

Metaphors about the death in American children's literature: Effects and educational values

Vi Thanh Le Trinh*, Gam Pham Hong Vo, Duong Thi Thuy Nguyen, Anh Tam Tran, Thao Phuong Bui



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ABSTRACT

Metaphor is often regarded as a powerful cognitive and literary tool for articulating intricate concepts in more relatable terms. Nonetheless, there is a gap in the existing literature regarding metaphors about death in children's books, despite the broader interest in death as a theme in children's literature. Therefore, this research investigates the metaphors about the death embodied in 20th-century American children's literature. Our specific purpose is to examine the effects of metaphors about death on different elements of fiction and explore the educational values they impart to young readers. The study employs a thorough textual analysis of American children's literary works as its primary methodology, alongside the thematic analysis, analytic-synthetic approaches, and systematic methods. We investigated the metaphors about the death in six American children's fictional works published in the 20th century, namely *The Big Wave* (1948) by Pearl S. Buck, *Beat the Turtle Drum* (1968) by Constance C. Greene, *Annie and the Old One* (1971) by Miska Miles, *A Taste of Blackberries* (1973) by Doris Buchanan Smith, *Bridge to Terabithia* (1977) by Katherine Paterson, and *The Fall of Freddie the Leaf: A Story of Life for All Ages* (1982) by Leo Buscaglia. The key findings reveal that the metaphors about death contribute to clarifying and deepening characterization, as well as reflecting the stories' cultural settings within the analyzed works. The study also mentions the educational value of these metaphors, demonstrating their capacity to help young readers grapple with a challenging topic like death and construct their knowledge and worldviews. These findings underscore the power of the metaphorical language in bridging the gap between the abstract concepts and children's comprehension, offering insights into how authors can sensitively approach difficult subjects while imparting profound life lessons.

Key words: metaphor, American literature, children's literature, death

Student, Faculty of English Linguistics and Literature, University of Social Sciences and Humanities, VNUHCM, Vietnam, Student

Correspondence

Vi Thanh Le Trinh, Student, Faculty of English Linguistics and Literature, University of Social Sciences and Humanities, VNUHCM, Vietnam, Student

Email: thanhlevi.203@gmail.com

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1 INTRODUCTION

2 In the study of language and literature, metaphor is
3 recognized as a powerful device that not only en-
4 hances the clarity and expressiveness of language, but
5 also shapes our thoughts, emotions, and actions. In
6 short, metaphor is fundamental to our understanding
7 of abstract concepts¹. Because of its popularity in dif-
8 ferent discourses and its unique nature, metaphor has
9 become the subject of many studies, from its aesthetic
10 role to its cognitive linguistics aspect²⁻⁴. Works on
11 metaphor in literature have been "highly idiographic"
12 and lack "generalization about metaphor use across
13 texts, authors, periods, schools and genres" [4, p.82].
14 Although the effects of metaphors are generally un-
15 derstood, their effects on fictional elements have re-
16 ceived limited attention in previous research. As for
17 its educational values, metaphors are generally valued
18 for their ability to facilitate learning and understand-
19 ing.
20 The theme of death is prevalent across literary genres
21 and eras, yet its portrayal in children's literature re-
22 mains a complex phenomenon. With the rise of the

death awareness movement in the 1960s, American
children's literature began to pay more attention to the
theme of death, depicting strong emotions such as a
sense of despair, extreme grief, and uncertainty sur-
rounding the characters' experiences⁵. This sparked
an interest in how authors can deliver such a complex
and sensitive topic in a delicate and relatable way, par-
ticularly in the literary devices they employ, including
metaphors⁶.

