

Assessment of the Pilot Program of the Cool Classics Program (April 18 – June 1, 2006)  
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## I. The Participating Children

The group of children who participated in the Cool Classics program was diverse in many respects. In this way they reflected the make-up of the larger context – the Disney Magnet School – in which they were situated. The group was multi-ethnic and consisted of children from 3 different grade levels: pre-kindergarten (4 children), kindergarten (8 children), and first grade (19 children). The 31 students consisted of 15 females and 16 males; by race: 11 Caucasian, 9 Asian, 8 African-American, and 2 Hispanic (these are the racial categories are used by the Chicago Public School System). Their countries of origin included the U.S., the Philippines, Ireland, Bosnia, Albania, Nigeria, Ghana, China, and Bangladesh. One third of the children were bilingual and half of the children were exposed to another language on a regular basis. The children also varied in terms of their academic abilities: two of the children had been labeled “gifted” students and, at the other end of the spectrum, several of the children were in direct instruction reading groups.

## II. Surveys: April 18 and May 30

At the beginning and at the end of the Cool Classics program, all of the children filled out (or received help filling out) a survey which assessed their understanding of The Story of Ferdinand as well as their understanding of literary terms and vocabulary words that related to the story. Before the students filled out the first survey on April 18, the story had been read to them one time.<sup>1</sup> (On the first survey, the children also performed a matching exercise. For this exercise they matched the words Bumblebee, Bull, Flower, and Matador with the appropriate pictures. Because all of the children completed this part successfully, the matching component was not included in the survey that was administered at the end of the program.) The four free-choice questions that the children were asked to answer were:

1. What is a story?
2. What is The Story of Ferdinand about?
3. What did you learn from The Story of Ferdinand?
4. What’s the best way to tell a story?

These questions elicited a range of answers and the kinds of answers that the children gave to the questions on the first survey differed substantially from the answers that they gave on the second survey. (To protect their identities, students are identified as letters from A – Z and

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<sup>1</sup> This does not take into account the handful of children who, during their final interview, said that they had heard The Story of Ferdinand before coming to Cool Classics.

AA-EE.) The following examples of survey answers provided by the children are representative of the content of the sets of responses to each question and the demographic diversity of the class.

1. What is a story?

April 18

A book. S (male, Hispanic, 1<sup>st</sup> grade)

It is something you learn about. A (female, Caucasian, Kindergarten)

It's something that somebody reads to you. Z (male, African-American, 1<sup>st</sup> grade)

Lily and the purple plastic purse. X (female, Asian, 1<sup>st</sup> grade)

May 30

A book or something you read. DD (male, Caucasian, 1<sup>st</sup> grade)

That people act out. N (female, African-American, 1<sup>st</sup> grade)

It is something with a beginning, a middle, and an end. CC (male, Asian, 1<sup>st</sup> grade)

A fairytale, a movie, a play. AA (male, African-American, 1<sup>st</sup> grade)

Twelve of the 31 children (39%) gave similar answers to the question, "What is a story?" on both surveys. In comparing the answers on the second survey to those on the first survey, fewer students (17 vs. 23) said that a story related to books or reading or telling someone something. Instead, on the second survey, the students made new references to writing, movies, plays and acting things out in addition to books and reading. In doing so, the children used a broader range of concepts and examples to answer this question.

2. What is The Story of Ferdinand about?

April 18

I don't know. D (female, Asian, pre-K)

A bull. I (female, African-American, 1<sup>st</sup> grade)

Ferdinand likes to sit around and smell flowers. E (male, Asian, 1<sup>st</sup> grade)

He goes to a bull fight. L (male, Caucasian, 1<sup>st</sup> grade)

May 30

About a bull who liked to sit under a cork tree. G (male, Caucasian, Kindergarten)

About a bull that doesn't want to fight in a bullfight. U (female, Caucasian, 1<sup>st</sup> grade)

About a little bull that didn't want to fight. S (male, Hispanic, 1<sup>st</sup> grade)

A bull who doesn't want to fight. H (male, African-American, 1<sup>st</sup> grade)

Between the administration of the first survey and second survey, the children's understanding of what The Story of Ferdinand was about got much more fine-tuned: on the first survey 12 children said the story was about "a bull" or "bulls"; on the second survey none of the children used an indefinite noun and three children used the definite noun,

“Ferdinand.” If we take a broader view and compare answers that consisted only of noun phrases (e.g., a bull; bulls; Ferdinand; a bee; his Mom, the cow; etc.), on the first survey there were 14 such answers whereas on the second survey there were only five. On the second survey the children’s answers were more complex in that more children made reference to what Ferdinand *did*. In addition, on the first survey five children made a range of references to a fight – e.g., “He goes to a bullfight”; “They want to have a bullfight”; “Bull that never fights”; on the second survey there were many more children – 21 – who made reference to fighting and all of these 21 responses developed the theme of Ferdinand’s not wanting to fight. If we include the oblique references to fighting on both surveys (e.g., “A bull that went on a race”; “There’s a bull and a matador”; “It’s a bull that goes to a very dangerous place”), the numbers increase from 8 [first survey] to 22 [second survey]. To summarize, the majority of the answers on the first survey connected The Story of Ferdinand with a bull or bulls. In contrast, a greater majority of the answers on the second survey reflected an awareness of the pacifist theme of The Story of Ferdinand. In addition, the answers on the second survey tended to be longer: the children’s answers to this question consisted of 183 words (total) on the first survey and 292 words on the second survey.

### 3. What did you learn from The Story of Ferdinand?

April 18

The bull sits under a tree. P (male, Hispanic, Kindergarten)

The bull doesn’t like to fight. He likes flowers. W (female, African-American, Kindergarten)

That he went to a fight and after that he went to the cork tree. B (female, Asian, 1<sup>st</sup> grade)

Not to fight. F (male, Caucasian, Kindergarten)

May 30

He doesn’t want to do like the other bulls do. AA (male, African-American, 1<sup>st</sup> grade)

That the bull didn’t want to fight. EE (female, Asian, Kindergarten)

Do not fight with others. CC (male, Asian, 1<sup>st</sup> grade)

That it’s OK if you don’t want to do the same thing as the others. V (female, Caucasian, 1<sup>st</sup> grade)

The answers that the children provided on the second survey differed from those that they provided on the first in that, on the second survey, more students made personal connections between The Story of Ferdinand and their own lives. Twice as many students demonstrated an ability to take the content of a story about an animal and apply it to themselves. In addition, on the second survey seven students were able to take the theme of not fighting and generalize it even further – not only is it OK to not fight like others, but it’s OK to not do *other* things that people might want you to do. This concept did not appear on the first survey. This would suggest that the practice of spending more time on a single story, in addition to

engaging with the story in different ways, allows students to draw greater personal meaning from literature.

