

Narrative skills and literacy learning¹

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This paper examines the storytelling narratives produced by four children, two low-income African-American first graders and two middle-income white first graders. The means of analysis Hicks employs is a text analysis based upon the delineation of lines into groupings, referred to as *stanzas*. Hicks calls into question the characterization of either group of children as having intrinsically more oral or literate styles of narration. Hicks points out subtle differences in narrative styles which may help to explain the mismatch between community and classroom styles of discourse.

Introduction

A conservative view of "what is literacy" would equate literacy with simply the ability to comprehend and produce written texts. Advocates of this view would propose increasing levels of achievement in relation to literacy skills, from simple decoding skills to the more complex ability to synthesize meaning from extended prose texts. And yet, research on the relationship between oral language and literacy suggests an even more complex picture of literacy. Sociolinguists and child language researchers have suggested that full participation in literacy also requires knowledge of specific kinds of discourse. In particular, researchers have suggested that children's interactions with various forms of narrative discourse can be an important determinant of their success with classroom literacy activities (Heath, 1982;1983; Michaels, 1981; Michaels and Collins, 1984; Snow, 1983; Wells, 1985; 1986).

Research on sociocultural issues in literacy education has begun to address the thorny problem of the discrepancy in levels of school success among members of different sociocultural communities. It is no secret to either researchers or practitioners that children from some low-income communities are more likely to experience difficulty as they make the transition to literacy-based school activities. Various reasons for this problem have been addressed in the literature. One explanation, and that which most strongly motivates the present research study, is the possibility that children from some sociocultural communities bring to the classroom different

ways of organizing their knowledge through narrative. Heath's ethnographic research (1982; 1983) has suggested that low-income African-American children and middle-income white children are exposed to different kinds, or genres, of narrative discourse at home. Thus, children from different communities may bring different repertoires of narrative skills to the classroom.

At issue is the effect these sociocultural differences in narrative skills have on children's performance in classroom literacy activities. In other words, are these differences in narrative styles the culprit for the literacy-related difficulties that children from some communities face? And, if so, why? Michaels (1981) and Michaels and Collins (1984) have suggested that, indeed, differences in styles of narration can be an obstacle to African-American children's full participation in classroom literacy events. The reasons suggested by Michaels and Collins are twofold. First, the narrative styles of African-American children are intrinsically more oral in nature, in that events are not centered around a central organizing topic (as is the case with mainstream middle-income speakers). Second, the narrative styles particular to African-American children may conflict with the discourse of literacy instruction (i.e., the discourse styles of the classroom teacher). In this paper, I would like to examine further this relationship between oral narrative styles and literacy learning.

In the present study, I will examine the storytelling narratives produced by four children, two low-income African-American first graders and two middle-income white first graders. The means of analysis which I employ is a text analysis based upon the delineation of lines into groupings, referred to here and elsewhere as *stanzas* (Gee, 1986; Hymes, 1981; 1982). The narratives which are the subject of analysis were obtained in two settings, in which children from two communities were given a series of narrative tasks (Hicks, 1988; In press,a). In the present study, I examine children's responses to the task of telling a *story* based upon events seen in a silent film. In light of the results from my analysis, I will call into question the characterization of either group as having intrinsically more oral or literate styles of narration. I will, however, point out more subtle differences in narrative styles, differences which may help to explain the mismatch between community and classroom styles of discourse.

Narrative Development in the Preschool Years

A review of the research on narrative development in the preschool years suggests that all children develop a *repertoire* of narrative skills in their primary language learning environments. Children's ability to represent events through narrative arises in the rich settings of their interactions with peers and family members. The cognitive and linguistic ability to narrate a series of events can be linked among very young children to events which are experienced on a regular basis. Children develop repertoires of knowledge about recurring events in their lives: eating, playing, sleeping, grocery shopping. Out of this repertoire of event knowledge develops skill in

talking about past, present, and future events (Gerhardt, 1988; Nelson, 1978; 1986; Nelson and Gruendel, 1981). Thus, the cognitive ability to represent events has its origin in children's interactions in widening social settings (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; McNamee, 1979; White, 1970; White and Siegel, 1984).

Children's repertoire of event knowledge is not, however, limited to one means of representing events. As children move between a range of social interactions, they also experience different ways of representing their knowledge through narrative. Researchers examining young children's narrative skills have in fact documented a wide range of narrative skills among preschoolers. Through conversations about past and present events, children develop what Stoel-Gammon and Scliar Cabral (1977) have termed the *reportative function*, or the ability to make references to personally experienced events (Eisenberg, 1985; Engel, 1986; Fivush, Gray, and Fromhoff, 1987; Fivush and Fromhoff, 1988; Miller and Sperry, 1988; Ninio, 1988). Young children also, however, develop the ability to talk about fictional events through their fantasy play (Applebee, 1978; Hicks and Wolf, 1988; Rubin and Wolf, 1979; Sutton-Smith, Botvin, and Mahoney, 1976). It therefore seems to be the case that the acquisition of a repertoire of narrative skills forms part of the social and cognitive development of all preschoolers.

A good deal of cultural variation in children's narrative skills has also been documented in the child language and sociolinguistic literature. As noted earlier, Heath (1982; 1983) has reported differences in the kinds of narratives children from different communities experience in their primary language learning environments. Additionally, Watson-Gegeo and Boggs (1977) found in their research among Hawaiian children a style of narration which was highly collaborative in nature. Finally, Scollon and Scollon (1980; 1984) reported that young Athabaskan speakers produce narratives in which there is a high degree of audience participation and in which the narrator is not a detached ("fictionalized") self. Thus, cultural variation in styles of narration also appears to be an important facet of children's development of narrative skills.

The fact that children bring different repertoires of narrative skills to the classroom may have important consequences for literacy education. As Michaels (1981) and Michaels and Collins (1984) have suggested, there may in some instances be a cultural mismatch between the discourse of literacy instruction (i.e., the teacher's discourse styles) and the narrative skills particular to children from "non-mainstream" (i.e., children from other than middle-income white) communities. Even though children from non-mainstream communities unquestionably bring repertoires of narrative skills to their classrooms, these children still may not have access to some forms of school-based knowledge.

Data Collection and Analysis

The narratives which are the basis for the present analysis were collected at two separate elementary school locations. The first setting for data collection was a private elementary school in the vicinity of Cambridge, Massachusetts. Children in this school were for the most part members of middle-income families in which one or both parents worked in professional job settings. The second setting for data collection was a public elementary school in the vicinity of Wilmington, Delaware. Children in this school were largely members of working class or low-income families, although the school also drew upon a housing development of mostly middle-income families.

