. This is an instance of Fudge's mommy: No more papa please. Frustration that Peter feels as a life-completion activity where staff choke in institutional responsibility without gratitude is merely a variation of the general envelope: 'It is fine, but isn't it bad that children are not allowed to be themselves, because of the adult's interference?' The standpoint that has been buttressed here is that the needs and wants of the children only come after the other roles that the family members play. This is a typical display and way of thinking that dominated families in the 1970s.

Gender construction in the text is also related to the reproduction of more general discourses of family and particularly this family-gendered division of labor. The notion of mother as a primary caregiver and the emotional support system at home is evident in Mrs. Hatcher's efforts to control Fudge and to prevent any outbreak of aggression. This expectation is evident when Mrs. Hatcher responds to Fudge at the dinner table.

*Let's not make a fuss, dear," Mom said. He'll settle down in a minute."*

People believe that this is why mom's job is – to act as relief during such stormy sessions so that peace may be retained, no matter whatever grievance or problem has been left unattended. Thus, the gendered norm is reinforced on who is said to be sick in that their society assumes that still women are largely responsible for the unnecessary family work of emotions as was normal in the culture of the 1970s.

### **Contextual Analysis: Contemporary Implications and Reader Impact**

The thoughts expressed in *Tales of a Fourth Grade Nothing* about notions of family and family members' roles and responsibilities are likely to influence young readers. The novel promotes the stereotype of power distribution within the family: the father as head, the mother as a second in command, and the child as an obedient servant who should meet his/her parents' expectations.

However, this representation might read differently for contemporary audiences; it may be regarded as confining, especially now when there are evolving issues concerning gender equity and joint parenting roles. The stereotypical images of families, as portrayed in the text, are likely to be contested by the audience who are already informed by more radical ideas about family structures.

Although the text reproduces conservative values, there are also possibilities for readers to take a different position and engage critically with the problem. Children who are similar to Peter in being powerless and dominated by grown-ups will relate to Peter's feelings of rebellion and dissatisfaction with family power structures. Such acts of defiance may provoke readers to challenge the power relationships shown in the text and not only imagine others but also try other ways of presenting the fundamentally different family structure.

For instance, in an instant of annoyance, Peter complains about Fudge's unending troublesome habits and their parents' relentless enabling:

*I don't understand why they always think Fudge is so cute when all he does is mess things up!"*



This paragraph indicates Peter’s increasing insight into how unfair the role of the family is, without ignoring his need and aspiration for recognition as an individual. In younger readers, this may provoke disruptive thoughts regarding assigned functions or duties within their family contexts.

Through a critical lens, *Tales of a Fourth Grade Nothing* can be deconstructed to show that certain beliefs presented within the text arise as an effect of the power relations in the American society of the 1970s. The analysis also emphasizes, through textual evidence, how the story reproduces conventional ideas of family, gender, and consumerism. Adherence to these beliefs, although consistent with the expectations of the American society at the time, also affords the modern reader engagement in the text through an analysis of the power relation it presents and its fairness. Such an insight brings to light the factors that inform the reading of literature beyond simply looking for a fascinating story; rather, some messages are intended and should be regarded as well especially in children’s literature which is where the messages affect them the most.

**Table 2: Influence of *Tales of a Fourth Grade Nothing* on Young Readers’ Views of Society and Social Change**

Aspect	Textual Example	Beliefs Conveyed	Impact on Young Readers
Reinforcement of Traditional Family Structures	"Oh, Fudge, Mommy's little boy... Don't cry. We'll make it all better."	Younger siblings are often indulged and excused from responsibility.	Encourages acceptance of unequal family dynamics.
Promotion of Conventional Gender Roles	"It's okay, Peter. You know how Fudge is... we just have to be patient."	Emotional labor is a woman's responsibility.	Reinforces traditional gender roles, hindering social change.
Authority Figures and Obedience	"Peter, you know how it is. Fudge is younger, and we have to be patient with him."	Authority figures are unquestionable.	Limits critical thinking and challenges to authority.
Struggles for Autonomy	"I wanted to go out and play, but I had to watch Fudge instead. I'm always watching Fudge."	Personal autonomy is secondary to family obligations.	Suggests that individual desires should be sacrificed for others.
Materialism and Identity	"Dribble was mine. He was my turtle, and now he's gone. It's not fair."	Identity and self-worth are tied to material possessions.	Encourages consumerism, which can hinder social change.
Potential for Critical Engagement	"Why does Fudge always get away with everything? It's not fair that I always have to be the responsible one."	Challenges fairness and justice within the family.	Promotes questioning of societal norms and power dynamics.
Promotion of	"Maybe Mom and Dad	Understanding and	Encourages balanced