#### 4. What's the best way to tell a story?

April 18

To everybody. P (male, Hispanic, Kindergarten)

Read it to somebody. M (male, Asian, pre-K)

To explain to people what it is all about and read it to them. K (female, Caucasian, 1<sup>st</sup> grade)

To read a story, then tell it to somebody else. Z (male, African-American, 1<sup>st</sup> grade)

May 30

Telling it or reading it to someone. O (male, Caucasian, 1<sup>st</sup> grade)

Act it out. C (male, Asian, pre-K)

That's kind of a hard question. I'd say it's better to have all kinds of things. J (female, Caucasian, Kindergarten)

To write it in a book. BB (female, African-American, 1<sup>st</sup> grade)

In general, on the second survey, there were fewer unrelated answers and the answers reflected greater diversity in terms of modality of engaging with a story. The theme of reading/telling a story was popular on both surveys: 20 children made reference to this theme on the first survey and 18 children touched on this theme in their answers to this question on the second survey. What differentiated the answers on the two surveys was that the second survey (and not the first survey) contained references to pictures (four students); singing the story (two students); and making a movie (one student).

The literary terms and vocabulary words were tested in a multiple choice format:

1. What is a narrative?
  - a. a story
  - b. two kids who are related
  - c. a skinny hallway
  - d. a trip to the zoo
  
2. What is a character?
  - a. a parent
  - b. a vegetable
  - c. someone who is nice
  - d. a person or animal in a story
  
3. What are illustrations?
  - a. the medicine you take when you're sick

- b. the pictures in a story or book
  - c. the words in a story or book
  - d. one of the 50 states
4. What is the mood in a story?
- a. the title of a story
  - b. what you feel when you're having a cranky day
  - c. the way the author wants you to feel when you read a story
  - d. the pictures in a story

What do these words mean?

1. Pasture
  - a. milk
  - b. the head of a church
  - c. a grassy field
  - d. to be respectful
2. Lonesome
  - a. happy
  - b. to want to be with other people
  - c. tall
  - d. your allowance
3. Understanding
  - a. to listen and know something
  - b. to be loud
  - c. to be silly
  - d. to be nice
4. Fierce
  - a. tough and scary
  - b. friendly
  - c. whiskers
  - d. lonesome

In comparing the multiple choice answers on the first set of surveys given on April 18 with those given on May 30, there were 158 correct answers on the first batch of surveys and 190 correct answers on the second batch of surveys. This reflects an increase of 12% ( $158/248$  possible correct responses = 64% vs.  $190/248$  possible correct responses = 76%).

Seventeen children improved their score on the second survey; eight children scored the same on both surveys (three of whom had a perfect score of 8 on both surveys); and six children got more correct answers on the first survey than they did on the second survey. Interestingly, of

the six children whose scores decreased on the second survey, five had scored perfect 8's on the first survey and the sixth child had scored seven correct answers on the first survey. Five of the six children whose scores decreased from the first survey to the second were among the younger students in the group – one was in Pre-K and four were in Kindergarten; it so happens that these same five children were boys. [See Section VII, pages 20-21 for further discussion.]

When we look at students' answers to individual questions on the survey, there were more correct answers given on the second set of surveys for six of the eight questions:

5. What is a narrative? (The number of correct answers went from 20 to 26)
6. What is a character? (The number of correct answers went from 25 to 29)
8. What is the mood in a story? (The number of correct answers went from 16 to 22)
1. What does the word 'pasture' mean? (The number of correct answers went from 17 to 25)
2. What does the word 'lonesome' mean? (The number of correct answers went from 17 to 24)
4. What does the word 'fierce' mean? (The number of correct answers went from 22 to 26)

There were two questions for which there were a couple more incorrect answers on the second survey:

7. What are illustrations?
3. What does the word 'understanding' mean?

For the question on the definition of 'illustrations', 20 children answered this word correctly on April 18 and 19 children answered it correctly on May 30. On the first survey, five children selected the related, but incorrect, answer, "c. the words in a story or book" whereas eight children selected this incorrect answer on May 30.

For the question on the meaning of the word 'understanding', 21 children answered this question correctly on April 18 and 19 children answered it correctly on May 30. On the first survey nine children selected the incorrect answer, "d. to be nice" whereas 11 children selected this incorrect answer on May 30.

In general, though, the change in the before and after surveys suggests that at the same time that the Cool Classic children improved their understanding of story-related vocabulary items, they also deepened their understanding of literary terms and the many different ways in which stories can be told.

### III. Following 12 Children

We selected 12 children to represent the diversity of the 31 children who participated in the Cool Classics program. They break down in the following ways: 6 boys and 6 girls; 1

Hispanic, 2 Asian, 4 African-American, 5 Caucasian; 4 kindergarteners and 8 first graders; 5 bilingual, 1 exposed to another language on a regular basis, 6 monolingual. What follows is a more in-depth look at these children's experiences in the program.

### 1. A – female, Caucasian, Kindergarten, monolingual

A was not a strong reader to begin with – at the time of the Cool Classics program she was receiving direct instruction in reading. Her answers to the survey question, “What is The Story of Ferdinand about?” demonstrate the change that was typical of Cool Classics participants: on April 18, she wrote: “It’s about a bull”; on May 30, her answer reflected an understanding of the central theme of the story: “It’s about a bull that doesn’t want to fight.”

During her interview at the end of the program, in response to the question of what her favorite part of Cool Classics was, A said that she enjoyed the art work. Her favorite part of The Story of Ferdinand was when Ferdinand sat on the bee. When she was asked why that was her favorite, she said: “Because – ‘cause he’s – ‘cause he’s, the bee is not in that much bee stories.” [She appears to be observing that the bee does not figure as a central actor in many stories.] During the review of vocabulary words on May 10, A gave an example sentence for the word ‘pasture’, saying: “It’s like somewhere where the bulls go somewhere and like eat grass and like, play around.” In the final performance, A played the roles of Ferdinand’s Mother and a Lovely Lady.