The data collection in the private elementary school formed part of a larger research project examining primary school children's narrative skills. The project was based upon Heath's ethnographic research on language learning in three communities (1982; 1983). The project was designed to examine primary school children's abilities to perform language tasks which drew upon a range of narrative genre skills. More specifically, the project was focused on the abilities of children in grades K-2 to produce three generically distinct kinds of narratives (Hicks, 1988; In press,b). The results from analyses of these data have suggested that primary school children have only nascent abilities to draw upon their genre knowledge in language tasks designed to elicit specific narrative genres. The results did reveal, however, that for many primary grade children the task of telling a story is one which elicits a story-like text, with formulaic phrasing and intonation, evaluative clauses, discussions of character internal states, and character dialogue (Hicks, In press,c). Thus, for children in grades K-2, the task of telling a story is apparently a familiar one.

The second research project represents an attempt to extend this research to members of something other than mainstream middle-income community settings. In this second study, first graders from a public elementary school also performed three narrative tasks. I identified children from low-income families through participation in the school's free lunch program. Although it was not my original intent to base this comparison study on ethnicity, I did find that the majority of children participating in the free-lunch program were members of African-American communities. The research on language development in the preschool years, as noted earlier, suggests that African-American and white children are exposed to different ways of representing events through narrative. Thus, I decided to focus this second study specifically on low-income African-American first graders.

Children in both research settings were given identical narrative tasks. Children were shown a shortened (14 minute) version of the silent film, "The Red Balloon", and were asked to perform three tasks: a) provide a simultaneous *eventcast* (sportscast) as they rewatched a three-minute segment from the film, b) provide a factual *news report* of the events in the film, and c) tell the film's events as a *story*. As a facilitation of their understanding of the tasks, children were

provided with an opening script for each task. These opening scripts are shown in the appendix. For the storytelling task, children were also given as a prop a "storybook", having one large picture from the film on its front cover (a closeup of the main character -- a young boy -- putting the balloon's string in his mouth) but only blank white pages inside.

The film shown for the two projects is a classic children's film in which the very few words spoken are in French (the boy calls to the balloon on several occasions). For the purposes of the study, the film was edited, so that a number of subplots were excluded. This edited version of the film consisted of the basic sequence of events shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Sequence of Events in "The Red Balloon"

1. A boy finds a red balloon tied to a lamp post.
2. He takes a bus on his way home, and the balloon follows the bus.
3. After leaving the bus, a gang of boys tries to take the balloon from him.
4. The following day, the boy goes to church with an elderly woman (grandmother?), and the balloon follows.
5. The boy and the balloon are taken out of church by a guard.
6. The boy goes inside a bakery and leaves his balloon outside.
7. The gang of boys steals his balloon.
8. The boy recaptures his balloon from the gang, and the gang of boys chases the boy and the balloon.
9. The gang of boys surrounds the boy and pop the balloon.
10. A large number of balloons come down to the boy and carry him into the sky.

Fifty-eight children from the private elementary school (twenty first graders) and twelve children from the public elementary school (all first graders) performed the narrative tasks. In the present analysis, I will examine in detail the story narratives produced by two first graders from each of the two communities. These four children were chosen as being representative of highly skilled speakers from their communities. All four children produced stories which were coherent and engaging texts.

In the analysis of narrative texts, the way in which one determines the boundaries of individual utterances (or lines) constitutes an important methodological decision. Various criteria have been adopted for delineating utterances in studies of children's narratives: clausal (predicate) structure (Berman and Slobin, 1986); intonation and breathing boundaries (Scollon and Scollon, 1981); "idea units", or tonal groups corresponding to speakers' cognitive chunking of words (Chafe, 1980); and, with very young children in particular, episodes of talk about events (Miller and Sperry, 1988). In this study, I will base my analyses of texts upon a delineation of what Gee (1986) has referred to as *lines* and *stanzas* (see also Hymes, 1981; 1982). Lines are individual utterances within the narrative, most often simple clauses (at least in the case of children's narratives) which terminate in a rising or falling pitch glide. Stanzas are groupings of lines,

determined in part from common topics or themes and in part from structural, lexical, and intonational parallelism found between contiguous lines. An analysis based upon lines and stanzas enables one to address sociocultural differences in how children thematically and structurally organize their narrative tellings. In other words, it is not simply the relations existing between utterances which are of importance in the analysis of narrative texts. Rather, it is the organization of sets of utterances, or what Hymes refers to as the "grammar of experience" (1982).

The delineation of lines and stanzas within texts is not a linguistic "given", in that there is no one defining set of characteristics on which to base one's analysis. Some elements of language can easily be determined on the basis of a simple constitutive feature, as in the case of the *-ing* ending which marks progressive aspect. In text analyses, however, the analysis is based rather upon constellations of linguistic features which lend evidence for a particular structural analysis. In the text analyses which follow, I will draw upon patterns of grammatical, lexical, and prosodic similarity as I attempt to determine how lines are grouped within texts. In fact, the determination of groupings of lines within the four texts examined is a central part of my analysis. I would like to end this discussion of analytic methods by stressing that the analyses in this paper are interpretive in nature. That is to say, although I in each instance provide support for my particular textual analyses, the possibility exists that other equally plausible analyses exist for each of the narratives in question. This does not, in my view, undermine the analyses presented. In fact, anthropologists and cultural critics have recently begun to call into question the existence of empirical "facts", suggesting that multiple interpretations should form part of what Rosaldo (1989) terms the "remaking of social analysis" (see also Clifford, 1988, for a discussion of similar issues).

Ways of Telling Among Two Groups of First Graders

In this analysis section, I would like to examine in detail the narrative texts produced by two children from each of the communities described above. Each of the children whose texts are analyzed here is a skilled narrator who tells a logically connected and engaging story. There are subtle differences between the narrative styles found among the two groups of children. I will in a later discussion section characterize this difference as one of the narrative *stance* which children assume with respect to events. Such subtle differences in children's stance with respect to events may reflect cultural values and speech styles acquired in their primary language learning environments. The main purpose of the analyses in this section, however, is to illustrate the complexity and sophistication which exists in the texts among *both* groups of children. Such sophistication, in my view, suggests that both groups of children have discourse skills which should prepare them well for interactions with written texts.

