

Anna Fienberg's Tashi Series and The Magnificent Nose and Other Marvels.

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 **Reading Development across Linked Stories: Anna Fienberg's Tashi Series and The Magnificent Nose and Other Marvels**

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**In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:**

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# Reading Development across Linked Stories:

Anna Fienberg's *Tashi* Series and *The Magnificent Nose and Other Marvels*

Izumi Tsukioka and John Stephens <sup>1</sup>

[Figures]

A text's primary meaning and its larger significance is produced through the dialogue between the text's own discourse and a reader's prior knowledge. The author of a series of stories, either as stories within an integrated collection (such as *The Magnificent Nose and Other Marvels*) or as books published serially (as in the *Tashi* books), has the opportunity to ask a little more of her readers as they proceed through her texts. Thus textual sophistication and reader sophistication may develop in tandem. To address young readers whose prior knowledge is limited, writers may initially confront these questions: "How do children understand text?" "How can writers make their text understood by children?" In his examination of how a text and its adult readers coproduce the meaning, Peter Hunt concludes that "children are outsiders to the adult secrets of text" (222). According to Hunt:

Understanding a text requires two skills: understanding what the language signifies—what it refers to—and understanding the rules of the game—how the text works. All of these understandings depend on allusion: allusion to things, and allusion to rules. (218)

What Hunt regards as requisites for understanding a text here—"allusion to things" and "allusion to rules"—are enabled by the underlying "schemata for things" and "schemata for story."<sup>2</sup> His suggestion that "to help [children] become insiders [to the adult secrets of text] . . . we must attend not only to what they know but also to just how those meshes are made" (222), is well met by Anna Fienberg's *Tashi* books, in which Fienberg both plays with familiar schemata and creates new ones, thus providing a good example of letting children know the way texts work and enabling them to "become insiders." Fienberg not only gives **[End Page 185]** children the pleasure of reading, but also attempts to impart abstract concepts. This paper will examine how these outcomes are achieved in the *Tashi* books, and will then go on to consider how Fienberg's text conveys abstract concepts in *The Magnificent Nose*, which is written for slightly older readers than those of the *Tashi* series.

The most notable characteristic of Fienberg's texts for younger readers is the effect of schemata. Schemata are units into which "all knowledge is packaged," and they represent concepts which underlie objects, situations, events, sequences of events, actions and sequences of actions (Rumelhart 34). Cognitive research discloses that children as young as three and four already organize their knowledge and experience of the world and their understanding of typical narrative forms by means of such schemata (Stephens, "Writing" 237). In an audience's process of recognition, schemata, which are assumed to be associated with the constituents of the concept in question, are interlinked in a hierarchal way (Rumelhart 39); therefore, the function of schemata is not only to "provide the framework for and determine the nature of understanding," but also to "allow the understander to go beyond the information actually given in a situation" (Crawford and Chaffin 5). However, since a schema contains not only constant components, but also "variable" or "default" components, what should be provided by schemata is "the skeleton around which the situation is interpreted" rather than a rigid frame within which no variation is allowed (Rumelhart 34-37). Another aspect of schemata to be mentioned here is that they are "assumed to be the guiding forces behind remembering" (Rumelhart 49). Understanding of a text is, then, mediated by schemata. A reader activates particular "story-schemata" for such components as "how participants in the story interact and

what this means, how cause relates to effect, and what are desirable outcomes" (Stephens, "Gender" 17).

The *Tashi* series started with the publication of *Tashi* (1995), and, at the time this article was written, seven subsequent books had been published. Each...



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