The program seems to have had a very positive impact on A’s attitude toward school in general. Her father noted that when A was grouchy in the morning and didn’t want to get out of bed, a reminder that “Cool Classics is today” changed her mind. The Director of the Early Childhood Center at Disney said: “A, who I really never had a relationship with – I know who she is – and suddenly was coming up and hugging me, because I think she felt a connection to the school in a different way than she ever had. ... She feels differently about school. She feels differently about everything.”

### 2. B – female, Asian, 1<sup>st</sup> grade, bilingual

B’s answers to the surveys administered on April 18 and May 30 reflect a deepened understanding of The Story of Ferdinand. On April 18, in response to the question, “What is The Story of Ferdinand about?”, she wrote: “A bull that went to a fight with men.” At the end of the program, she was able to say about the story: “It’s about a bull who doesn’t want to fight.” In this way, she demonstrated a grasp of the pacifist theme of the story. The change in her answers to “What did you learn from The Story of Ferdinand?” is noteworthy as well. On April 18, she was only able to offer features of the plot in response to this question: “That he went to a fight and after that he went to the cork tree.” Seven weeks later, she wrote: “I learned that if somebody wants you to do something you don’t want to do, just walk away.” In this way, B displays her ability to apply the events of a story about a bull to her own life in a very promising way.

In class discussions, B chimed in on a number of occasions. On April 20, during the session devoted to the meaning of vocabulary words, B offered a succinct definition of an illustration: “The picture for the words.” On May 4, she contributed a sentence which used the word “mood”: “Today I am in a happy mood.” On May 17, in response to Ms. Tapp’s request for examples of characters in The Story of Ferdinand, B was the first child to refer to the banderilleros. The next day, she offered a personally meaningful example for the meaning of “lonesome”: “I was lonesome when I got a yellow [a marker of misbehavior in her class].”

For the assignment in which the children picked their favorite sentence from the story and illustrated it, B wrote: “My favorite part was Ferdinand sitting under the cork tree smelling the flowers.” She said her favorite part of the program as a whole was: “When we read Ferdinand. Because we just sit there and be quiet.” In the final performance, B played the roles of one of the Mother Cows and a Lovely Lady.

### 3. F – male, Caucasian, 1<sup>st</sup> grade, monolingual

F was another one of the children who was receiving direct instruction in reading at the time of the program. He was one of the 6 children who gave more correct answers on the first survey than they did on the second survey. It is worth noting, however, that this difference was small: on the first survey he scored a perfect 8 and on the second survey, he answered 7 questions correctly. With regard to the free-choice questions F’s answers demonstrated a broader awareness of the different media that can be used to tell a story. On April 18, in response to the question, “What is a story?” F’s answer made reference to only one kind of medium: “A story is when somebody tells you something.” At the end of the program he wrote that a story is “[s]omething you can write and read.”

It was the classroom discussion, however, that really gave F an opportunity to shine. On April 26, in a discussion of the moods that The Story of Ferdinand evoked, Mara Tapp noted in her log that F said that an emotion that Ferdinand felt while being taken in the cart to the *corrida* was “homesick.” This point was not at all explicit in the story – F demonstrated insight in identifying the way Ferdinand might have been feeling in that situation. In the discussion of the meaning of the story that took place on May 17, Ms. Tapp asked, “What kind of fighting didn’t Ferdinand want to do?” F responded: “A bullfight, like running and the things that he was trying to do.” Ms. Tapp pushed the point further, asking: “Why wouldn’t Ferdinand want to do that?” F then said: “Because he wanted to smell the flowers.” Later that day, Ms. Upchurch asked the question: “What do you do when everyone else is doing something that you don’t want to do?” Different children offered various responses. When Ms. Tapp asked the children to get specific by saying: “How do you say it? That’s hard to say sometimes.” F said: “If somebody asks me and you don’t want to do it you say, ‘No thank you.’” During the vocabulary review the next day, F offered a poignant definition for the word ‘lonesome’: “It’s kind of like, when you got nobody to play with.”

Although F was among the younger students in the class, he appeared to be oriented toward the feelings of others to a greater degree than many of his classmates. In the final performance, F played the roles of the stinging bee and a member of the bullfight audience. When he was interviewed on May 18, Ms. Tapp asked him why he wanted to change roles. F gave this [very funny!] response: “Because I can sting butts. Because it’s not going to really hurt.” When he was asked about his favorite part of The Story of Ferdinand, F said: “I guess, when Ferdinand didn’t get hurt. The matador, because he didn’t like [to] fight. Because the matador kept thinking Ferdinand would die.” F was able to connect with the motivations and feelings of the characters in the story in a way that was quite remarkable. F said that his favorite part of Cool Classics was when Ms. Tapp read Ferdinand.

#### 4. J – female, Caucasian, 1<sup>st</sup> grade, bilingual

On the first survey, J answered 4 out of 8 questions correctly; on the second survey, she answered 7 of the 8 questions correctly. This improvement is consistent with the assertion she made on June 12 that she likes reading and learning new, hard words. J’s answers on the free choice questions demonstrate similar growth. On the first survey, in response to the question, “What is The Story of Ferdinand about?”, she wrote that it was about “a bull that went on a race.” At this point, she appears to have confused the bullfight with a race. At the end of the program, in response to the same question she wrote: “It’s about a little bull who doesn’t like to do stuff with the other bulls. He likes to sit down and smell the flowers.” This answer demonstrates a much firmer grasp of one of the main points of the story.

J appeared to be one of the most articulate children in the group. The contributions that J made in class discussions were, on the whole, quite insightful. On April 20, in response to the question, “What’s a character?”, J said: “A person or an animal that’s in a book.” During the mock press conference on April 27, she asked the actor playing the matador: “Why were you afraid of Ferdinand when he wasn’t fighting?” On May 4, she contributed a sentence which used the word ‘illustrator’: “An illustrator draws pictures.” It was J who suggested during the discussion on May 17 that Ferdinand was an example of a character who did what he wanted to, even when that was different from what everyone else was doing. In the final performance, J played the roles of one of the bulls and a Lovely Lady.