The Narrative Skills of Two African-American Children

This study is in part a study of group and in part a study of individual differences in children's ways of representing events through narrative. To say that members of any one sociocultural community share the same styles of narration would clearly be an overstatement. Individual members of communities may, however, share similar styles of telling events. These similarities, and also differences, in speakers' styles of narration can best be traced through a detailed analysis of the texts produced by individual speakers. In this section, I will examine closely the narrative texts of two African-American children. The two children who are the focus of this section demonstrate unique, individualistic ways of narrating the events seen in the film. A common thread which emerges among these two children, however, is that of an emphasis on providing detailed evaluative information about the events in the film.

The first narrative examined is that produced by Brenda. The text shown below represents Brenda's response to the task of telling a story based upon the film's events (see appendix). I have attempted in my transcription of this text to delineate lines and stanzas. The delineation of lines and stanzas below represents an interpretation based upon Brenda's use of prosody and intonation (an integral part of her speech performance), the structural parallelism which exists among lines, and also the topical continuity existing within stanzas.²

Brenda: Storytelling Narrative

Stanza 1

the little boy and his balloon went on^
on to their business
and until^ his friends came from school
and tried to get! the balloon
they got it twice!

Stanza 2

but the little boy kept catching! it
'cause the little boy cared! about his balloon
and the balloon^ cared about him
everytime he would let the balloon go
the balloon would fly^ on behind him

Stanza 3

and I have a book in my hand called The Red Balloon
which we're talking about
but there's no # pictures or words
and the little boy's right here with 'im
and on the balloon it says "The Red Balloon"

Deborah

can you read some more from your book?

Brenda
yes!

Stanza 4
and # the little boy climbed^ up a rail to get the balloon
and that's the way he found it [staccato]

Stanza 5
he was going through the alley
runnin through the alleys
so that his friends from school couldn't get! it
they were jealous because they didn't have a balloon

Stanza 6
they stepped! on it
and they ## they shot! at it
and then^ they stepped! on it
and the balloon^ busted

Stanza 7
and then all^ the balloons in the whole city-state got together
and (he) got all^ the strings
and flew around the state

Stanza 8
and that was the end of the story [very staccato]

In Stanza 1 above, Brenda first provides an orientational statement which sets the scenario for the events in the narrative. The repetition of *on* links the two statements within this stanza, as does the thematic topic centered on the events that were occurring prior to the first encounter with the boys. In fact, her use of *until* in line 3 of this stanza probably indicates that the events in the first two lines were protracted in nature. The rising intonation on *until* also helps to alert the listener to an upcoming dilemma: the boy's "friends from school" throughout the film make attempts to take his balloon away from him. This dilemma is strongly asserted in lines 4 and 5, in which Brenda makes use of a repetitive intonational structure (*get!*, *twice!*). Thus, Stanza 1 appears to function as a statement of a basic problem in the film. The boy and his balloon are prevented from moving freely about because of repeated stealing attempts on the part of the boy's school friends.

Stanza 2 appears to be, thematically speaking, a partial resolution to this dilemma. In spite of the repeated attempts on the part of the boy's school friends, the young boy was able to hold on to his balloon because of a unique caring relationship between him and his balloon. The discourse marker *but* signals the beginning of this thematic contrast in Stanza 2. The use of the habitual auxiliary *kept*, the stative verb *cared*, and the modal *would* mark a non-narrative temporal structure within Stanza 2. In addition, a structural and intonational parallelism existing between contiguous

lines in this stanza signals its separate existence within the narrative. The repetition of key subject phrases (*the little boy*), patterns of intonation and stress (*catching!*, *cared!*), and verbal phrases --

'cause the little ^ boy cared ! about his balloon
and the balloon ^ cared about him

-- are examples of parallelism within Stanza 2. Thus, one finds strong evidence for internal thematic and structural consistency within Stanza 2.

Stanza 3 represents a departure from a narration of the events occurring in the film. Here, Brenda steps momentarily out of her role as narrator of events and comments on the book used as a prop for the narration task. In response to my question --

Can you read some more from your book?

-- Brenda provides a statement which I would interpret as a re-orientation of the events in the film. In the first two stanzas, she has provided both a statement of the dilemma in the film and also a timeless statement about how that dilemma was resolved. In Stanza 4, she takes the listener back to the initial events in the film, perhaps as a way of moving once again into the sequential narrative. This narrative strategy, in my opinion, represents a skillful manipulation of the actual sequence of events in the film. It serves as a thematic link between her previous statements in Stanza 3 about the storybook prop and the upcoming topics of Stanzas 5 and 6. Recall that children were given a storybook facsimile for the storytelling task. On the front cover of the "storybook" was a picture depicting the boy climbing up a post to get the red balloon. Thus, in Stanza 4, Brenda manages to weave the events depicted on the storybook cover into her ongoing narrative. This narrative "move" successfully takes the listener back into a discussion of the film's events.

In Stanzas 5-7, Brenda relates the climactic events which occur towards the end of the film. In Stanza 5, she provides a set-up for the action which occurs in Stanza 6. Stanza 5 consists of two couplets, each having structural and thematic similarities. In the first couplet, the action of the boy running is stated once in the first line (*he was going through the alley*) and then again in the second line of Stanza 5 (*running through the alley*). Then, in the third and fourth lines of this stanza, Brenda provides two evaluative statements explicating why the gang of boys wanted the balloon in the first place. The parallelism which holds within couplets in Stanza 5 reinforces its thematic unity. As a whole, Stanza 5 serves as an evaluative statement which prepares the listener for the climactic events to come.

In Stanza 6, Brenda narrates the final destruction of the balloon. In a series of stressed complete verbs, she relates this emotionally-packed climax. As was the case with earlier stanzas, the lines within Stanza 6 have a distinctive parallel structure. Lexical items (*stepped*), patterns of intonation (stress on complete verbs), and thematic subjects (*they* = the gang of boys) are

repeated in individual lines within the stanza. This structural parallelism reinforces the thematic topic of Stanza 6: the balloon's demise.

Stanza 6 is followed by a series of three lines in Stanza 7, in which Brenda provides the resolution to this state of affairs. The shift in topic is signalled by a shift in thematic focus to *all* the balloons, and subsequently to the boy who gets all the balloons. Finally, in Stanza 8, Brenda once again exits the narrative and brings closure to her text. Speaking in the voice of one who is now removed from events, she again moves out of the sequential narration of events. Her rendition of the events in the film is thus a skilful manipulation of narrative perspectives and of temporality (Wolf and Hicks, 1989).