This research attempts to look into the metaphors
about the death in the 20th-century American chil-
dren's literature, specifically their effects on differ-
ent elements of fiction and the potential educational
values for children readers. We argue that these
metaphors serve a dual purpose: they enhance fic-
tional elements while providing children with acces-
sible concepts to understand and cope with the ab-
stract notion of death. This study hopes to contribute
to the current body of literature about how sensi-
tive topics are addressed in children's literature and
may inform future approaches to discussing death
with young readers. Our primary research method

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45 is the textual analysis, along with thematic analysis
 46 and other common methods for interpreting litera-
 47 ture such as the analytic-synthetic method and sys-
 48 tematic method. Our subjects in this research study
 49 are limited to 6 children's books that are all fiction:
 50 The Big Wave (1948) by Pearl S. Buck, Beat the Turtle
 51 Drum (1968) by Constance C. Greene, Annie and the
 52 Old One (1971) by Miska Miles, A Taste of Blackber-
 53 ries (1973) by Doris Buchanan Smith, Bridge to Ter-
 54 abithia (1977) by Katherine Paterson, and The Fall of
 55 Freddie the Leaf: A Story of Life for All Ages (1982)
 56 by Leo Buscaglia.

57 METAPHOR - A FIGURE OF SPEECH 58 AND A REFLECTION OF COGNITIVE 59 THINKING

60 Definition of metaphor

61 Various definitions have been made regarding the na-
 62 ture of metaphors. To Knowles and Moon⁷, metaphor
 63 is “the use of language to refer to something other
 64 than what it was originally applied to, or what it ‘lit-
 65 erally’ means, to suggest some resemblance or make
 66 a connection between the two things”. Holyoak and
 67 Stamenkovic⁸ defined metaphor as the use of lan-
 68 guage to “describe one thing in terms of something
 69 else that is conceptually very different”. Perhaps the
 70 most prominent definition was by Lakoff and John-
 71 son¹ who stated that metaphor is a reflection of the
 72 conceptual system in human cognitive thinking. They
 73 highlighted that “human thought processes are largely
 74 metaphorical” [1, p.6] and proposed the conceptual
 75 metaphor theory (CMT).

76 A conceptual metaphor comprises two conceptual
 77 domains, where one target domain is understood in
 78 terms of the other source domain. The source domain
 79 is typically a familiar, concrete concept rooted in our
 80 physical experiences, while the target domain is more
 81 abstract and less familiar. The elements of the source
 82 domain are systematically mapped onto the corre-
 83 sponding elements in the target domain, facilitating
 84 a more accessible and comprehensive understanding
 85 of the abstract target concept. The three fundamen-
 86 tal types of conceptual metaphor are the orientational,
 87 ontological, and structural metaphors, distinguished
 88 by the “peculiar cognitive functions” [7, p.100] they
 89 perform. CMT challenges the previous classical ap-
 90 proach, which viewed metaphor as merely a feature
 91 of figurative language and considered it to serve pri-
 92 marily decorative functions⁹. It has significantly im-
 93 pacted metaphor studies, garnering widespread sup-
 94 port from various authors and disciplines^{3,10,11}.

Effects of metaphors on literary works

96 Metaphor is seen as “one of the most important
 97 rhetorical devices that enrich narrative discourse or
 98 literary work”¹², being a vital stylistic strategy to
 99 boost rhetorical meaning. Metaphors encourage au-
 100 thors to use stronger analogies and descriptions, not
 101 only making complex ideas vivid and lively⁹ but
 102 also leading to richer aesthetic experiences for read-
 103 ers¹³. Nevertheless, existing research on the effects
 104 of metaphor on fictional elements is limited, possibly
 105 due to the vastness and scattered focus of the topic.
 106 Some studies that do exist mostly concentrate on the
 107 characterization of characters within a particular lit-
 108 erary work^{14,15}.

109 Metaphors are also powerful communication tools,
 110 effective for both explanation and connection. They
 111 clarify complex ideas¹⁶ and tap into emotions, creat-
 112 ing a stronger bond between the speaker/writer and
 113 listener/reader^{17,18}. This emotional connection is
 114 particularly powerful in literature, where metaphors
 115 can act as a bridge between the writer's unique per-
 116 spective and the reader's understanding. While some
 117 metaphors may be new expressions of familiar con-
 118 cepts, others can be entirely new creations, offering
 119 a fresh lens through which to view the world¹⁹. In
 120 essence, metaphors bridge the gap in understanding
 121 on two levels: one for clarity and another for emo-
 122 tional connection.