---

Empathy and aren't always right, but empathy are critique and  
 Understanding they're trying. And I important in family compassionate social  
 guess I have to try dynamics. change.  
 too."

---

At first glance, *Tales of a Fourth Grade Nothing* written by Judy Blume seems like an amusing and comical tale, however behind this facade are a great deal of beliefs and concepts which can manipulate the young readers' perceptions of the world around them. The story plots over the tent poles of issues like family, gender, society, consumerism, and the need fight for inner self in the context of a family. These issues, lightly brushed over within the text, can potentially mould and determine the young readers' views on their positions within society, their relationships with leaders, and their understanding of the rules surrounding even greater issues.

### **Reinforcement of Traditional Family Structures**

The book helps to maintain established family structure, which affects the way young readers perceive a "normal" family. The Hatcher family is portrayed with identifiable, stereotypical members: Mr Hatcher is the head of the family and the one who enforces rules; Mrs Hatcher is a caring mother; Peter and Fudge play different roles in the family hierarchy. Since Peter is the elder brother, he is often put in charge, whereas Fudge, the youngest one is pampered especially when he is being hyperactive. For instance, when Fudge destroys the school project that Peter had put in so much effort to complete, the parents do not get angry with Fudge, but instead try to calm down Fudge in this way:

*Oh, Fudgey, Mommy's little boy... Don't cry. We'll make it all better."*

This shows the belief that children are sick, therefore, they cannot be blamed or made to accept the consequences of their deeds. The assumption that arises out of this is that for the youngest or pet child, being pampered and escaping punishment is alright which sows the seeds in young readers' minds or even such patterns in their families.

It is also possible that the depiction of traditional gender roles in the novel will also affect the young readership's understanding of what is expected from men and women in society. As the wife and mother, Mrs. Hatcher performs the most attentive caregiving and the emotional center of the family while not overtly indicating that those responsibilities belong to women. Her attempts to deter Fudge from any tantrums and keep the family together will further the view that women are in charge of the emotional aspects of the household. She steps in when Fudge decides to make the children's lives a little more tumultuous optimistically.

*It's okay, Peter. You know how Fudge is... we just have to be patient."*

Portrayals such as these might frustrate young readers' vision of women and men taking part in demystified gender roles and may, therefore, act against social change as it depicts women as caregivers and emotional nurturers first rather than women who can pursue any career anyone likes.

### **Influence on Views of Authority and Autonomy**

It's a recurrent aspect of the novel that authority figures, especially parents, are treated as beyond any reproach. Mr. Hatcher often occupies the father's role in the family and makes

decisions independently. This instills the idea that acts of submission to the parents' commanding nature are called for. Such representation may prejudice young readers concerning authority and hierarchical setups that they have to unquestioningly fit into. An example would be when Peter is constantly perplexed and disgruntled by the fact that they all have to adjust to Fudge's stubbornness. Mr. Hatcher's reaction to this takes one clear form:

*Peter, you know how it is. Fudge is younger, and we have to be patient with him. That's just how it is."*

This puts forth a notion that there is no use in defiance, dissent against power, or unfair threats because the order and hierarchy are permanent and do not change with time. For young readers, this could stifle developing the ability to think critically or to have the disposition to defy oppressive leaders in their lives.