A striking feature of Brenda's narrative text is its elaborate evaluative structure. Stanza 2 is devoted entirely to a discussion of the unique relationship existing between the boy and the balloon. The full implications of this relationship are established when Brenda states that the balloon followed the boy under its own volition. In addition to this special relationship between the boy and the balloon, the motivations of the boy's school friends (the gang of boys) are clearly explicated in Stanza 5, in which Brenda explains the other boys' feelings of jealousy towards the boy. Thus, far from being a sequential listing of events, Brenda's text represents a skillful weaving of mainline events and evaluative statements.

The second narrative text examined in this section is that produced by Sherrie. Like the narrative produced by Brenda, that produced by Sherrie is also extremely rich in terms of its evaluative structure. Sherrie's narrative consists of a series of stanzas which are three-four lines in length. An interesting pattern which emerges within stanzas is a set of two-three narrative (sequential) lines followed by an evaluative statement. Thus, in the narrative shown below, Sherrie continually moves between mainline sequential events and explications of those events.

Sherrie: Storytelling Narrative

Stanza 1

the re(d) // the boy he was walkin to // he was gettin on the busstop
and then # he saw the red balloon
and then he got it^
because he wanted it to be his friend

Stanza 2

and # he / and he tried to keep it everywhere he went
but he couldn't
because it kept / 'cause it kept flyin out of his hand
and uhm # the balloon always comes down
so people can catch it

Stanza 3

and then there was boys^
and they tried to // and then they stepped on the balloon^

and # and then // he // the boy was a little bit sad^

Stanza 4

and then # all these balloons flied out of people's hands
and / and he got it
and then he was happy

Even though Stanza 4 appears to represent the events occurring at the end of the film, additional stanzas do follow Stanza 4. In Stanzas 5 and 6 below, Sherrie returns to an earlier scene in which the boy was looking for the balloon that the gang of boys had stolen from him.

Stanza 5

and uhm # he / he was going / he was going by uhm / he was goin by some xxxx
[unintelligible on tape]
so he can try to get his balloon
'cause he was lookin for it

Stanza 6

and then the boys keep takin it away from 'im
'cause they wanted it to be their friend too^_
so # they just # tried to keep it away from the little boy

It is unclear, however, whether or not these last two stanzas were intended to be part of her narrative. It may be the case that Sherrie felt compelled to continue her narration, given that the task was one of telling a story to an adult listener. Perhaps she felt something more was expected of her. I will for the purposes of my analysis here consider all six stanzas as part of her text, even though Stanzas 1-4 constitute the plot line from beginning to end.

In Stanza 1, Sherrie relates the events occurring at the beginning of the film, in which the boy finds the balloon on his way to a bus stop. The first line in this stanza is an orientational statement for the events to come. The last line in this stanza not only explains why the boy got the balloon in the first place; it also provides a thematic focus for the text. The theme of the relationship (friendship) between the boy and the balloon in fact permeates Sherrie's text. The structural pattern seen in Stanza 1, a set of sequential event lines followed by an evaluative statement, is one that is found in additional stanzas in her story. In particular, Stanzas 3 and 4 exemplify this pattern.

Stanza 2 is devoted almost entirely to background information about the balloon. Thematically, this stanza seems to function primarily as a statement about the magical properties of the balloon. The boy was unable to hold on to the balloon since the balloon continually flew out of his hands. This stanza represents, in my view, a skillful exit from the mainline events in the story. Considered in the context of Stanza 1, Stanza 2 provides the essential thematic plotline of the events preceding the climactic final scenes from the film. A boy finds a balloon and wants the

balloon to be his friend. The balloon, however, has the magical property of being able to fly on its own.

In Stanzas 3 and 4, Sherrie narrates the crisis events which dramatically alter the state of affairs set up in Stanzas 1 and 2. In Stanza 3, she introduces the gang of boys with an existential statement (*and then there was boys*). Then, a critical problem is introduced: that of the balloon's destruction by the boys. Rather than simply stating this problem, Sherrie provides a statement about the boy's reaction to the problem (*the boy was a little bit sad*). In Stanza 4, she narrates the resolution to this dilemma. The boy gets additional balloons. Then again, Sherrie provides an evaluative statement of the boy's reaction (*and then he was happy*).

Stanzas 5 and 6 are perhaps best viewed as flashbacks, particularly since it is unclear whether or not they should be included as a part of the story. In Stanza 5, one finds again the pattern of a sequential mainline statement followed by an evaluative explication. In the first line of this stanza, Sherrie describes the scene in which the boy was starting to look for his balloon. She then in the second and third lines explains that he was walking in order to find his balloon. In Stanza 6, an additional dilemma is narrated. The gang of boys were continually taking the balloon from the boy. The issue of friendship re-emerges, with Sherrie stating that the gang of boys also wanted the balloon to be *their* friend. These two "flashback" stanzas provide additional valuable information about the motivations and actions of the gang of boys.

Sherrie's oral narrative represents a sophisticated weaving of narrative voices throughout her text. Rather than simply describing the events in a sequential manner, she provides extensive information about the internal states and motivations of the actors involved. In addition, Sherrie provides in Stanza 2 an elaborate description of a central and important theme in the film: that of the balloon's magical self-propelling abilities. The stanza structure of a set of sequential lines, followed by an evaluative statement, is representative of her emphasis on the causal links which underlie events in the film. In her text, virtually every stanza contains an explanatory statement.

The two first graders, whose texts have been examined in this section, without question have individualistic ways of representing the events seen in a wordless film. However, I would at this point in the discussion like to point out some commonalities which are evidenced in their texts. First, in the two stories, individual lines seem to be grouped in stanzas sharing common topics and, frequently, structural and intonational patterns. In Brenda's text, lines within stanzas often contained repetitions of lexical items and prosodic variations. In Sherrie's text, lines within stanzas often were representative of an interesting pattern of narration-evaluation. The patterns of lines within stanzas seen in the texts of these two first graders support research suggesting that prosodic and structural repetitions are an important facet of the oral texts of African-American speakers (Foster, 1989; Gee, 1986; Heath, 1983).