Educational values of metaphors about death

125 As a fundamental cognitive tool, metaphor helps peo-
 126 ple grasp complex ideas by linking them to familiar
 127 concepts^{20,21}. This is especially useful for young read-
 128 ers whose life experiences are still limited. By offer-
 129 ing relatable visuals and representations, metaphors
 130 provide young readers with their needed “software”²²
 131 to better conceptualize profound concepts. Beyond
 132 this, metaphors can even spark creativity and criti-
 133 cal thinking by encouraging people to see things from
 134 new angles²⁰. This can be extended into educational
 135 settings, as metaphors help students understand con-
 136 cepts and acquire new ways to discuss them²³.

137 Building upon the broader educational benefits of
 138 metaphors, the death-related metaphors reveal their
 139 capacity to evoke profound philosophical reflections
 140 and discussions about mortality. Llewellyn²⁴ ar-
 141 gued that metaphors offer a way to express com-
 142 plex emotions about death using imaginative ratio-
 143 nality. Roberts²⁵ also noted that the metaphorical
 144 language suggests the philosophical and educational
 145 exploration of death, provoking profound questions
 146 about human existence, values, and knowledge.

147 **Death in children’s literature - A statement**
 148 **of research gap**

149 The presentation of death in children’s literature
 150 changed significantly in the latter half of the 20th
 151 century⁵. With World War II, children were ex-
 152 posed to the harsh realities of mortality directly and
 153 profoundly⁵. Advancements in psychology height-
 154 ened the awareness of children’s emotional lives, while
 155 American experts on grief counseling, such as Elisa-
 156 beth Kubler-Ross and Rabbi Earl Grollman, asserted
 157 the importance of discussing death through influen-
 158 tial works like Kubler-Ross’s ”On Death and Dying”
 159 (1969). Therefore, children’s books at this time be-
 160 gan to introduce diverse situations and characters re-
 161 lated to death, offering young readers the opportu-
 162 nity to explore and learn to cope with loss and grief.
 163 Death and grief were discussed as a recurrent theme
 164 in children’s realistic fiction^{26,27}, with one study in
 165 1977 identifying 111 titles addressing these topics²⁸.
 166 The treatment of death in children’s fiction showed
 167 death ceased to be depicted as a form of punishment, a
 168 warning, or a taboo subject, but rather as an inevitable
 169 part of life^{5 29,30}.

170 Research has underscored the necessity of discussing
 171 death with children and presents children’s literature
 172 as an effective means to do so^{31,32}. Previous stud-
 173 ies explored death in children’s literature in a vari-
 174 ety of ways, including its changes over time, con-
 175 nection to biological understanding, spirituality, or
 176 cultural elements expressed³³⁻³⁷. However, limited
 177 research focuses on literary devices, specifically the
 178 metaphors portraying death. Although metaphors are
 179 generally agreed to enhance the impact of language in
 180 children’s novels^{22,38}, the research on the metaphors
 181 about death in children’s literature remains scarce.
 182 Recent literature includes Prokopová’s examination,
 183 which highlights common metaphors in three chil-
 184 dren’s picture books with death as ”sleep” or a ”jour-
 185 ney”, and Grilli’s exploration of death as a metaphoric
 186 dimension in children’s literature classics^{39,40}. This
 187 is worth noticing, as the indirectness in their nature
 188 suggests metaphors about death may be an appropri-
 189 ate approach to introduce mortality to young minds.

190 Our research aims to examine the metaphors about
 191 death in American children’s literature, to better un-
 192 derstand their role within fictional narratives and
 193 their educational value for the reader. Particularly,
 194 we explore their effects on different elements of fic-
 195 tion and assess their educational value in engaging
 196 young readers with the topic of mortality. Our study
 197 focuses on the American children’s literature around
 198 the latter half of the 20th century that addresses death,

further restricted to fiction that features human mor- 199
 tality. These titles were chosen by consulting biblio- 200
 therapy sources^{41,42} and frequent citations in schol- 201
 arly discussions on death in children’s literature^{5,34,40}. 202
 While not exhaustive, this selection allows for an in- 203
 depth analysis of how authors approach this sensi- 204
 tive topic for young readers, balancing the need for 205
 a focused study with the constraints of time and re- 206
 sources. We hope this research will facilitate a deeper 207
 comprehension of metaphors in literature, while also 208
 contributing to the growing body of research in chil- 209
 dren’s literature, specifically on the portrayals of chal- 210
 lenging subjects such as death. Concurrently, the in- 211
 sights gained from this study may be of assistance 212
 to future practices in communicating with children 213
 about death through literature. 214