The theme of Peter's struggle for autonomy within the confines of the family is an important aspect of the novel and it connects with quite several young readers. Still, the age of Peter invites him to break free from fostered constraints, while this is also hindered by taking care of younger siblings as well as parental expectations. This persistence can be useful, for instance, in influencing young readers to learn about the importance of autonomy and highlighting structural power and responsibilities as over overarching personal desires and needs.

It is the case with Peter's recalls when he is in the mood to engage in rather exciting activities but Fudge is around, and this makes his excited plans hard:

*I wanted to go out and play, but I had to watch Fudge instead. I'm always watching Fudge."*

Such scenarios make young readers come to a point: it is okay for them to give up their freedoms in pursuit of the welfare of the group. It is constructive but it also raises a barrier to the development of an individual's essence, sense of self, and self-driven ambitions.

### **Reflection of Consumer Culture**

The book rather lightly makes a case that material things are associated with a person's self and a person's worth. Peter's love for Dribble, his pet turtle, subscribes to this notion. Dribble is not a mere pet but a possession that defines who Peter is and his place in the family. Death of Dribble causes enormous heartbreak for Peter, not so much due to the death of the pet as the death of such a part of Peter himself:

*Dribble was mine. He was my turtle, and now he's gone. It's not fair."*

This excerpt in essence fires their thoughts on the relationship between self-identity, self-esteem, and their belongings. On a wider social picture, this belief may lead to greater commercialization, defining people and their worth by their belongings. This stress on materialistic beliefs may also slow down social development with people having stronger consumer-oriented features than more relevant attributes such as being upright or participating in community service.

The consumerist values accentuated in the monologue justify why younger audiences may regard social change in a particular manner. How people defend themselves may not change from possession of material, as in the case of Peter's fondness for Dribble. It is such beliefs

that act as barriers to social change as they encourage competition rather than working together to achieve social transformation.

### **Opportunities for Empowerment and Social Consciousness**

Although the book reaffirms dominant paradigms, it also allows young readers to critique these ideas. Peter's cuddle exasperation interspersed with some stubbornness, although usually, merges into the heat of the action, creates hesitation in the reader's mind: For instance; Fair enough, when Peter ridicules her aunt for behaving as if she plays a perfect grandparent to Fudge, the fans inclined to argue for the aunt may recognize how poorly such bias sits with Peter:

*Why does Fudge always get away with everything? It's not fair that I always have to be the responsible one."*

This kind of moment can spark the readers' level of critical thinking on probative arguments concerning equality, fairness, and justice, including how these concepts relate to structures of power or family relationships. Because of such sympathy arousal, it is suggested that whenever the readers are in Peter's position, they may take the chance to address the situations wherever they might encounter them and along these lines when action is taken it generates respect and self-awareness in the targeted population.

The understanding extends to situations where Peter is displeased with Fudge's behavior, as well as Fudge being the one who feels pressured by the parents all the time. For the development to occur, however, a development of some empathy is required from young readers. Such cognitive development of engagement and projection can be notably helpful in teaching young readers to read about characters from much fuller perspectives, even those in authoritative positions. This, for example, is why this quote can enable families to ultimately resolve the tension within their homes.

*Maybe Mom and Dad aren't always right, but they're trying. And I guess I have to try too."*

Timothy's understanding of the fact that his parents are doing their best in a tough situation, can help readers see the problem from a particular angle in the objective reaction to the problem.

Through the construction of family, the depiction of gender roles, the portrayal of authority, and the commercialization embedded in Judy Blume's *Tales of a Fourth Grade Nothing*, society's views among young readers. The novel offers a way out as a change agent but also reinforces some conservative beliefs that are necessary for social groups that threaten social change. By empathizing with Peter's problems and growth, the readers are likely to review what they commonly know, fight injustice, and redefine the normal world. Thus, the effects of the book on the younger population can be viewed as quite noticeable, since in the course of readings children receive both the strengthening of the existing system and the potential for critical thinking and social attention increase.

### **Discussions and Findings**

To understand the influence of ideologies espoused in Judy Blume's *Tales of a Fourth Grade Nothing* on the attitudes, especially the young readership, has on the society – and vice versa

– regarding their ability to bring about socio-political change or otherwise, several major conclusions arrived. This argument incorporates the analyses and relevant literature upon which the study was based to enhance the significance of the findings.