An additional commonality which emerged through an analysis of the two narratives was that of their intricate evaluative structure. Rather than simply listing the sequential events from the film, both children included extensive information about character internal states and motivations. In both texts, entire stanzas were devoted to providing background information about the salient relationship depicted in the film (the friendship between the boy and the balloon) and about the magical self-propelling properties of the balloon. This emphasis on providing extensive evaluation of events in the narrative might be characterized as a more intimate narrator stance. In fact, this particular narrator stance enhances the story-like quality of the texts, since underlying character feelings and motivations are an integral part of engaging stories.

The Narrative Skills of Two Middle-Income White Children

The texts of two middle-income white children represent a homogeneous style of narration which emerged among this group of children. The narratives produced by children from this school community tended to be sequential *lists* of the events occurring in the film. There was in general a great deal of attention given to detail, so that the narratives of this group of children also tended to be lengthier than those produced by the African-American children in the study. These detailed narrations also tended to be more factual in nature: a blow-by-blow description that closely matched the events occurring in the film. In addition, the evaluative comments in these texts often represented a more distant perspective on events, since they were rendered more from the vantage point of an omniscient observer.

The narrative produced by Allison below is an example of such a performance among the middle-income white children. Allison tells a rather lengthy version of the film's events; indeed, she manages to detail nearly all of the main events in the film. There does seem to be a stanza structure which is evidenced throughout her text. As was the case with the narratives produced by Brenda and Sherrie, the delineation of stanzas can in part be determined on the basis of thematic topic. In Allison's narrative below, however, individual stanzas also appear to be marked by the use of adverbial phrases (*when, the next day*) and by evaluative statements. Her text is reproduced in its entirety below.

Allison: Storytelling Narrative

Stanza 1

and so he climbed up # and up the thing that it was tied to
and he got it undone
and so he took it to the bus stop
and the little boy # let the balloon go # off^ into the air
and it followed right^ behind the bus
as if it was a person gliding down the street

Stanza 2

and # when they got to the little boy's house
the little boy # he knew there was some bullies down there that wanted to pop^ the
balloon
so he got # the balloon
and he sent it off into the air
and it went up up
and waited^ # near a window

Stanza 3

and the next day # he went with his grandma to the church
and the church guard said "no # you can't come in!"
"no balloons allowed!"
and so he went out
and walked away with
and the bullies had thought of a sly^ plan to get! the balloon
so they thought it over

Stanza 4

and the boy^ he went # near a candy store
and he looked^ at it
and reached in his pocket
and said "hmmm # this is about enough money to have something to eat"
so he went inside to get something
leaving the balloon outside

Stanza 5

and the bullies came along
and grabbed the balloon
and took it away

Stanza 6

and the little boy # when he came out
the balloon was gone
he looked all^ over the place
and then he # began walking one way
he looked around # after a little while

Stanza 7

and then he stopped
and turned back the way he came
and then ## he saw where the balloon was
and he went in # into the place
and # he saw the balloon in there
and he got the balloon
taking it from the bullies

Stanza 8

and he went to a # to a small crack in between two buildings with the bullies a little
behind
and then he went down a stairway with a dog near it
and he went right down
and he saw the dog
the rest of the bullies still^ after him

Stanza 9

and # then ## he ran away some more
and the bullies got him and the balloon
and they got the balloon
and began shooting // throwing rocks at it
and # and the balloon lost most of its helium

Stanza 10

and # when it was down on the ground the // one of the boys stepped! on it
so it popped all the way
and they left him alone
and the boy felt like crying
but he didn't

Stanza 11

and finally # all! over the neighborhood # all! the balloons! came
and they came to him
and he tied them to him
and he rode up up into the air
and over rooftops and over things

Stanza 12

and I don't know^ what happened to 'im then
but he just sailed away for all I know

An interesting pattern emerges across stanzas in her text. The beginnings and endings of stanzas can in a number of cases be determined on the basis of Allison's use of temporal adverbials and also her use of stative descriptive statements. In Stanza 1, a series of completive actions (*got*, *took*) are followed by a descriptive metaphor. This metaphor serves as an evaluative statement which also brings closure to the particular set of events in Stanza 1. Allison's use of expressive intonation (*off^ into the air*) and her metaphorical comparison of the balloon (*as if it were a person* ...) seem very literary in nature. In fact, we shall see that the use of literary (storybook) phrasing is one linguistic technique which she uses to structure her narrative telling.

Stanza 2 begins with a temporal adverbial phrase (*when they got to the little boy's house*) which sets the scenario for a new series of events. The second line in Stanza 2 is also orientational (evaluative) for this particular stanza, in that it states a basic dilemma which underlies the story: that of the gang of boys who also want the balloon. Interestingly, the information that the gang of boys *want* to pop the balloon is presented from the perspective of what the principal character (the little boy) *knew*. In this sense, the locus of the emotional state of one set of characters is transferred to the cognitive state of another character. The young boy's reaction to his knowledge is presented as a series of responses, the end result of which is the balloon waiting near a window. Thus, in Stanza 2, a structural pattern of a) temporal adverbial (= orientation), b) series of events, and c) resultive state is introduced.

Stanza 3 can be delineated on the basis of this structural pattern. A temporal adverbial (and the next day) serves as an orientational statement for this stanza. Then, the events occurring in the church are recounted. At one point in her narration, Allison trails off midstream (and walked away with ...), so that it becomes difficult to determine the precise segmentation of this stanza. However, I have interpreted two evaluative statements, referring to the gang's thoughts, as representative of a stative ending to Stanza 3. It is interesting that the events in this particular evaluative statement are again presented as the internal cognitive states (thoughts) of characters. Recall that in the narratives of Brenda and Sherrie there were numerous references to the internal states of characters: what characters wanted, felt, etc. The presentation of characters' internal states from the perspective of what they *thought* is a unique facet of Allison's text.

In Stanza 4, a shift in topic can be seen in the topicalized subject (and the boy) which is marked by rising intonation. This stanza functions thematically as a backdrop to the critical events in Stanza 5, in which the gang of boys grab the balloon. I have interpreted the postposed adverbial (*leaving the balloon outside*) as the final line in Stanza 4, in accord with the structural patterning already seen in Stanzas 1 and 3. With this postposed adverbial phrase, Allison presents a state of affairs which serves as a type of closure to the set of events in the stanza. Stanza 5 appears to be a rapid rendition of the critical stealing scene in the film. In a series of three complete phrases, Allison provides a climactic conclusion to the events detailed in Stanzas 1-4.