215 **EFFECTS OF METAPHORS ABOUT**
 216 **DEATH ON THE FICTIONAL**
 217 **ELEMENTS**

218 **Metaphors clarify and deepen characteriza-**
 219 **tion**

220 In the examined fictional works, the most promi-
 221 nent characteristics observed in the characters us-
 222 ing metaphors about death are their experienced and
 223 sympathetic nature. In *The Big Wave* by Pearl S.
 224 Buck⁴³, Kino’s father answers his son’s question about
 225 death profoundly:

226 “What is death?” Kino asked.
 227 “Death is the great gateway,” Kino’s father said. His
 228 face was not at all sad. Instead, it was quiet and happy.
 229 “The gateway—where?” Kino asked again.
 230 Kino’s father smiled. “Can you remember when you
 231 were born?... You wanted to stay just where you were
 232 in the warm, dark house of the unborn. But the time
 233 came to be born, and the gate of life opened.”
 234 “Did I know it was the gate of life?” Kino asked.
 235 “You did not know anything about it and so you were
 236 afraid of it,” his father replied.
 237 “You are only afraid because you don’t know anything
 238 about death...”
 239 [43, pp.32-33]

240 The father uses the metaphor “Death is the great gate-
 241 way” to suggest that death is a transition to another
 242 realm or existence, indicating that it is not an end but
 243 a gateway to somewhere beyond. In combination with
 244 the metaphor of “the gate of life”, he explained death
 245 as an inseparable part of life and encouraged his son
 246 to face it courageously. These metaphors reveal the fa-
 247 ther’s profound reflection on mortality and his com-
 248 passion for others. 249

249 Additionally, metaphors about death portray a char- 302
 250 acter’s emotional response to death. In Greene’s Beat 303
 251 the Turtle Drum⁴⁴, Kate and Joss were loving sisters 304
 252 until Joss died tragically. When someone who 305
 253 did not know about Joss’s unexpected death asks Kate 306
 254 about Joss’s presence, Kate initially responds “She’s 307
 255 not here” [⁴⁴, p.100]. The phrase metaphorically rep- 308
 256 resents Joss’s absence but implies it is contemporary, 309
 257 not eternal. Death is metaphorically imagined as a 310
 258 place separated from the living. Kate’s profound grief 311
 259 leads her to conceal the harsh truth, clinging to the be- 312
 260 lief that Joss is “not here” but rather somewhere else, 313
 261 expecting Joss to return. The metaphorical expres- 314
 262 sion highlights Kate’s sisterly love and her struggles 315
 263 to accept Joss’s passing. In this case, the employed 316
 264 metaphor works as a euphemism for death, comfort- 317
 265 ing Kate and helping her cope with her beloved sister’s 318
 266 tragic event more calmly. 319
 267 Metaphors also capture the characters’ shifting experi- 320
 268 ences toward death, indicating their transition into 321
 269 maturity. In *The Big Wave* by Pearl S. Buck, Jiya com- 322
 270 mented early in the story: “the sea is our enemy”. This 323
 271 implies the DEATH IS AN ADVERSARY metaphor, 324
 272 and the death is embodied by Jiya as being a powerful 325
 273 and terrible entity. This metaphor indicates a nega- 326
 274 tive perspective and avoidance of death, placing life 327
 275 and death in opposition. However, Jiya later eventu- 328
 276 ally perceives himself and death on an equal footing 329
 277 without fear: 330
 278 “I have opened my house to the ocean”, Jiya said. “If 331
 279 ever the big wave comes back, I shall be ready. I face 332
 280 it. I am not afraid.” 333
 281 [⁴³, p.57] 334
 282 The verbs “be ready” and “face” demonstrate Jiya’s 335
 283 newfound courage and acceptance of death. Death is 336
 284 no longer avoided but accepted and regarded as in- 337
 285 evitable. Regarding the storyline, at this point, Jiya 338
 286 decides to continue his family’s fishing tradition and 339
 287 live by the ocean, despite the threat of a tsunami that 340
 288 once took his family. This metaphorical expression 341
 289 captures Jiya’s transition into maturity, from fear and 342
 290 avoidance to bravery and resilience. 343
 291 Generally, metaphors about death bring readers closer 344
 292 to the characters and reveal a more profound un- 345
 293 derstanding of the literary works. Our observation 346
 294 aligns with Semino and Swindlehurst’s¹⁴ who argue 347
 295 metaphors can reflect an individual’s worldview. Dif- 348
 296 ferent metaphors reveal unique aspects of characters’ 349
 297 thoughts, beliefs, and actions. 350