The book upholds the classic sociocultural archetypes and hierarchy, especially regarding children who are presumed to serve their parents or at least let them do what they particularly want to do. Such representation is also indicative of the social norms existing in the 1970's, which can be found in the interactions of the characters as well as the roles of Peter and Fudge. The legitimization of the mundane division of family roles so often exercised in the literature by Blume, conforms with Fairclough (1989) and Robinson. Fairclough (1989) argues that texts can also sustain the functions of authority and power that exist in societies, is evident in Blume Family Interaction. Sarland (2006) elucidates using children's literature, that traditionalism of the family unit has a way of being embraced which ultimately causes the readers to behave in the ways they are considered to be nominal.

This reinforcement, however, may restrict readers' comprehension of other forms of family life or gender patterns. It serves to reinforce the status quo of conventional roles, which may obstruct positive transformations of family relations and gender equality. The gender relations depicted in Blume's books belong to the 1970s when care provision within families was primarily done by Mrs Hatcher, and Mr Hatcher took the authority of a strict parent. This exposes the cultural divide where women are caregivers and men hold authority figures. According to Nodelman (2008), children's fiction is oftentimes passive in transferring the societal order which includes gender specifications. Blume's treatment of gender relations also supports these conventional perceptions and may affect the readers' perception of gender relations. It should also be noted that literature takes performative attributes to the persistence of ideological imagery, gender inclusive. This reinforcement of gender stereotypes in the text might as well prepare a young audience to buy into such expectations thus sparking the dangers of gender stereotypes and inhibiting the embrace of fairer gender viewpoints.

The text describes the family structure as unquestionable, which affects the developing readers in that they will naturally embrace means of hierarchy and obedience. Mr. Hatcher's authoritative decisions and Mrs. Hatcher's caregiving role reinforce this dynamic. Important work has also been done by Schmidt (1993) and Wodak (2009) focused on power relations theorized in literature and discourse. Psychological discursiveness of language is influenced by power (Ramzan et al., 2023, 2021; Bukhari et al., 2024). Newspapers have discourse analysis for power situations (Fatima et al., 2024, 2018). Expressive writing can impact cognition and certain expressions (Javaid & Mahmood, 2023). Schmidt (1993) highlights the nature of power in children's literature, while Wodak (2009) addresses how this type of literature sustains political and social structures. This tendency may inhibit the capacity of the younger population to comprehend and actively challenge the authority, hence no unfair or unjust activities will be questioned. So, this plays out in the sense that it even asserts that those of higher authority ought not be opposed, and thus it hinders critical thinking, and the desire to oppose unfair power situations as well.

Peter's attempt at gaining independence from his family is an ongoing process and such conflict characterizes many children's narratives in literature. The character's desperate attempts in the novel to become independent are characteristically rendered as being against

the character's younger brother, Fudge. As argued in other children's narrative literature, these issues of independence and others such as family rather than individuals' wishes are in conflict, which peeps into family issues as children grow. Erdogan (2024) states that children's and young adult's literature has ideological implications for how the readers will conceive issues of independence and self-agency. Moreover, Rumfelt (2023) addresses the relationship between children's literature and religious/personal autonomy, which finds an analogy with family relations depicted in Blume's novels. Such depiction of Peter's struggle in the novel might lead the reader to see self-independence as less important than family responsibility which would further the view that family conflict should be solved at the expense of individual aspirations.

The novel demonstrates over-indulgence with its materialist portrayal of characters, most notably about Peter and his pet turtle Dribble, which is largely reflective of capitalism, where identity is determined through consumerism. The illustration above seems to endorse the belief that ownership is key to one's values and worldview. Well, Blume's concern on the material aspect of the issue is in line with that of Nodelman (2008) who, amongst other things, investigated how consumerist ideals and children's books relate to one another with regards to material culture. This can alter the way readers view themselves or the value of material objects. It appears that the novel also encourages its young readers to associate material possessions with self-worth through an implicit message of materialistic culture which, in turn, reinforces the McDonaldization process of the new generation.