In her final interview, Ms. Tapp asked J why she decided to participate in Cool Classics. J answered: “Because I thought it was gonna be real fun and it was.” Ms. Tapp followed up: “How was it fun?” J replied: “Cause we got to read Ferdinand almost every day. We got to go on field trips, and most of all, because I had a lot of friends coming.” She said that her favorite field trip was the one to the bookstore because she got to get free books. (She got James and the Giant Peach and a book by Judy Blume.)

#### 5. L – male, Caucasian, 1<sup>st</sup> grade, monolingual

In terms of the vocabulary component of the surveys, L answered 6 questions correctly on the first survey and 7 on the second survey. As a complement to his improved vocabulary score, his answers to the free-choice questions on the second survey reveal a more sophisticated understanding of the story. On April 18, in response to the question, “What is The Story of Ferdinand about?” L recounted one aspect of the plot: “He goes to a bull fight.” On May 30, the answer he gave touched on one of the main themes of the story: “About a bull that doesn’t want to fight.” His answers to the question, “What did you learn from The Story of Ferdinand?” reflected a similar progression. On April 18 he wrote: “He’s very happy” whereas on May 30, he wrote: “I learned that if somebody doesn’t want to fight just let them be. Don’t cry about it.” Like many of the other children, in his response to this question L moved from providing a feature of the plot to applying the meaning of the story to his own life.

During the discussions, L could be silly at times (e.g., in response to Ms. Upchurch’s question of who the children ask for support, he said: “Well the thing that I would do – I would go downstairs and get an egg and then throw it at my neighbor and I would crack it and then laugh too hard.”). At other times his answers seemed to come out of left-field. But L also clearly engaged with the story. On April 20, during the discussion of why the letters spelling ‘Ferdinand’ appeared on one page in very small print, L suggested: “They want to say it slow ‘cause they’re all scared.” On May 17, L offered the matador as an example of a character in The Story of Ferdinand. Later that day, during the discussion of a character in the book who does what he wants to even though that’s different from what the others are doing, L provided a justification for another child’s identification of Ferdinand as such a character: “All the other bulls want to fight but he doesn’t want to fight.” In the final performance L played the roles of one of the Five Men in Very Funny Hats and the head Banderillero.

After the program had ended, L said that his favorite part of the book was “that all of the banderilleros and picadores and matador cry and get real mad.” When Ms. Tapp asked him if he was continuing to read the story, L said: “Now I’m telling my sister to act it out.” Ms Tapp responded: “Excellent. Do you read it to her?” L stated: “Yep, and I do parts, too, and she always wants to be Ferdinand and I let her.” That children are recreating the story at home, with their siblings, speaks volumes about the vibrancy of the Cool Classics program. L also stood out in his enthusiasm for the final program and in the way that he successfully memorized his lines. When Ms. Tapp asked him how he did that, L replied: “Well, me and my Dad went in our little guest room. I said my lines, and he said all the other lines, and when it was me and [B], we said it together.” His mother told Ms. Tapp that L even took the script with him into the bathtub.

## 6. N – female, African-American, 1<sup>st</sup> grade, bilingual

N showed dramatic improvement in her recognition of literary definitions and the meanings of the vocabulary words: on the April 18 survey she answered two of eight questions correctly; on May 30 she answered six of eight questions correctly – an increase of 200%. In response

to the free choice question, “What is a story?”, on April 18 she wrote, “It is a book that you read.” On May 30, her answer to this question referenced the medium of acting: “That people act out.” It appears that the exposure she received to the Lifeline Theater company’s production of The Story of Ferdinand, in addition to the class’s own performance of this story, made this mode of story-telling salient for her.

In the class discussions, N didn’t participate as much as some of the other students, but the times when she did were meaningful. On May 2, while the class was waiting for the announcement that their bus had arrived (they were taking a field trip to the Uptown Branch of the Chicago Public Library), Ms. Tapp told them about the Russian literary salon that meets at the library on Saturday mornings. She explained that it was a salon for Russian immigrants and then asked if anyone knew what an immigrant was. Different children offered suggestions (e.g., “an iguana book”; “a kung fu fighter”); then N said: “People that came from different countries?” In the discussion of vocabulary words on May 10, Ms. Tapp asked: “What happens in a pasture?” N responded: “Like cows grow big.” The discussions in the Cool Classics program moved from making sure that the children understood the surface meaning of the text to the deeper meanings of the story. On May 17, the topic of doing things that are different from what other people are doing was developed. When pressed, a couple of children said that one way to do this would be to say “No thank you. I don’t want to.” Ms. Tapp asked if this was hard to do, and the children said that, yes, it was. Ms. Tapp pursued this theme, saying: “It is? Why is it hard?” N then offered: “They don’t want to do what you want them to do.”

N said that her favorite part of The Story of Ferdinand was when Ferdinand got stung by the bee. When asked what she liked best about the Cool Classics program, she gave a unique answer: “That we get to eat cheese sticks.” In the final performance, N played one of the Mother Cows and one of the Lovely Ladies.

### 7. S – male, Hispanic, 1<sup>st</sup> grade, bilingual

On the first survey, S answered 6 of 8 vocabulary-related questions correctly; on the second survey he answered 7 out of 8 questions correctly. The answers he gave on the free choice section didn’t change much in content, but the answers he gave on the second survey were more elaborated. For example, in response to the question, “What is a story?”, on the first survey he wrote only, “A book.” On the second survey he wrote: “A story is a book that you can read.” His answers to the question, “What did you learn from The Story of Ferdinand?” are worth noting because the details in the answer he gave on the second survey appear to reflect a deeper internalization of the meaning of the story. On the first survey he wrote: “Fighting is never appreciated.” In response to the same question on the later survey (“What did you learn from The Story of Ferdinand?”), S wrote: “That fighting is not good. You could hit somebody in the face and they could bleed and it would be all your fault.”

On May 18, one of the topics for discussion was where children could find support. (This was a follow-up to the point that Ferdinand had an understanding mother.) When asked who he could ask for support, S said: “Go to my Dad.” Later, the topic shifted to people who look and act different. S appeared to be operating at first in a “be wary of strangers” mode – not surprising in a first-grader today. In response to Ms. Tapp’s question, “What if you like someone but they look and act different?” S replied: “I would go to a police officer.” Ms. Tapp then developed the point that it was possible for someone to be different and not be dangerous. She pointed out different people in the class and noted that they looked different from her, and they acted different, too, but they weren’t dangerous. After this observation, S modified his stance a little: “I would ask them to ignore me.” When Ms. Tapp pressed him, saying: “You would ask what?” S modified his position even more: “I would try to learn from them.”