In Stanza 6, Allison presents a detailed description of the boy's reaction to this crisis situation. In this stanza, she makes extensive use of adverbials to narrate the protracted nature of this search. As was the case in Stanza 2, I have interpreted Allison's use of a temporal adverbial (*and the little boy # when he came out*) as indicative of the beginning of a new stanza. I have interpreted her use of an additional adverbial phrase (*after a little while*) as the end point of this stanza. Certainly the events in Stanzas 6 and 7 are closely related, since in both stanzas Allison describes the boy's search for the balloon. Stanza 7, however, appears to represent a turn in events. After searching for a protracted period of time, the boy stopped, turned back, and saw the balloon. Thus, thematically speaking, Stanza 6 is a description of an extended search whereas Stanza 7 is a statement of a resolution to that search. Interestingly, the line that I have designated as the end point of Stanza 7 (*taking it from the bullies*) is again a postposed timeless adverbial. This particular type of construction was seen in Stanza 5 and is again seen in Stanza 8.

In Stanza 8, Allison narrates events occurring in a long chase scene. As I noted above, the end point of this stanza is, in my view, marked by a postposed adverbial (*the rest of the bullies still^ after him*). The chase scene is then continued in Stanza 9, in which the backdrop to a critical event in the film is presented. Although Allison does not make use of a postposed adverbial in Stanza 9, the line which I have designated as final in this stanza represents a state of affairs: the balloon is devoid of helium. In Stanza 10, one finds once again the structural pattern that seems to

permeate Allison's narrative telling. The opening line in the stanza is a contingency statement presented in the form of a temporal statement (when it was down on the ground). This line is followed by a couplet of lines in which completive events are narrated. Then, an evaluative statement follows, in which the boy's reaction is described. Of interest is the form in which this evaluative statement is presented. Rather than simply stating the boy's internal emotional state (e.g., he was sad), Allison presents the boy's reaction to the balloon's demise as his response to a physical state:

and the boy felt like crying
but he didn't

Thus, the narrator perspective which Allison assumes in Stanza 10, as well as in Stanzas 2 and 3, is one which is more distanced from events.

The temporal adverbial *finally* provides an orientational beginning to Stanza 11, in which a resolution to the unhappy state of affairs in Stanza 10 is provided. A series of narrative clauses follows, in which the boy's flight with balloons is described. The line that I have interpreted as final in this stanza (*and over rooftops and over things*) may be viewed as a repetition of the position-final adverbial phrases seen in additional stanzas in Allison's text. In a final couplet, Allison enters a different narrator perspective, one in which the speaker has stepped out of the action to provide commentary on a possible subscript to the film.

The final storytelling narrative that I would like to examine is that produced by Jessica. In her text shown in its entirety below, Jessica, like Allison, provides a detailed rendition of the events occurring in the film. She moves through the events shown in the film scene-by-scene, in the manner of an eyewitness report. Jessica also, however, provides evaluative commentary on events, particularly in reference to the balloon's magical qualities. The stanza structure in her text is best delineated on the basis of Jessica's use of temporal connectives (*and then*), discourse markers (*well*), and pausing in the opening lines of stanzas. In addition, the final lines of some stanzas are evaluative in nature. Thus, the stanzas in Jessica's text often have the form: a) a temporal form/discourse marker, b) a series of narrative lines, (optionally) c) an evaluative statement. This patterning of stanzas strongly resembles that seen in Allison's narrative.

Jessica: Storytelling Narrative

Stanza 1

and so he climbed up the rail // well the post thing that it [balloon] was on
and # he # untied it
and brought it down

Stanza 2

and then # well he had to go to school

except there were no balloons allowed on the bus
so he made the balloon follow him
'cause it was magic!

Stanza 3

and uhm # well # he saw the man washing windows
and then he went to church with his mo / mother
and the red balloon followed
and he went in // and they both went in
and they got kicked out of church for a day

Stanza 4

and uhm # then the little boy went to a pastry shop
and heeee # uhm had something that he really liked
and it cost // and he had enough to uhm buy it [a pastry]
so he told his balloon to wait right there
'cause he was // 'cause it was magic!

Stanza 5

so then he went inside
and then all these mean! boys came along
and stole! the balloon
and they / and they took it back to the hideout
and they uhm tried to // they were uhm shooting slingshots
but they always missed

Stanza 6

'and uhm then he // and then the litle boy from a wall saw his red balloon
and he's // and he was saying
"red balloon come here!"
and # then # he untied it
but the boys were pulling on the string
'cause they couldn't see the balloon anymore

Stanza 7

and # then ## uhm # well all the boy // well he ran away with the balloon
and then all the boys started running after him
and thennnn ## and then they uhm cornered him
and then // but he escaped

Stanza 8

and then what happened was # they surrounded him on top of a hill
and one of 'em hit it
and it was sharp
and it made a tiny hole
and it bursted

Stanza 9

and all! of a sudden # all of these balloons were uhm flowing out of the sky
as if there was a party going on
except it was a funeral!
and ## you can take over [looks to E]

Deborah

don't you want to finish the <story>?

Jessica

ok [<overlap]

Stanza 10

and then they flew towards him
and he grabbed all the strings
and they took 'im for many new adventures
the end

In Stanza 1, Jessica provides a narrative continuation of the opening script used for the task. In response to my opening lines, she describes the boy's actions of getting the balloon down from a lamp post. Stanza 2 illustrates a structural patterning within stanzas which appears frequently in her narrative. In the first line of this stanza, a temporal adverbial (*and then*) followed by a discourse marker (*well*) and pausing marks a shift in topic. Then, a series of lines follows, the end result of which is an explanatory/evaluative statement ('cause it was // the balloon was magic!). Stanza 2 is unique, however, in that it consists almost entirely of lines which are evaluative in nature. Stanza 2 seems to function thematically in Jessica's story as a backdrop for the events to come. The boy wants to take the balloon with him (= friendship) and the balloon follows the boy because of its magical qualities.