Although traditional attitudes and roles are further embedded, the novel also offers chances for criticism and sympathy. Such experiences as Peter's clashes with the family and the later acceptance of his parents' striving may enable the readers to ponder over the concepts of justice and empathy. As scholars such as Agustina et al. (2023) and Pietruszewski (2022) note, there is the possibility of critical engagement and empathy in children's literature. These studies also suggest, which might be consistent with the possible visions of Blume's works, that through literature, readers can be motivated against the normative order of society and develop some compassion. The upgrading of Peter's emotional machinery and their functioning encourages readers to look critically at family and social relations and power, thus encouraging a healthy and complex understanding of interpersonal relations and hierarchies.

The book by Judy Blume titled '*Tales of a Fourth Grade Nothing*' functions quite well in depicting family structure and relations, inter-gender relations, control, and consumerism. However, the traditional views and the social order are once again repeated, yet some activities promote confrontation and compassion. In such instances, the findings are rather interesting in how one feels that although the novel, for instance, '*the Fault is in our stars*' does have a lot of society's structuralism and values prevailing in it, there is a great power within the book that can motivate young readers to critique and enjoy these very structures, which educates and inspires against and in favor of society's norms.

### **Conclusion**

Judy Blume's *Tales of a Fourth Grade Nothing* has repercussions when it comes to young readers' perceptions of society through Oceania's Azac's rich threads of themes and ideologies. It is typical domestic violence, gender roles, the structure of power, and consumerism that repackages several conservative ideas that were widely common in the 1970s. These images affect the perception of society on the roles and responsibilities of family members, the responsibility tied to gender, and possession of personal attributes about material wealth thus buttressing the status quo and curbing the expansion of more liberal views. The influence of traditional aspects of family and gender in the text serves as a medium for upholding the existing power relations and perspectives of gender roles. There is an unquestionable parental power hierarchy where women take on caregiving tasks and men undertake disciplinary measures. Parents being protective and obedient has helped in upholding the concept of a nuclear family which limits most readers from integrating more liberating and flexible families. The image of power given to authority figures and disregard for personal freedom in the course of family duties creates perceptions of power relations in the readers. This does not allow one to engage in healthy opposition and desire to interrogate the abuse of power, which maintains the message that one does not push against the established order or there is no point in doing so. The novel's focus on Peter's love for his pet turtle, Dribble, further depicts a capitalistic view of identity that revolves around the ownership of things. Such a portrayal furthers the notion of possession's value and thus is likely to propagate the values of consumerism in the readers thereby inhibiting their progression towards a deeper self-identity. Despite these reinforcing criticisms, *Tales of a Fourth Grade Nothing* also contains sites of critical engagement and the construction of compassion. Peter's conflicts with his family structure and how the reader understands the dynamics of Peter's parents' efforts on him instill the need for justice and compassion in the audience. This feature of the novel cultivates an appreciation for the social order and relations making it possible for the readers to question some of these parameters as habitual. Thus, the few narrower approaches of the novel foster what in young readers is the exhortative twofold response of reinforcing deeply entrenched beliefs and providing a means of questioning such beliefs. While some sociocultural tendencies are likely to be maintained, it also has the power to take the reader on a journey to genuinely criticize such tendencies.

The interplay between traditionalism and the values of critical appreciation and compassion shows that in the eyes of the young readers, the novel in question would have both reinforcing and transforming effects in shaping their perception of society. Judy Blume's literature provides clear insights into what is intended to be achieved when reading any formation of literature. In this sense, the analysis of the narratives constructed in *Tales of a Fourth Grade Nothing* demonstrates the necessity of the analysis of children's literature for comprehension of the effects of internalized messages regarding social structures on the young readers and their activities concerning those structures. The ability of the novel to reinforce and subvert societal values explains the continued application of literature in the development and representation of culture.