S said that his favorite part of the book was when Ferdinand sat on the bee and got wild. When asked about what he liked best in Cool Classics, he said that he liked the art. In the final performance, S played the roles of a flower and the Matador.

#### 8. W – female, African-American, Kindergarten, monolingual

The total number of W’s correct answers on the vocabulary portions of the surveys was the same on both surveys: 6 on the first and 6 on the second (on the second survey she lost one point in the literary definition section and gained a point in the vocabulary section). W’s answers to the free choice questions reflect the pattern typical of the majority of the Cool Classics participants: her answers on the second survey reflected a deeper understanding of the story on several dimensions. On the first survey, in response to the question: “What is The Story of Ferdinand about?” she wrote only: “Bull.” In her response to this question on the second survey she provided more details, and was able to articulate one of the main themes of the story: “A bull that doesn’t want to fight.” Similarly, on the first survey the question: “What did you learn from The Story of Ferdinand?” elicited a response that was limited to recounting descriptors of the main character, Ferdinand. On the first survey she wrote: “The bull doesn’t like to fight. He likes flowers.” On the second survey she wrote: “Sometimes when you fight you may get hurt.” In this way, she demonstrated the ability to apply the events of the story to her own life – here the pronoun “you” serves to make reference to people as a whole, herself included.

Choosing illustrative examples of W’s experience in the Cool Classics program was quite easy. In the discussion of the meaning of vocabulary words on April 20, W said that a character is “a person that acts on a stage.” On May 10, Ms. Tapp showed the children a playbill from a performance of *Sita Ram* in order to get them thinking about the program that they would help to create for their performance of The Story of Ferdinand. Ms. Tapp asked if anyone knew what the picture on the cover of the playbill was and it was W who identified it correctly as “an eye of God.” Later that day her proposed definition of the meaning of the word ‘narrative’ bordered on the metaphysical: “It’s like you’re in a dark place and you’re in a

light place.” A week later, W identified the bee as an example of one of the characters in *The Story of Ferdinand* and on May 18 she offered a poignant example of the meaning of ‘lonesome’: “Sometimes when you’re lonesome – when people drive away and they forget about you. Then you feel like you’re alone.”

For the assignment in which the students illustrated their favorite sentence from the book, W wrote: “He liked to sniff the flowers.” She said that her favorite part of *Cool Classics* was “when we read *The Story of Ferdinand*.” In the final performance she played the roles of a flower and one of the *Lovely Ladies*.

### 9. Z – male, African-American, 1<sup>st</sup> grade, monolingual

Z was a delight. When it came to understanding the words and the meaning of *The Story of Ferdinand*, Z was also among the group of students who really “got it.” He showed dramatic improvement on the vocabulary portions of the survey: on April 18 he answered two questions correctly; on May 30 he answered seven questions correctly. This put him in the top 10% of students who showed the most improvement on vocabulary. His answers to the free choice questions, however, were right on target from the very beginning. For example, the answer he gave to the question, “What is *The Story of Ferdinand* about?” on the first survey was the most complex of any of his classmates: “It’s about this bull who doesn’t like to fight or be mean to anybody else. He just likes to sit under a tree and smell the flowers.” The answers he gave to the question, “What is a story?” reflect the deepening awareness of multiple modes of storytelling that was typical among the *Cool Classics* participants: on April 18 Z wrote: “It’s something that somebody reads to you.” On May 30 he wrote that a story is “...a book, play, or movie.”

Z missed 3 classes early in the program, but he was an active and insightful participant in the class discussions that he did attend. On May 10, during the discussion of the meaning of vocabulary words, he suggested that a mood was “something that you feel inside but you can’t really speak out.” When it came time for students to offer example sentences using the vocabulary words, Z tapped into his own experience to come up with his sentence: “My play of *Peter Pan* was a narrative.” On May 23 he demonstrated his sensitivity and ability to identify with others – one of his teachers no less – during a discussion of “being different.” Ms. Upchurch had shared her story of leaving Poland to come to the U.S. at the age of 20 and how that was difficult at first. Z then asked: “Why did you leave your mother and father?”

Z said that his favorite part of the book was where Ferdinand sat on the bumblebee. When asked about what he liked best about the *Cool Classics* program, he said: “when we do activities.” Following up, Ms. Tapp him what his favorite activities were and Z said: “Yesterday I like [the] activity when I made the sword for the – for the – matador – not the matador –” (Ms. Tapp then offered: “picador?”) Z: “Yeah.” For the final performance, Z ended up playing the role of Ferdinand when he got stung by the bee.

#### 10. AA – male, African-American, 1<sup>st</sup> grade, bilingual

On the vocabulary portion of the surveys, AA doubled his number of correct answers: on April 18 he answered 3 of 8 questions correctly and on May 30, he answered 6 questions correctly. The answers he gave to the free-choice questions demonstrated an increased understanding as well. On April 18, in response to the question, “What is a story?” AA wrote: “a story is a book.” At the end of the Cool Classics program, in response to the same question, he cited three different means through which a story could be conveyed: “A fairytale, a movie, a play.” The answers AA gave to the question, “What is The Story of Ferdinand about?” reflected a similar progression. On April 18, he wrote: “It’s about a bull. He likes to smell flowers. Some people have funny hats. They want to have a bullfight.” Seven weeks later, rather than recounting non-central aspects of the story, AA’s answer got at the heart of the meaning of The Story of Ferdinand: “Ferdinand doesn’t want to fight with the other bulls.”

AA was one of the hardest children to keep on task and required almost constant supervision. As a result, he didn’t participate in the discussions to the same degree as the other students. On a few occasions, though, he was able to contribute. For example, on April 20, it was AA who offered a concrete suggestion regarding the way to find the word ‘story’ in the dictionary: “Find ST.” On May 2, during the discussion on how one should behave in a library (this was right before the class left for their field trip to the library), AA said: “Be quiet and you have to put the book where you put it.”

AA’s favorite part of the book was “[w]hen the bulls stuck their horns and jumped and crashed.” Although AA had some issues with paying attention, he (unlike most of the other children) was successful in memorizing his line for the final performance. As a result, he earned the opportunity to play a bigger role in the play: head Picadore. He also played the roles of one of the bulls (in the scene where the other bulls butted their heads with one another) and one of the Ferdinands in the Ferdinand line-up (showing how Ferdinand grew and grew).

