

EXAMINING *THE MAGIC TREE HOUSE* SERIES FOR HISTORICAL
ACCURACY
AND EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

By

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ABSTRACT

Often teachers are faced with the challenge of teaching more content with less time and resources. The use of trade books within the content areas allows teachers to integrate multiple skills in one lesson. The *Magic Tree House* series has been popular with students and teachers on the elementary level. Using books such as these would be a good way for teachers to use their allotted time to teach all of the content that they are accountable for.

This thesis will explore the historical accuracy and educational connections within the *Magic Tree House* series by Mary Pope Osborne. The purpose of my thesis research is to determine, through the methodology of content analysis, if the facts provided within the *Magic Tree House* series are accurate enough to use as supplements within the classroom as well as what Next Generation Sunshine State Standards might be linked to particular books.

DEDICATIONS

To my husband, Stephen, who stood by me through all of the ups and downs of this process. I would have never been able to complete this project without his love and encouragement.

To my parents, Nilda and Aurelio, who taught me that hard work and dedication will always be rewarded. Without their educational values, I would not be where I am today. Their love and support means the world to me.

To my in-laws, Melody and Dudley, who supported me throughout this process and pushed me to never give up. Their love and encouragement has meant a lot to me.

And to Dr. Roberts who “tortured” me until I believed in myself.

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Chapter One: Introduction and Rationale

This thesis will explore the historical accuracy and educational connections within the *Magic Tree House* series by Mary Pope Osborne. The purpose of my thesis research is to determine, through the methodology of content analysis, if the facts provided within the *Magic Tree House* series are accurate enough to use as supplements within the classroom as well as what Next Generation Sunshine State Standards might be linked to particular books.

My ten year old nephew first introduced these books to me and he told me two important things: 1) that they were fun to read and 2) that he was learning a great deal while he was reading them. This conversation got me interested in the books and I wanted to check them out for myself. After doing some research and reading some of the *Magic Tree House* books, I became more excited about the material included within the texts. I was particularly curious about the historical accuracy of the information presented throughout the books. I also wanted to know if the information within these books could be related to the Next Generation Sunshine State Standards.

After an examination of the characteristics of historical fiction, (McElmeel, 2009; Rycik & Rosler, 2009; Turk, Klien, & Dickstein, 2007) I began my research in terms of a pilot study by reading three of the books within the series to craft a possible schema for what a content analysis might find (Busch, et al., 2005). In the same vein as Cole's *Magic School Bus* series, Mary Pope Osborne decided to create a series for second to fourth graders that provided an intriguing fantastical storyline along with elements of historical fiction. *The Magic Tree House* series by Osborne is a newer genre called "a mixed-genre" because it has characteristics of both fantasy and historical fiction (Roberts S. K., Characteristics of mixed genre, 2010). Based upon a current

search of the research literature, neither these books nor this genre appear to have been analyzed for the historical data within their content. According to an article published in *The Reading Teacher* called “The Return of Historical Fiction” (Rycik & Rosler, 2009): “Good historical fiction creates an emotional connection between children of today and their historical counterparts (Rycik & Rosler, 2009).” As I read through several of these books, I understand this quote more and more. Each book starts off with a fantastical element, the magic tree house, this helps students connect with the series and it grabs their attention even before they start reading. The historical and non-fictional elements of these books are imbedded within the storyline, so students would find these elements easy to read and understand. I believe that this is one of the reasons that this series is so popular among children, and it also provided a strong rationale for me to further investigate this current series.

Historical Fiction and Fantasy

The genre of historical fiction is difficult to clearly define because the line between history and fiction is often blurred. One definition that I have found states that “historical fiction is a book set in a specific historical time period with a plot that uses significant historical characters and dialogue but all must be accurate to the time period” (McElmeel, 2009). Another more generic definition states that historical fiction is, “a novel set among actual events or a specific period of history” (Dictionary.com's 21st Century Lexicon). According to these definitions, the *Magic Tree House* books would fit the criterion for this genre; yet this series also possesses elements of fantasy. According to an article published in *The Reading Teacher*, “modern fantasy includes a combination of motifs such as magic, use of special character types, fantastic objects, time shifts, the supernatural, imaginary worlds, and the hero’s quest” (Kurkjian, Livingston, Young, & Avi, 2006). *The Magic Tree House* series also has many of these elements.

The idea of a “mixed genre” matches this series perfectly because it includes both elements of historical fiction as well as elements of fantasy.

Background Information

The Series

Mary Pope Osborne is the author of over 80 children’s books, including her most famous series: *The Magic Tree House* series (Random House, 2009). The first book in the series, *Dinosaurs Before Dark*, was published in 1992 and her series has been very popular since then. She continues to write her famous series, extending the original series set of 28 books (*see chapter four*) to create a new series based mission, *Merlin’s Missions*. These books are more of the fantastic nature and take Jack and Annie on adventures along with the help of two magicians. Her most recent book, *A Crazy Day With Cobras* number 45, will be published in January of 2011 (Random House, 2009). Osborne came up with her idea for the magic tree house while on a walk with her husband in Pennsylvania where they have a cabin. She already knew that she wanted her series to be about children who travel to different places in time, but until she saw the tree house on their walk, she never had the right vehicle to get them there (Osborne M. P., 2003).