298 **Metaphors reflect on the stories’ cultural**
 299 **settings**

300 Metaphors can be considered the influential language
 301 devices reflecting the cultural settings of a story. In

Miska Miles’ *Annie and the Old One*⁴⁵, the narrative 302
 revolves around a Navajo family living in the south- 303
 western United States. For the Navajo people, the 304
 earth holds the immense significance in explaining 305
 the concepts of life and death, rooted in the belief in its 306
 sacredness⁴⁶. The use of the metaphor “go to Mother 307
 Earth” to suggest death is prominent and recurring 308
 throughout the story. On one hand, this metaphor 309
 refers to the physical act of the dead body being buried 310
 in the ground; on the other hand, it carries a much 311
 deeper meaning. The metaphor conceptualizes death 312
 as a return to a primordial state. This can be further 313
 clarified by how the grandmother describes Earth as 314
 the origin and end of all life: 315

“Earth, from which good things come for the living 316
 creatures on it. Earth, to which all creatures finally 317
 go.” 318
 [⁴⁵, p.41] 319

The grandmother indicates dying through the verb 320
 “go” and the adverb “finally,” pointing out that the 321
 destination for this motion is Earth. In this way, 322
 the metaphor illustrates the Navajos’ belief that death 323
 is a spiritual reunion and reintegration with Mother 324
 Earth’s perpetual cycle of existence. Similarly, Pearl S. 325
 Buck’s *The Big Wave* is set in coastal Japan, a disaster- 326
 prone area to earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, and es- 327
 pecially, tsunamis. The novel portrays the sea as both 328
 a source of life and a potential source of deathly dan- 329
 gers, reflecting the coastal Japanese cultural view of 330
 death. In one passage, the tsunami’s attack is vividly 331
 personified with human-like qualities: 332

“In a few seconds, before their eyes, the wave had 333
 grown and come nearer and nearer, higher and 334
 higher. The air was filled with its roar and shout. It 335
 rushed over the flat still waters of the ocean and be- 336
 fore Jiya could scream again, it reached the village and 337
 covered its fathoms deep in swirling wild water, green 338
 laced with fierce white foam. The wave ran up the 339
 mountainside until the knoll where the castle stood 340
 was an island.” 341
 [⁴³, p.21-22] 342

The wave’s immense power to engulf and devastate the 343
 village is associated with the ferocious and indiscrim- 344
 inate nature of death. Through this, death is depicted 345
 as a powerful and frightening entity - a force of na- 346
 ture that must be respected and feared. This captures 347
 the coastal Japanese cultural perception of death as a 348
 powerful and unpredictable presence, as Asquith and 349
 Kalland mentioned⁴⁷. 350

Generally, the cultural settings of the novel can also 351
 be realized through metaphorical expressions just 352
 as Lakoff and Johnson¹ mentioned, metaphors are 353

354 deeply rooted in our thoughts, actions, and daily lan- 405
 355 guage. They are not merely linguistic devices but 406
 356 deeply embedded within cultural contexts. Culture 407
 357 shapes how people understand abstract ideas and 408
 358 therefore influences the conceptual metaphors em- 409
 359 ployed. 410

