

THE ROLE OF STORYBOOKS IN STRENGTHENING EARLY CHILDHOOD CHARACTER: AN ANALYSIS OF THE *MERAH* BOOK BY ANDREA SHARON

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Abstract. The use of storybooks in early childhood education has an important role in shaping moral understanding and strengthening character values. This study analyzes Andrea Sharon's *Merah* children's storybook, published by the Language Development and Development Agency in 2022, to explore how literary narratives can foster positive character in early childhood. The method used is qualitative descriptive with a literature review approach to examine the intrinsic elements, moral messages, and educational values contained in the story. The results of the study show that *the Merah* book contains four aspects of character formation, namely courage to face challenges, confidence in expressing abilities, creativity in facing limitations, and empathy for differences. The character of Cantika, a child who mistakenly carries crayons during the coloring competition, but still tries and doesn't give up, shows that character growth can emerge through self-acceptance and perseverance. The conclusion of this study is that storybooks such as *Merah* not only serve as a literacy development suggestion, but also an effective medium in integrating character education into early childhood learning. The results of this study confirm the importance of the role of teachers and parents in using children's storybooks as suggestions to strengthen moral and social values from an early age.

Keywords: storybook, character education, early childhood, moral values, *Merah*

INTRODUCTION

Character education in early childhood is the main foundation in shaping personality, morals, and social values in the future. Early childhood is in the "golden age" phase, which is a period in which all aspects of cognitive, social, and emotional development develop rapidly and are easily influenced by the surrounding environment, the educational process at this stage focuses not only on the academic aspect, but also on character formation (Wardani and Suryana 2021). One effective way to instill character values is through children's storybooks. Storybooks are not only a means of entertainment, but also an educational medium that can convey moral messages with simple language and attractive illustrations. Through stories, children can learn to recognize the concepts of honesty, responsibility, empathy, and courage in a concrete way. Children's stories help them understand social situations, express emotions, and learn to make moral decisions in a context that is appropriate to their experiences. (Azis and Sunardi, n.d.)

Research (Manunggal, Rusilowati, and Sunarso 2022) shows that picture storybooks based on character values are able to improve literacy skills while strengthening early childhood social-emotional behavior. Thus, storybooks have a dual function: to increase reading interest while instilling positive moral values. Children's storybooks based on local wisdom are effective in instilling values such as mutual cooperation, respect, and social responsibility. Stories that are close to children's lives make it easier for them to understand the moral meaning and emulate the positive behavior of the characters in the story. (Rohmat 2024), developing storybooks based on local wisdom as a medium to strengthen character education in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah.

According to (Jannah 2025) The results of the study show that children are more enthusiastic about understanding moral messages when they are conveyed through characters and events that are familiar to their environment. In addition, reading storybooks has been proven to foster empathy and prosocial behavior in children. (Retnowati, Salim, and Saleh 2020) states that regular reading of picture storybooks can increase attitudes of kindness (*Kindness*) and the child's concern for his friends. In the context of this study, *Merah Book* Andrea Sharon's work is an interesting example of

children's literature works that are full of character values. The character of Cantika is described as a brave, creative, and enthusiastic child despite facing limitations. Through a simple story of courage and self-acceptance, this story provides a concrete example for children to learn to face adversity with a positive attitude.

The *Merah Book* story also describes a situation close to the child's life: when Cantika mistakenly brought a crayon, she still tried to finish the drawing with enthusiasm. From these events, children can learn the meaning of perseverance and creative thinking in limitations. Values like these are important in forming resilient, confident, and unyielding characters, all of which are the foundation of future personality development. Thus, an analysis of *the Merah Book* by Andrea Sharon needs to be carried out to understand how children's storybooks can be an effective medium in forming positive characters. This study is also expected to contribute to teachers and parents in choosing and utilizing storybooks that are not only visually appealing, but also rich in educational and moral value.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative descriptive approach with a content analysis method. This method was chosen because it is suitable for analyzing children's literary works that contain moral messages and character values (Munar and Suyadi 2021). The main data in this study is the text of the *Merah Book* by Andrea Sharon published by the Language Development and Development Agency, Ministry of Education and Culture, Research and Technology. Secondary data sources include scientific articles, books, and journals relevant to character education and early childhood literacy.

The data collection technique is carried out through documentation studies by reading the text in depth and recording the parts that contain character values. The analysis is carried out through the following steps :

1. Read the text thoroughly to understand the context and moral message of the story.
2. Identify the character values that appear in dialogue, characters, and storylines.
3. Grouping values by category Character education (Abdiah 2023)
4. Interpreting the findings with the theory of early childhood character education.

This approach allows researchers to comprehensively interpret the symbolic meaning and moral messages in the story.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of an analysis of *the Merah Book* by Andrea Sharon (2022) show that children's stories can be an effective medium in shaping character values in early childhood. The analysis focused on four main aspects, namely courage to face challenges, confidence in expressing abilities, creativity in facing limitations, and empathy for differences. The analysis was carried out based on the theory of character education and the concept of early childhood literacy, where storybooks are used as a means of social-emotional learning.