#### 11. DD – male, Caucasian, 1<sup>st</sup> grade, monolingual

DD had been labeled as “gifted” at Disney and was one of the strongest students in the Cool Classics group. He was one of only three students who scored perfect 8’s on the vocabulary portions of both surveys. The answers he gave to the free-choice questions reflected the pattern of deepened understanding of the meaning of the story that was typical of the students. In response to the question, “What is The Story of Ferdinand about?”, On April 18 DD wrote only: “A bull.” On May 30, he wrote: “A bull who doesn’t want to fight.” Similarly, in response to the question, “What did you learn from The Story of Ferdinand?”, on the first survey, DD gave a characterization of Ferdinand: “He’s a nice bull.” Seven weeks later, in response to the same question, he demonstrated the ability to apply the story to his own life: “You can be different.”

The kinds of contributions that he made to the class discussions were consistently right on target and were usually very insightful. On April 20, in response to a question on the meaning of the word ‘mood’, DD said: “The thing that the person who wrote the book wants to make when you read the book, what you feel by it.” During the press conference on April 27, DD posed the follow-up question: “What did Ferdinand do when he got home?” Mara Tapp noted in her log for May 16: “In our discussion about our field trip, I reminded the children that we were going to look for Ferdinand’s relatives and when I asked what relatives were I got some wild answers before we got on the right track. The most amazing correct answer came from [DD] who said relatives were ancestors but, when pressed, wasn’t sure what ancestors were.” In the final performance DD played the roles of Ferdinand refusing to fight at the bullfight and back home again, as well as one of the Five Men in Very Funny Hats. When one of his roles ended up getting switched, DD was a good sport about it.

During his interview, in response to the question: “Which version of the story did you like best?” DD said: “The one we did.” When asked why he liked that one best, he observed: “Because it was kind of like realistic a little bit.” DD was also one of the children who successfully learned his line for the play. Ms. Tapp noted that he had learned his role in one day and asked: “How did you do that?” DD replied with charming concreteness: “I just kept practicing, because we have a little curtain that for my playroom – from my playroom to the living room, and I went from the playroom to tippy toe out into the living room, then I sat down on the couch.”

## 12. EE – female, Asian, Kindergarten, exposed to foreign language

EE thrived in the Cool Classics program. Of all the children, she demonstrated the most dramatic improvement on the vocabulary component of the surveys: On April 18 she did not answer a single question correctly; on May 30 she answered 7 questions correctly. Her answers to the question, “What is The Story of Ferdinand about?” reflected the typical pattern of growth. On April 18 she wrote: “A bull.” On May 30, her answer communicated a deeper understanding of one of the main points of the story: “A bull that didn’t want to fight.”

During the class discussions, EE was an active participant. On the very first day of the program, Mara Tapp noted in her log that, “After some back-and-forth about what ‘understanding’ means, [EE] said it meant that Ferdinand’s mother knew what he was feeling. On April 26, Tapp again noted: “In a discussion of the moods that the story invoked, the best answers came from kindergartners [F], who said that an emotion that Ferdinand felt while being taken in the cart to the *corrida* was “homesick” and [EE], who said “a story could make you feel happy and sad.” The question that EE posed at the press conference the next day was one of the biggest hits. Tapp’s log reads: “We finished with the press conference with the kids speaking their questions into a microphone one at a time. [EE] was first and her question – “I want to know where’s Ferdinand’s Father? Where’s your Dad?” – brought the house down.” On May 18, during a discussion about people who look different, EE observed: “If it’s your

mom and she looks different and acts different, you should not run away.” It’s probably worth noting that this is especially salient for EE, as she was born in China and adopted by Caucasian parents.

The picture that EE drew of her favorite part of the book was “when Ferdinand sits under the cork tree.” When asked what she thought was most fun about Cool Classics, EE said: “Everything.” In the final performance she played one of the Ferdinand roles and a Banderillero. The surveys that parents/guardians completed were anonymous, but EE’s mother identified herself by writing: “This program was the best and most educationally effective aspect of the school year for [EE]. She needed a challenging class and you gave her that opportunity. Thank you!”

#### IV. Summing up

This closer look at 12 children’s experiences in Cool Classics suggests that one of the benefits of the program is that it offers something to children at many different stages of development. It is exciting to see how “gifted” students and struggling readers alike participated in the different discussions and that, overall, their answers to the second set of survey questions reflected a deeper understanding of the meaning(s) of the story. As I noted above, the children’s answers on the second survey to the question “What did you learn from The Story of Ferdinand?” revealed that twice as many of them (16 vs. 8 on the first survey) made an explicit connection between their own lives and what happened in the story. This seems to be a very valuable finding and one that should be emphasized: with time and with different methods of engaging with the story, it appears that more students gain the ability to draw personal meaning from classic literature.

A number of the children cited the arts component as one of their favorite aspects of the Cool Classics program. In a way, it appears that art-based activities might function as a form of leveling – by providing children with creative ways of engaging with different aspects of the story, all of the children – not just the good readers – get to do the work of meaning-making.

#### V. Assessment by Adult Participants/Administrators/Parents & Guardians

As a whole, the Cool Classics program exceeded the expectations of the adults who were involved with it. Dr. Kathleen Hagstrom, the principal at the Walt Disney Magnet School, said that she would like to see the program continued. On the final survey, parents and guardians were unanimous (18 of 18) in choosing number 5, “strongly agree” in response to the statement, “*I would send my child(ren) to Cool Classics again.*” In fact, 15 of the 18 parents said that they would be willing to pay for Cool Classics (10 “strongly agreed” with the statement “*I would be willing to pay for Cool Classics*” and 5 “agreed” with this statement).

That the Cool Classics program gave children the opportunity to connect with The Story of Ferdinand in a meaningful way seems indisputable. The issue for replicating the program in other contexts seems to require an understanding of the way in which this result was achieved. Julie MacCarthy, Associate Director for Art Resources in Teaching, observed:

“The program really helped the kids understand the book they were reading... I think with Cool Classics, the kids developed a love for the story first. That was the way they got hooked, and then through all the different activities, they understood the themes in the text, and they really understood the process of literary analysis.”