360 **EDUCATIONAL VALUES FROM THE** 411
 361 **METAPHORS ABOUT DEATH IN** 412
 362 **CHILDREN’S LITERATURE**

363 **Children’s ability to deal with harsh topics**

364 Most of the metaphors about death in the examined 413
 365 works explain the meaning of death in positive view- 414
 366 points, whether as a journey, a transformation, or a 415
 367 natural part of life’s cycle. These representations offer 416
 368 children a means to conceptualize and comprehend 417
 369 death without feeling overwhelmed. In one story, The 418
 370 Big Wave by Pearl S. Buck, the father character sum- 419
 371 marizes: 420

372 “Life is always stronger than death” 421
 373 [43, p.30] 422

374 The metaphor illustrates the powerful effects of life 423
 375 that extend beyond physical existence. While the fa- 424
 376 ther’s dialogue directly addresses death, the metaphor 425
 377 emphasizes the strength of life rather than solely 426
 378 dwelling on the finality of death. It shifts the attention 427
 379 toward the positive aspects of life, such as the con- 428
 380 nections, experiences, and legacies that an individual 429
 381 leaves behind. This can provide children with a sense 430
 382 of resilience and comfort, reminding them of the posi- 431
 383 tive memories and meaningful legacy their loved ones 432
 384 left. Likewise, another example can be found in Beat 433
 385 the Turtle Drum by Constance C. Greene: 434

386 “Dying was just a beginning” 435
 387 [44, p.14] 436

388 The metaphor suggests that death is a new beginning, 437
 389 implying a continuation of existence beyond death, 438
 390 whether in the form of an afterlife, a spiritual realm, 439
 391 or the memories and impact a person leaves behind. 440
 392 This perspective can provide children with a sense 441
 393 of hope and reassurance that death is not the end of 442
 394 a person’s existence. By emphasizing the potential 443
 395 for growth and new experiences beyond death, the 444
 396 metaphor can help children approach the topic with 445
 397 curiosity and a sense of possibility rather than fear. 446

398 In conclusion, metaphors can aid children with an 447
 399 optimistic perspective regarding death. Through 448
 400 metaphors, the nuanced and profound meanings of 449
 401 death can be conveyed less directly, thus mitigating 450
 402 the potential emotional distress when children en- 451
 403 gage with sensitive topics. Our findings align with 452
 404 prior research, including Nadeau⁴⁸ and Spall et al.⁴⁹, 453

which suggests that metaphors offer a less intimidat- 405
 ing means to discuss loss and propose ways of coping 406
 with it. The inclusion of metaphors, particularly in 407
 discussing challenging subjects, can be instrumental 408
 for young readers in dealing with a harsh topic like 409
 death. 410

411 **Children’s ability to self-construct their** 411
 412 **knowledge and worldview** 412

413 Metaphors about death in children’s literature can also 413
 414 serve as tools for children to actively construct their 414
 415 own understanding of this complex concept. By relat- 415
 416 ing death to familiar concepts and experiences, these 416
 417 metaphors provide children with new insights, en- 417
 418 abling them to build a more comprehensive world- 418
 419 view. One example can be found in Leo Buscaglia’s 419
 420 The Fall of Freddie the Leaf⁵⁰ which features an anal- 420
 421 ogy between death and the changing of seasons: 421

422 ”We all fear what we don’t know, Freddie. It’s natural,” 422
 423 Daniel reassured him. ”Yet, you were not afraid when 423
 424 Spring became Summer. You were not afraid when 424
 425 Summer became Fall. They were natural changes. 425
 426 Why should you be afraid of the season of death?” 426
 427 [50, p.25] 427

428 The cyclical pattern of the seasons, from spring to 428
 429 summer to autumn to winter, mirrors the natural cy- 429
 430 cle of life, where individuals are born, grow, age, and 430
 431 eventually pass away. Through the parallels between 431
 432 death and the seasons in nature, young readers can 432
 433 gain a deeper understanding of the death inevitabili- 433
 434 ty. This comparison helps them construct their new 434
 435 perception of death by recognizing the natural order 435
 436 of life. 436

437 Similarly, in A Taste of Blackberries by Doris 437
 438 Buchanan Smith⁵¹, the concept of death is also de- 438
 439 picted based on a familiar phenomenon - ripples on 439
 440 the water: 440