### **References**

- Agustina, M. F., Sari, T. B., & Putri, H. R. (2023, January). Social influence in adolescence's identity crisis in Blume's *Are You There God? It Is Me, Margaret* (1970). In *Prosiding Seminar Nasional Kolaborasi Akademik Dosen-Mahasiswa* (Vol. 1, No. 1, pp. 287-293).
- Blume, A. W. (2020). A new psychology based on community, equality, and care of the Earth. *Fiammenghi, C. (2022). Ideologies and the representation of identities in anti-vaccination conspiracy theories. Conspiracy Theory Discourses, 98, 345-364.*
- Blume, C. (2022). My text is in another tipi: Indigenous serious gaming for critical digital literacy in the EFL classroom. *Anglistik, 33, 77-95.*
- Bukhari, S., Fatima, N., Jameel, S., & Rashid, M. (2024). Power, Conflict, and Resistance: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Pakistani Diplomatic Cypher (March 07, 2022). *Harfo-Sukhan, 8(1), 493-506.*
- Fairclough, N. (1989). *Language and power*. Longman.
- Fatima, N., Hashmi, F. A., & Hashmi, Z. H. S. (2018). Systemic functional interpretation of transitivity templates in news reports. *NUML Journal of Critical Inquiry, 16(1), 1-46.*
- Fatima, N., Jameel, S., & Mohani, S. (2024). Politics Of Channels And Geography In Diplomatic Discourse: A Study Of Pakistani Diplomatic Cypher Under Reception Theory. *Migration Letters, 21(S9), 58-66.*
- Fiammenghi, C. (2022). Ideologies and the representation of identities in anti-vaccination conspiracy theories. *Conspiracy Theory Discourses, 98, 345-364.*
- Javaid, Z. K., & Mahmood, K. (2023). Efficacy of Expressive Writing Therapy in Reducing Embitterment among University Students. *Pakistan Journal of Law, Analysis and Wisdom, 2(02), 136-145.*
- Martin, M. H. (1997). *Periods, parody, and polyphony: Ideology and heteroglossia in menstrual education*. Illinois State University.
- Nodelman, P. (2008). *The hidden adult: Defining children's literature*. Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Pietruszewski, M. (2022). *Specters in the attic: Melancholia and the intersectional Jewish identity explored in the works of Sebald, Snyder, and Blume* (Master's thesis, State University of New York at Buffalo).
- Ramzan, M. Qureshi, A.B., Samad, A. Sultan, N. (2021) Politics as Rhetoric: A Discourse Analysis of Selected Pakistani Politicians Press Statements. *Humanities & Social Sciences Reviews, 9(3), 1063-1070.*
- Ramzan, M., Javaid, Z. K., & Khan, M. A. (2023). Psychological Discursiveness in Language Use of Imran Khan's Speech on National Issues. *Global Language Review, VIII (II), 214-225.* [https://doi.org/10.31703/glr.2023\(VIII-II\).19](https://doi.org/10.31703/glr.2023(VIII-II).19)



- Ramzan, M., Khan, M.A.& Sarwar, M. (2023). Style Shift: A Comparative Cultural Analysis of *Pride and Prejudice* and *Unmarriageable*, *University of Chitral Journal of Linguistics & Literature VOL. 7 | ISSUE II,22-29*.
- Rumfelt, T. M. (2023). Religious questioning in Katherine Paterson's and Judy Blume's fiction (Master's thesis, The University of North Carolina at Charlotte).
- Saeed, B. M. (2024). Critical discourse analysis of ideology in Judy Blume's *Tales of a Fourth Grade Nothing*. *Zanco Journal of Human Sciences*, 28(2).
- Sarland, C. (2006). Critical tradition and ideological positioning. In *Understanding children's literature* (pp. 30-49). Routledge.
- Schmidt, G. D. (1993). Questions of power. *Children's Literature*, 21(1), 167-173.
- Smith, M. (2010). The critical reader-responses of Grade 4 children to a novel written by Judy Blume (Doctoral dissertation, Cape Peninsula University of Technology).
- Wodak, R. (2009). *The discourse of politics in action: Politics as usual*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Zipes, J. (1983). *Fairy tales and the art of subversion*. Methuen.