The *Merah Book* story shows that simple experiences such as coloring competitions can be an effective medium for instilling moral and social values. The character of Cantika represents a brave, creative, and empathetic child, while the surrounding environment provides support for the process of character formation. The following is a description of each aspect of the analysis results.

1. Courage to Face Challenges

The character of Cantika is described as continuing the coloring competition even though she realizes that the crayons she brought are mixed in color. He did not give up, but tried to finish the

picture with the color of the crayons that were there. This attitude reflects courage to face difficult situations without shyness. According to (Astuti and Purnami 2023) Reading ANA's storybook which contains brave characters can help children develop confidence and the ability to manage emotions when facing new situations. Stories that depict simple struggles make it easier for children to understand the meaning of courage in a concrete way. (Paradilla, Sjamsir, and Putri 2023) emphasizing that the child characters in the story play a role as a model of behavior that can foster the values of resilience and responsibility. Through reflective reading and discussion after reading the *Merah Book*, guru can help children understand that courage does not mean not being afraid, but keeping trying despite facing limitations.

2. Confidence in Expressing Abilities

Research (Jannah 2025) It shows that storybooks based on character values are able to increase children's confidence because the characters in them become models of positive behavior. (Listyaningsih et al. 2024) emphasized that reading picture books in kindergarten encourages children to express ideas without fear of being wrong, thereby improving social-emotional skills.

In the context of learning, teachers can foster children's confidence by giving them the opportunity to share their work and appreciate the process, not just the final result. This strategy reinforces the moral message in *the Merah Book*, that every child has uniqueness and potential that should be appreciated.

3. Creativity in Facing Limitations

When she realized the mistake of carrying a crayon, Cantika did not stop drawing. It blends the available colors and produces an interesting piece. This action shows the ability to think creatively in the face of limitations. (Fauzi et al. 2024) mentioned that pictorial stories that contain the value of sustainability and environmental exploration can stimulate children's creativity because it invites them to find solutions from limited situations.

In the context of early childhood education, teachers can use *Merah Book stories* to encourage children to innovate with limited media, such as drawing with random colors or natural materials. Through this kind of activity, the value of children's creativity and resilience can grow naturally.

4. Empathy for differences

The final part of the story describes how Cantika's teachers and friends support her after learning that she has partial color blindness. They gave enthusiasm and appreciation for their efforts. This event taught the importance of empathy and acceptance of differences. (Rohmat 2024) Explains that folklore and children's storybooks based on local wisdom play an important role in building empathic characters because children learn to appreciate the uniqueness of other individuals. In addition, according to (Retnowati et al. 2020) argues that reading picture storybooks can increase prosocial behavior and social concern in children aged 5–6 years. Teachers can develop this value through reading activities together and role-playing based on the content of the story. Children are invited to understand what it feels like to be a Cantika, so that they learn to place themselves and appreciate friends with different abilities.

Behind the simplicity of the story, "*The Merah Book*" presents a portrait of a child who learns to understand the world through color, mistakes, and the courage to try again. The character of Cantika is a representation of children who develop through real experiences: daring to face challenges, believing in their own abilities, being creative in the midst of limitations, and showing empathy for the differences around them. Through this story, Andrea Sharon succeeds in showing how the process of forming children's characters can grow naturally in a simple context and close to daily life. Each of Cantika's actions, from the mistake of carrying a crayon to the acceptance of her work, depicts the dynamics of moral and emotional development that are relevant to the world of early childhood. This story shows that character education can not only be taught through advice or rules, but also through the aesthetic and emotional experiences gained from reading. Teachers and parents can use the "*Merah Book*" as a means of reflection to instill positive values in a fun and meaningful way. Thus, children's literary works like this not only enrich literacy skills, but also form a strong personality foundation in children from an early age.

CONCLUSION

The children's storybook *Merah Book* by Andrea Sharon is one of the effective literacy media to foster positive character values in early childhood. The story of Cantika, the main character in this story, describes how children can learn to face difficulties with courage and creativity. Even though she had problems during the coloring competition because she brought the wrong crayon, Cantika still tried to finish her drawing with the available colors. This action reflects the spirit of never giving up and the ability to think creatively in the face of limitations. In addition, Cantika's attitude of remaining confident in her work shows the importance of self-acceptance in children. Through the support of teachers and friends who understand the differences in Cantika's abilities, the value of empathy and mutual respect is also strongly highlighted. This simple story shows that character education does not always have to be delivered through advice, but can be instilled naturally through the experiences of the characters and storylines that are close to the lives of children. Thus, *the Merah Book* not only serves as an entertaining reading material, but also as a means of fun moral learning. Through reflective reading, teachers and parents can use these stories to instill courage, confidence, creativity, and empathy in children from an early age, so that they grow into resilient, independent, and sensitive individuals to others.

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