441 “Someone said that ripples go on forever and ever, 441
 442 even when you can’t see them anymore.” 442
 443 [51, p.45] 443

444 The phrase ”ripples go on forever and ever” (p. 45) de- 444
 445 picts the tranquil movement of water as a metaphori- 445
 446 cal expression of the continuous flow of life. Similar 446
 447 to how ripples persist indefinitely, a person’s legacy 447
 448 of impacts and essence lasts long after their physical 448
 449 presence fades. By using the familiar image of rip- 449
 450 ples to convey the idea of one’s essence transcending 450
 451 death, the metaphor encourages children to contem- 451
 452 plate the enduring influence of life even after death. 452
 453 In the same story, metaphors also provide a simpler 453
 454 and more accessible way to experience the depth of 454
 455 loss and grief. In the expression “The heaviness of 455

456 Jamie’s death was on me” [51, p.55], death is visual-
 457 ized as a burden, or a heavy thing that “I” have to bear.
 458 By associating with the familiar concept of heaviness,
 459 the metaphor encapsulates the profound guilt after a
 460 loved one’s death. Consequently, children can actively
 461 relate grief to their sensory-motor experiences, en-
 462 abling them to construct their understanding of death
 463 and its emotional impacts on individuals and commu-
 464 nities.

465 Another educational value is exposing children to dif-
 466 ferent cultural perspectives. As previously discussed,
 467 metaphors often use the significant concepts and im-
 468 ages that can reflect the cultural settings of a story. In
 469 Annie and the Old One, the metaphorical expression
 470 “Earth, to which all creatures finally go.” [45, p.41]
 471 introduces the Native American view of death as a re-
 472 turn. Similarly, in Pearl S. Buck’s The Big Wave, the
 473 metaphors about death reveal the Japanese’s respect
 474 and fear toward the sea. From these metaphors, chil-
 475 dren could gain the insights into distinctive cultural
 476 perspectives and rituals on death, eventually develop-
 477 ing their sense of cultural identity while appreciating
 478 other cultures.

479 Finally, diverse metaphors about death in children’s
 480 literature offer young readers a spectrum of perspec-
 481 tives on mortality. For example, Pearl S. Buck’s The
 482 Big Wave emphasizes death inevitability and insepar-
 483 ability with life. Miska Miles’s Annie and the Old
 484 One conceptualizes death as a return to one’s origi-
 485 nality, while Constance C. Greene’s Beat the Tur-
 486 tle Drum describes death as a permanent departure
 487 from the physical world. Such exposure fosters chil-
 488 dren’s critical thinking and supports the construction
 489 of personal philosophies regarding mortality. More-
 490 over, varied linguistic constructs surrounding death
 491 in these narratives contribute to children’s metaphori-
 492 cal competence, which, as Vosniadou⁵² posited, is in-
 493 trinsically linked to broader cognitive development.

494 **CONCLUSION**

495 Through six 20th-century American fictional works
 496 with the theme of death, this research set out to ex-
 497 plore the metaphors about death in children’s litera-
 498 ture in two aspects: their effects on the fictional ele-
 499 ments and educational values for children.

500 Regarding the first aspect, this study has found that
 501 the metaphors about death generally enhance charac-
 502 terization and reflect cultural settings within fiction.
 503 The results consolidate prior studies that metaphors
 504 can clarify and deepen characterization, while also of-
 505 fering new insights into their role in depicting the cul-
 506 tural settings of a story.

507 On the educational values, we underscore the
 508 metaphors about death in helping children navigate
 509 such harsh subjects, as well as to self-construct their
 510 knowledge and worldview. By bridging the gap be-
 511 tween abstract concepts and familiar experiences,
 512 metaphors make difficult topics like death more com-
 513 prehensible and less intimidating for young read-
 514 ers to explore. Notably, our analysis finds that the
 515 metaphors about death in children’s literature mostly
 516 emphasize the meaning and positive insights of death,
 517 fostering understanding and acceptance rather than
 518 fear.

519 Given the theoretical focus of this study, necessitated
 520 by research constraints, future research should incor-
 521 porate empirical studies with children for deeper in-
 522 sights into the educational value. Additionally, our
 523 findings note inadequate data for the effects on other
 524 elements of fiction rather than characterization and
 525 settings, suggesting further investigations for a com-
 526 prehensive insight into the metaphors about death in
 527 children’s literature.