One way that this was accomplished was through repetition of the story. Julie MacCarthy suggested that through the process of hearing the book on multiple occasions, the children “relived it in their minds. They lived out the story, and then through the different activities they explored components of the story, and it gave them a chance to really fantasize and take things to another level.”

We might think of the Cool Classics program as consisting of two major strands – content and packaging. While the content was focused around The Story of Ferdinand – helping the children to understand the story (both the plot and the motivations of the characters) and introducing vocabulary for literary analysis, the way in which this was done was grounded in the arts and engaged the children’s interest in many different ways. In her interview, Julie MacCarthy noted:

“The nice thing about Cool Classics is it is fun, so the kids, and the participants, really enjoyed being part of the arts. What happened in Cool Classics is the kids were exposed to various art forms, which, I think, in and of itself, is very valuable, but because there was a focus through the various art activities, the kids really understood various components of literary analysis. While the standards were not posted and talked about, I think, very subtly, the standards were addressed in a very natural way. The kids learned things – like new vocabulary words and various aspects of analyzing a story – but they never were asked to memorize anything, and it just was a very seamless kind of a thing for them.”

Thus, a multi-faceted approach like this serves a number of educational and development goals at the same time. As MacCarthy observed, this kind of approach for primary school children is relatively unique in that it doesn’t assume that children can’t grasp the complexities of a story; instead it makes this sort of higher-order literary analysis the centerpiece of the program.

The educators involved with the program were not the only ones who appreciated the way in which the Cool Classics program delivered an exciting and meaningful encounter with The

Story of Ferdinand to 31 children. The parents and guardians of the participating children also appeared quite pleased with this aspect of the program. In response to the survey question, “Please tell us what your child learned in Cool Classics”, many parents made reference to the positive reading experience which the program provided:

“To read a book very carefully, to really think about the story.”

“They learned to discuss the story, focus, Ferdinand the Bull”

“The program gave my child the opportunity to do something she has been craving to do – talk about stories and think and talk with her fellow students.”

“[EE] learned how to relate her experience to a piece of literature.”

“She learned about authors and has now developed a love for reading and likes books.”

“To get along and now she loves plays and reading.”

“He enjoyed reading, field trips, and he loves the performance.”

“My child learned to read better, he loved the field trips. He really enjoyed the Ferdinand story.”

“He started to sound out words and became very interested in reading and trying to read.”

As noted above, the way in which children encountered the deeper meaning of the story was mediated by a number of different arts-based activities. Over the course of 7 weeks (18 class sessions), they watched the classic Disney movie version of The Story of Ferdinand, they listened to a CD of *Ferdinand & Friends* by Drostan Hall and Disney’s *Farmyard Symphony*; they sang songs with Ella Jenkins; and they enjoyed a performance of the story by Drostan Hall (narrator) and the Lincoln Piano Trio. They went on field trips to the Uptown Branch of the Chicago Public Library; Powell’s Bookstore (where they each got to choose two books to take home); and the Lincoln Park Zoo. Other activities included a staged reading of Lifeline Theatre’s The Story of Ferdinand; acting exercises led by actors; a press conference in which the students got to pretend that they were reporters; Spanish dancing; making and painting papier-mache masks of bulls and creating other props for the final performance. Just as repetition of the story gave the children an opportunity to engage with the content on deeper levels, the active engagement through the arts gave children the opportunity to interact with the story in different ways. For children who are still developing reading skills, these different modes appear to have provided a way for all children – strong and weak readers alike – to connect in a personal way with the meaning of the story.

As was noted earlier, the group of participating children was diverse in many respects. The decision to reflect the diversity of the Disney Magnet School in the selection of Cool Classics participants was deliberate, as was the decision to mix grade levels. Mara Tapp believes that the content and activities of the program would benefit all of the children, regardless of the stage of development of their reading skills; she felt that the pairing of relatively weak and strong readers, however, would provide a natural incentive and aid for children whose reading skills weren’t as developed as some of their classmates.

Not surprisingly, some of the children had behavior/attention issues. The arts-based Cool Classics program appeared to be effective for them, as well. Julie MacCarthy noted:

“As I watched, and as I’d come back to subsequent sessions, I was amazed at how cohesive the group became, and how even the kids who needed channeling were able to focus and get into things. Both Mara and the other adults who were involved in the program got to know each of the kids, and knew what was gonna work with each individual kid to engage them, and get them to be part of whatever the activity was.”

A similar observation came from Mara Tapp: “I have to say, even some of the most difficult [children] were doing their best work, and I was able to give one child a starring role in the show.” Here she is referring to AA, a child who consistently required adult supervision in order to keep him on task.

In addition to providing a positive experience with literature, the Cool Classics program had beneficial social consequences as well. Julie MacCarthy pointed out that the mix of different kinds of activities and the way in which the group bonded as a whole appeared to prevent the formation of cliques. Similarly, in their final interviews, several children reported that they had made new friends in the program. Both a parent-helper and Leonie Deutsch, the Early Childhood Center Director at Disney, observed (separately) that the program had had an effect on (at least) one child’s attitude toward school in general. One of the parent helpers said that his daughter, A, really enjoyed coming. “In fact, most of the time in the mornings when she’s grouchy and doesn’t feel like getting out of bed, [I’ll say:] ‘Cool Classics is today.’ ‘Oh, okay.’ That changes her mind. Right, [A]?” On the final survey, two parents made explicit note of the ways in which their children benefited from interacting with the other participants.

By virtue of being a school program which utilized the talents and energies of a number of different people in the community – older students, parents, and teachers – another benefit of the program was that it reinforced the bonds of this community. Julie MacCarthy noted that this was the first after-school program [that she has observed] that used student helpers. MacCarthy felt that this was a major plus in that it was good for big kids and small kids alike:

“With the older kids, it gave them a chance to be authority figures. The nice thing that happens when you use older kids in that role is the kids are proud of taking on something and they feel really mature. For the little kids, big kids are so cool. They want the big kids to like them. They think the big kids really know everything, and so, for them, any time one of the student helpers focused on them, it was very exciting, and it really drew the kids in.”

Similarly, Leonie Deutsch observed that the Cool Classics program provided an avenue for getting parents more involved in school activities. One parent helper revealed that he had

found the program personally valuable – in response to his experience with Cool Classics he volunteered that he had recently written a letter to a former grade school teacher who had inspired him to do better during a time when he was getting into a lot of trouble.