Stanza 3 can be demarcated, in my view, on the basis of the discourse marker *well*, along with pausing, in what I have interpreted as the first line of this stanza. In Stanza 3, Jessica narrates a series of complete events associated with the church scene in the film. The end point of these events is indicated by the temporal adverbial phrase *for a day* in the final line of Stanza 3. This adverbial shifts the temporal locus of the action from a series of punctuated events to an extended time period. Another shift in the action is marked by a temporal form (*and uhm then*) which I have interpreted as the beginning of a new stanza (Stanza 4). This shift in temporality is also linked to a shift in the location of events. The boy moves from the church, where he has been kicked out for an extended period of time, to the pastry shop. In Stanza 4, Jessica presents a series of evaluative statements about the boy's ill-fated decision to leave the balloon outside the pastry shop. As was the case in Stanza 2, nearly every line in Stanza 4 functions as an evaluative statement. As was also the case in Stanza 2, Jessica in Stanza 4 ends with a statement of the balloon's magical qualities ('cause it was magic!). This emphasis on the balloon's magical abilities appears to be a continually reoccurring theme in her narrative.

Against the backdrop of the ill-fated decisions in Stanza 4, Jessica relates a series of critical transitional events in Stanza 5. In a series of complete statements in which adverbial and verbal forms are stressed, she narrates the gang's stealing of the balloon. Interestingly, as was the case in

Stanza 3, the final line in this stanza represents a protracted event. After the gang has stolen the balloon, they take it to their hiding place (an old construction site) and shoot at the balloon for an indefinite period of time. During this indefinite period of time, they continually miss as they attempt to slingshot the balloon. These protracted events bring closure to Stanza 5, as the protracted nature of the boy's expulsion from church also bring closure to Stanza 3.

As was the case in the preceding stanzas, the opening line of Stanza 6 is marked by a temporal form (*and uhm then*). As a whole, this stanza represents a primarily evaluative statement about the boy's attempts to recover his balloon. The boy's efforts are presented through character dialogue (*and he was saying, "red balloon come here!"*), through a completive statement (*he untied it*), and finally through a statement of the protracted action on the part of the gang of boys. The inability of the gang of boys to maintain their hold on the balloon is recounted through a causal statement, in which Jessica explains that the boys continued pulling on the balloon because they could not see that it had already been recovered by its owner. It is very interesting to note the similarities between the structure of this stanza and that of Stanzas 2 and 4. All three stanzas contain a series of evaluative lines, ending with an explanatory statement. This particular format appears to alternate with Stanzas 1, 3, and 5, in which a series of completive event statements are followed by a protracted event. Thus, one finds in Stanzas 1-6 an alternation of primarily narrative and evaluative stanzas.

Stanzas 7 and 8 deviate from this pattern of alternation, in that the two successive stanzas are both primarily non-evaluative. In Stanzas 7 and 8, Jessica presents the critical events occurring near the film's end. In a series of completive statements in Stanza 7, Jessica narrates the chase scene. These events terminate in a partial resolution: the boy escapes for the time being. In Stanza 8, however, this partial resolution proves futile. The boy is surrounded and his balloon is destroyed. Both Stanza 7 and 8 are demarcated by an initial temporal connective (*and then*) followed by either a discourse marker (*well*) or a statement of sequence (*what happened was*). Neither stanza has a statement of evaluation or protracted action in final position. Thus, these two stanzas stand out as being structurally distinct and thematically critical for the story as a whole. They suggest a critical turn of events.

The resolution to this critical turn of events is presented in Stanza 9 and 10. Because Jessica breaks her narration at Stanza 9, asking me to take over, it is difficult to determine the precise boundaries between these final stanzas. However, I would interpret the shift in topic, along with marked stress, which follows the balloon's bursting (*and all! of a sudden # all of these balloons ...*) as indicative of the beginning of a new stanza. Stanza 9 functions partially as a presentation of new events (more balloons come out of the sky) and partially as a metaphor describing those events. Because the events in the first line of this stanza are presented as ongoing events, I would interpret Stanza 9 as primarily evaluative in nature. The state of affairs narrated in

Stanzas 7 and 8 changes dramatically in Stanza 9, and this change is presented through a descriptive metaphor. Finally, Stanza 10 brings closure to the story, through a couplet of event clauses followed by a timeless statement. Thus, the final two stanzas in Jessica's text appear to reestablish the earlier pattern of alternating (primarily) evaluative and (primarily) non-evaluative groupings of lines.

The narrative texts produced by Allison and Jessica represent individualistic ways of representing events seen in a silent film. However, their texts also share certain similarities. First, both children narrated the film's events in extreme detail. Events were related in a scene-by-scene fashion, matching the sequence of events in the film. In this sense, the narratives produced by Allison and Jessica represent what I would term a reportive, eye-witness, perspective on events. Allison's narrative, in particular, exemplifies an attempt to narrate events in as much detail as possible.

In addition to this eye-witness perspective, Allison and Jessica made use of temporal adverbial phrases and evaluative statements in similar organizational ways. In their texts, one could discern a pattern in which stanzas were segmented through the use of adverbials (*and then, finally*) in initial position and the use of evaluative statements, or statements of protracted events, in final position. It would be a huge leap from the data to conclude that this type of organization within stanzas represents a style found among all speakers in a particular community. However, this shared pattern may represent various overlapping narrative traditions within the community of middle-class speakers to which Allison and Jessica belong. In particular, a focus on the *sequence* of events, marked through an extensive use of temporal adverbial forms, may be a trademark of mainstream middle-income white communities (Gee, 1986; Heath, 1982; 1983).

Conclusions: Narrative Skills and Literacy Learning

The findings from a detailed analysis of the narratives produced by two groups of first graders call into question a characterization of either group as representative of an intrinsically more "oral" or more "literate" style of narration. Both the low-income African-American and the middle-income white children in this study produced narratives which were topic-centered (centered on one unified as opposed to several successive topics), logically organized, and engaging. All four of the children presented information sufficient to derive the basic plot structure of the film. All of the children provided causal explanations for events. I see no evidence to support an interpretation that one set of texts is more decontextualized or logically-connected than another.

The findings from the study, however, point to a distinction between the two groups of children which is somewhat more subtle. If one considers these children to be representative of their respective communities, it may be the case that children from the different communities bring a different interpretative *stance* to the task of telling a story. The African-American children in this

study appeared to narrate events in the film more from the vantage point of one who is intimately concerned with the internal states and motivations of characters. As a result, their narrative texts displayed an extremely rich and complex evaluative structure. The white children in this study appeared to narrate events more from the omniscient stance of an onlooker, a reporter of events. Although both children provided extensive evaluative information, this information was more concentrated on states of affairs (*'cause they couldn't see the balloon anymore*) than on character internal states (*'cause they wanted it to be their friend, too*). Thus, it may be an interpretative stance with respect to events, rather than the thematic connections between events, which best distinguishes the narrative styles of children from these two sociocultural communities.