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533 **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

534 Conceptual Metaphor Theory = CMT

535 **CONFLICT OF INTEREST**

536 The authors declare that they have no conflict of in-
 537 terest.

538 **AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION**

539 All authors contributed to the design and implemen-
 540 tation of the research and to the writing of the first
 541 manuscript draft. V.T.L.T. took the lead in revising
 542 and editing the manuscript after receiving reviewers’
 543 feedbacks. All authors reviewed and approved the fi-
 544 nal version of the manuscript.

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Ảnh dụ về cái chết trong văn học thiếu nhi Mỹ: hiệu quả và giá trị giáo dục

Trịnh Thanh Lê Vi*, Võ Phạm Hồng Gấm, Nguyễn Thị Thuỳ Dương, Trần Tâm Anh, Bùi Phương Thảo



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TÓM TẮT

Phép ẩn dụ thường được xem là phương tiện nhận thức và tu từ mạnh mẽ để diễn đạt các khái niệm phức tạp bằng cách dễ hiểu hơn. Tuy nhiên, vẫn còn khoảng trống trong các nghiên cứu hiện có về ẩn dụ về cái chết trong văn học thiếu nhi, mặc dù chủ đề cái chết nói chung đã được quan tâm rộng rãi trong bộ phận văn học này. Nghiên cứu này nhằm khảo sát các ẩn dụ về cái chết trong văn học thiếu nhi Mỹ thế kỷ 20, cụ thể là xem xét tác động của các ẩn dụ về cái chết đối với các yếu tố của tiểu thuyết và tìm hiểu giá trị giáo dục mà chúng mang lại cho độc giả trẻ. Nghiên cứu sử dụng phương pháp chính là phân tích văn bản, cùng với các phương pháp khác trong phân tích văn học như phương pháp phân tích chủ đề, phương pháp phân tích-tổng hợp và phương pháp hệ thống. Chúng tôi khảo sát các ẩn dụ về cái chết trong sáu tác phẩm văn học thiếu nhi Mỹ xuất bản trong thế kỷ 20, bao gồm: *The Big Wave* (1948) của Pearl S. Buck, *Beat the Turtle Drum* (1968) của Constance C. Greene, *Annie and the Old One* (1971) của Miska Miles, *A Taste of Blackberries* (1973) của Doris Buchanan Smith, *Bridge to Terabithia* (1977) của Katherine Paterson và *The Fall of Freddie the Leaf: A Story of Life for All Ages* (1982) của Leo Buscaglia. Kết quả nghiên cứu cho thấy các ẩn dụ về cái chết làm rõ và sâu sắc hóa đặc điểm nhân vật, đồng thời phản ánh bối cảnh văn hóa của câu chuyện trong các tác phẩm được phân tích. Nghiên cứu cũng chỉ ra giá trị giáo dục của những ẩn dụ này, như giúp độc giả trẻ hiểu biết một chủ đề nặng nề như cái chết, hay hỗ trợ trẻ em trong việc tự kiến tạo nhận thức và thế giới quan của mình. Những phát hiện này nhấn mạnh sức mạnh của ngôn ngữ ẩn dụ trong việc thu hẹp khoảng cách giữa các khái niệm trừu tượng và khả năng linh hoạt của trẻ em, cũng như cách nhà văn tiếp cận những chủ đề nặng nề một cách tinh tế mà vẫn truyền tải được những bài học sâu sắc về cuộc sống cho trẻ.

Từ khoá: ẩn dụ, văn học Mỹ, văn học thiếu nhi, cái chết

Sinh viên khoa Ngữ Văn Anh, Trường Đại học Khoa học Xã hội và Nhân văn, ĐHQG-HCM, Việt Nam

Liên hệ

Trịnh Thanh Lê Vi, Sinh viên khoa Ngữ Văn Anh, Trường Đại học Khoa học Xã hội và Nhân văn, ĐHQG-HCM, Việt Nam

Email: thanhlevi.203@gmail.com

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