In addition to strengthening the school’s bonds within the community, Kathy Hagstrom pointed out that the program could also potentially serve another need that schools have – that of providing professional development for their teachers:

“Maybe what would be an interesting concept is for you to develop the program, and customize it within each school, so that when you’d go to a principal, you would say, ‘Tell me some of the talents of your staff’ and you take advantage of the staff in place. That smacks of professional development within a school in a different way.”

Such a strategy would open up opportunities for teachers; at the same time it would mean that the Cool Classics program could be replicated on a smaller budget.

At the end of the seven weeks, the children acted out the story in a final program for their families. The program took a different form than what was originally envisioned: instead of the children relaying the story by means of lines they had memorized, adults took a more active role in telling the story while the children acted out the different parts. This was viewed as a positive by educators at Disney. Julie MacCarthy observed that the program was age-appropriate in a way that typical end-of-program performances are not. She noted that during the performance the kids seemed to really be enjoying themselves; even better, it wasn’t just a show: “it was the kids reliving the story, and taking on different roles in the story.” Leonie Deutsch also appreciated the age-appropriate style of the final performance: “[it] opened everyone’s eyes to a different way of doing things.” Julie MacCarthy saw it as a major plus that the program had been designed in such a way that preparation for the final production didn’t dominate the program as a whole.

## VI. Things to think about for future Cool Classics programs

The comments that parents/guardians made about the Cool Classics program were extremely positive. The most common suggestion (made by 5 out of 18 parents) for improvement was to lengthen the program. Other individual suggestions for improvement included: improved audio system, more parent helpers, provide transportation (parents would be willing to pay for this service) and more time for the children to learn their lines for the final performance. One parent suggested that more time be allotted for the field trips; another would prefer fewer field trips. (It should be noted, however, that five parents explicitly cited the field trips as highlights of the Cool Classics program.)

At the beginning of the CC\_01 video, we observe a volunteer helping M (one of the four pre-K students) complete the intake survey. At times it appeared that M might be having difficulty remembering the four multiple choice answers that were offered for each question. (This appears to be a function of his age.) To reduce the possibility that the younger children give as an answer the choice that they remember (as opposed to the correct answer), it could be helpful for survey administrators to get a “yes” or “no” after each individual a., b., c., or d. option in the future. Perhaps starting the survey with a ‘practice’ multiple choice question would be helpful for the younger students as well.

Tapp notes in her diary that she would arrange to have more (and better) help – especially from parent volunteers – on any future trip to a bookstore and that she’d like to prepare the children more so that they are prepared to choose high quality books.

One of the exciting things about using many different arts-based activities to help children engage with a story is that, in principle, this can be done in different ways and on different sized budgets. From this point of view, replicating the Cool Classics program is entirely feasible. The issue of whether the skill set that Mara Tapp used to administer the program is replicable has arisen. I think the Cool Classics program is replicable as long as certain core criteria are met. First, it seems crucial to have the program led by someone who shares the values of the program – a love of good literature and excitement about the possibilities of helping children to connect with the different layers of the story in a meaningful way. Second, I think the two most important skills in terms of classroom administration are her ability to maintain good control and her affirming interactive style. Her technique of calmly directing antsy children to other, more supervised, locations (i.e., right next to parent or teacher helpers) seemed especially effective for this group. The positive way in which she responded to the children appeared to foster a very supportive environment for discussion. While it may be challenging, I do think it is possible to identify other teachers who are dedicated to introducing children to the power of good books and who are good classroom managers.

## VII. Miscellaneous

Earlier I quoted Julie MacCarthy’s suggestion that the children’s love for The Story of Ferdinand served to hook them into the story and provided the foundation for the work of literary analysis. It occurs to me that one of the means through which the children appear to have gotten hooked is suggested by the theme that predominated in the pictures they drew of their favorite part of the book. On the second day of the program (April 20), the children were asked to write down their favorite sentence from the story. (Help with spelling was available for those who needed it.) Of the 22 children who were videotaped with their pictures, 14 of them (64%) selected high-affect scenes as their favorites: ten children chose the scene in which Ferdinand sat on the bumblebee and four chose the scene when the matador or the picadore was angry or upset when Ferdinand wouldn’t cooperate at the

bullfight. (The remainder of the pictures break down as follows: four pictures of Ferdinand sitting under the cork tree/smelling flowers; two pictures of the other bulls butting their heads; one picture of Ferdinand going to the bullfight; and one of the lovely ladies with flowers in their hair. Depending on how we define affect, the pictures of the bulls butting their heads and Ferdinand's going to the bullfight could qualify as well.) When asked why they liked these parts, most children weren't able to go beyond the observation that they just liked them. The prevalence of the choice of scenes of heightened emotion, however, suggests that it was precisely this connection which provided the "hook" into the story. In other words, it appears that the pain of getting stung (and, perhaps, the initial understated response by Ferdinand – opening his eyes wide after getting stung by the bee) and the frustration/embarrassment of the matador/picadores when Ferdinand didn't do what they wanted him to do provided the children with very navigable channels of access to the meaning of the story. (As Mara Tapp has noted, the use of "real" emotional responses such as the ones in Ferdinand as opposed to exaggerated, sugar-coated or "politically correct" emotional responses differentiates great children's literature from mediocre children's literature.)

[Please note: The following musing is pure speculation.] As I noted on page 5, six children answered more questions correctly on the first survey than they did on the second one. In thinking about the reasons for why this might have happened, a few possibilities occur to me. The fact that five of these children were in Pre-K or Kindergarten suggests that perhaps they haven't yet learned how to take tests; or maybe their guesses on the first survey were luckier. When we look at the class discussions of the meanings of vocabulary words, we can observe that various children often produced incorrect definitions along the way to a correct one. In a supportive classroom environment like this one, however, wrong answers are not met with a bare 'No'. Children come to learn the code: if the teacher calls on another student after an answer is given, that answer probably wasn't the one she was looking for. It occurs to me that perhaps the younger children in the class haven't yet learned this code. As a result, they might not be able to distinguish a classmate's incorrect answer from her correct answer. This could potentially lead to confusion and to the replacement of correct definitions with incorrect definitions.

It struck me that the two boys who talked about learning their lines for the final program (L and DD) did so in very place-oriented terms: *where* they learned their lines seemed to be a salient part of the experience.