Another way of viewing these differences in discourse styles is to think of such differences in terms of the range of narrative genres which children bring to their classrooms. It is clear from the research on the development of narrative skills that all children bring to their classrooms a range of ways of representing events through narrative (see the earlier review section). Children from different communities also acquire distinct "ways of telling". In fact, the linguistic representation of events in a reporter-like sequence may be more a trademark of middle-income white children (Heath, 1982; 1986). The findings from the present study suggest that, even though both groups of children in the study were ostensibly given the task of telling a story, the interpretations of this task were quite different among groups. In other words, the differing interpretative stances seen in this study may represent the unique range of narrative genres which children within communities experience in their primary language learning environments.

The evidence presented in this analysis, however, flies in the face of some disturbing social problems. Although low-income African-American children bring to their classrooms a sophisticated set of narrative skills, these children are unfortunately more likely to experience difficulty as they make the important transition to producing and comprehending written texts. This problem is one that Gee (1989) has termed the "failure problem". In other words, why is it that children who have in their possession an extremely sophisticated range of narrative skills are more likely to fail at tasks which are structured as simply as possible: tasks such as decoding words from a beginning reader or locating a specific word from a list? This is an extremely complex problem, and one that I can only begin to address in the context of this study. However, the findings that have emerged in my analyses may provide some preliminary information relevant to this issue.

Scollon and Scollon (1981) have commented that full participation in literacy entails the ability to adopt an author's stance, a "fictionalization of self" with respect to events. In the case study which gave rise to this conclusion, Scollon and Scollon observed and audio-taped their two-year-old daughter, Rachel, as she narrated fantasy stories. They uncovered a type of distanced, author-like stance which emerged in these narrative tellings, which they felt to be representative of

a literate tradition. Britton (1982) has in a similar vein differentiated between *spectator* and *participant* roles in discourse. According to Britton, communication in a spectator role is more typical of literary discourse, in that the speaker/writer takes on the role of an onlooker who is more removed from events.

If one considers literacy to be the ability to adopt the perspective of an author, or spectator, with respect to events, then clearly both groups of children in the present study produced narratives which were highly literate texts. All of the children in the study demonstrated their skill in adopting a variety of perspectives on events as they moved between narrating mainline events and providing evaluative commentary. However, it may be the case that many classroom literacy events are based upon a specific kind of authorship with respect to events: the reporter stance which appears to be more characteristic of middle-income white children. Although fictional stories form the basis for much of reading instruction, the oral discourse of literacy instruction appears to be based more upon a factual rendition of "what happened". In small reading groups, children are often asked to report on specific sequences of events in a story. In fact, one entire method of reading instruction, the Language Experience Approach, is based upon a group oral discussion of "what happened next". Thus, children from some African-American communities may be at a disadvantage due to the unique discourse of literacy instruction.

Certainly the factors which play into what Gee terms the "failure problem" go beyond cultural differences in narrative styles. The research on emergent literacy suggests that mainstream middle-income caretakers may enter into book-related activities which prepare their preschoolers for school-based literacy tasks. It is not my goal in this paper to discount these important factors related to literacy learning in the classroom. It is rather my goal to suggest that low-income African-American children bring to their first grade classroom narrative skills which are, in every respect, equally as sophisticated (topic-centered, decontextualized, literate) as those of mainstream white children. If it is the case that cultural differences in children's discourse styles are part of the failure problem, then, as Michaels (1981) and Michaels and Collins (1984) point out, this problem is a function of the discourse of literacy events in the classroom rather than a function of a language deficiency on the part of African-American children.

If educators are to meet the learning needs of children from a variety of social communities, then it may be necessary to make alterations in our current means of literacy instruction. Literacy education in a pluralistic society must somehow accommodate the language skills particular to more than just mainstream middle-income communities. At present, literacy curricula based upon "whole language" instruction offer one means of allowing children from diverse communities the opportunity to celebrate in the classroom their particular ways of telling (Atwell, 1987; Graves, 1983). The success of these curricula, however, depends upon the abilities of educators to adopt an ideology allowing for diversity in children's ways of expressing events through narrative.

¹ The research described in this paper was made possible through a Spencer Dissertation Year Fellowship for Research to Education (Harvard University) and through a General University Research Grant (University of Delaware). I would like to thank Catherine Snow and Dennie Wolf for their input into this research project. I would also like to acknowledge James Paul Gee for his valuable comments and suggestions at various stages of research and writing. Finally, I wish to express my gratitude to the first grade children, and their teachers, who so graciously participated in the project.

² The transcription symbols used in the excerpts from children's narrative texts are derived from the CHILDES coding system for child language analysis (see MacWhinney and Snow, 1985). The following key to these symbols may facilitate the reading of narrative texts in this paper:

#	pause
##	long pause
/	retracing
//	retracing with correction
!	phonological stress
^	rising intonation
_	falling intonation
^ _	rising-falling (sing-song) intonation
< >	marking of text (often to indicate overlap)

Appendix

Eventcasting Task

This is (child's name) and Deborah, sportscasters, and we're gonna say everything we see happening in the film. I'm gonna start off and then (child's name) is gonna take over.

(I start re-playing a three-minute segment from the film).

The little boy and the red balloon are going past a church steeple. And they're coming to a bakery shop. The little boy is looking inside the bakery shop. Now he's checking in his pocket to see if he has enough money to buy something to eat. Looks good. Now he's walking into the bakery shop.

Can you take over and be the sportscaster?

News Reporting Task

This is (child's name) and Deborah, and we're gonna be news reporters and tel what we saw happen in the film. I'm gonna start off and then (child's name) is gonna take over.

News Headlines: Boy Seen Flying Over City! The first thing that I saw happen was: a little boy found a red balloon on his way to the bus stop. He was seen walking with the balloon to a bus. He got on the bus, and the balloon followed behind.

Can you be the news reporter now and tell what you saw happen?

Storytelling Task

This is (child's name) and Deborah, and we're gonna be storytellers and tell the story of "The Red Balloon." I'm gonna start off and then (child's name) is gonna take over.

(I hold in my lap a "storybook" which has on the front cover a picture from the film but which has neither words nor pictures inside)

The Red Balloon. Once upon a time there was a little boy who lived in Paris, France. One day, on his way to the bus stop, he found this big beautiful red balloon. He wanted the balloon to be his friend.

Can you take over now and be the storyteller? (I pass the storybook facsimile to the child)

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