In each of the books within this series, the main characters are Jack and his little sister Annie. In each book, the two children, aged eight and seven, enter a magic tree house where they travel to a different time period and learn about that time period along the way. The tree house is filled with books, and all Jack and Annie have to do is wish to go wherever a particular book can take them. They also use research books to guide them through the time period and they always return wiser and more knowledgeable because of the historical data research. As readers progress through the *Magic Tree House* series, the historical data that they find is bolded within the text

and usually comes from their reading of the book in the tree house. In particular, this bolded information is the focus of my study so as to determine its historical accuracy.

Research Guides and Website

Before each book is written, Ms. Osborne spends a substantial amount of time researching the time and place of her books. Along with the fantasy/historical fiction series, Ms. Osborne, her sister, and her husband have also created “research guides” that serve as a nonfiction companion to the books in her series. For example, *Twisters and Other Terrible Storms* is a companion to *Twister on Tuesday* (Osborne & Osborne, 2003), *American Revolution* is a companion to *Revolutionary War on Wednesday* (Osborne & Boyce, 2004), and *Ancient Rome and Pompeii* is a companion to *Vacation Under the Volcano* (Osborne & Boyce, 2006). The information provided within these books is intermingled within the story as if Jack and Annie have gone back after their adventures and researched more about the topic and are providing the reader with additional information that they found at the library. These research guides offer more in-depth nonfiction information than the books in her series and can be used to guide students into their own research (Osborne M. P., 2003). In *Appendix A* I have included a list of the related research guides.

In addition to the books in the series a comprehensive website is dedicated to the series for both students and teachers to explore. This website is <http://www.randomhouse.com/teachers/magictth/index.html>. Here, one may find passports for students to use while reading the series, activities that go along with each book, as well as lesson plans, and teacher guides (Magic Tree House Classroom Club, 2010).

Summary of Chapter One

After reading many books in the series, I am convinced of the pedagogical impact of this literature; that is why my study focuses on not only their historical accuracy, but also their links with the accepted standards in the state of Florida known as Next Generation Sunshine State Standards. This thesis will explore both historical accuracy of the information provided within the text and also the connections with the Next Generation Sunshine State Standards in order to better educate teachers on the practical uses of the series within their classrooms.

The following chapters will walk you through my research, processes, and data. In Chapter Two I have provided a literature review based on series books and the genre of historical fiction. Chapter Three explains my methodology in completing this study. My findings, discussion, and analyses can be found in Chapter Four, and Chapter Five includes my concluding remarks, the educational implications of the study, and suggestions for further research.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Studying the genre of historical fiction through the *Magic Tree House* series is a stimulating body to research. This chapter seeks to provide information relevant to this study. The following sections provide an analysis of children's literature as related to series books, historical fiction, and the influence of children's literature.

Series Studies

Series books have been popular for many years, even as early as the 1920s (Greenlee, Monson, & Taylor, 1996). In an article published in *The Reading Teacher*, a study was conducted on the lure of series books (Greenlee, Monson, & Taylor, 1996). This study sought to explain why series books were so popular and if reading series books interfered with the "reader's appreciation of nonseries literature" (Greenlee, Monson, & Taylor, 1996, p. 218) The study involved interviews with 32 children with ages ranging from 11 to 12. The students were asked questions based on their independent reading habits, series books, and recommended nonseries books. Based on their results, one conclusion that the researchers came up with was "For many children involvement comes easily with series books, which are carefully targeted to the identified interests and dreams of a particular gender and age group." (Greenlee, Monson, & Taylor, 1996, p. 223). This study also suggested that reader appreciation for high quality literature is not affected by the popularity of series books. Another reason that the researchers believe that series books are so popular is because "they are easy to select" and available to most students (Greenlee, Monson, & Taylor, 1996, p. 221).

In a study conducted by Sherron Killingsworth Roberts (2010), the idea of role models in a popular series book are analyzed. The *Sweet Valley* series was very popular in the 1990's and this content analysis focused on two main characters within the series, Jessica and Elizabeth.

Roberts analyzed 22 books in this series focusing on internal and external locus of control, faux-maturity factors, and role models of behavior. Because of their popularity, the series could be very influential on the young girls that were reading it. Based on her study, Roberts concluded that she would not recommend these books to young girls because of the values and characteristics found within the series.

Series books provide students with the knowledge of what to expect from their reading (Lempke, 2005). They also provide a way to start and keep students reading. Many students like the predictability of the books and the connections that they are able to make. Series books also provide students an easy way to choose books about topics that interest them. Specific to historical fiction, “children seem to like the predictability of the diary format and the guarantee that a book will get them in touch with another time in this country’s history through the eyes of a person their age.” (Mitchell, 2003, p. 283). It seems that while series books may not be popular with critics, they are with students because of their connection with the books and their characters. The following section analyzes studies based on historical fiction for children.

Studies on Historical Fiction for Children

This section will focus on the genre of historical fiction as it relates to children’s literature. As stated in chapter one; historical fiction can sometimes be hard to distinguish. For the purposes of this study, historical fiction will be defined as a piece of work in which the characters and setting are authentic to a historical time period. The studies and articles analyzed in this section provide both the benefits and criticisms that have been found in respect to historical fiction for children.

Many times the teaching of history is focused on names and dates. The use of historical fiction within the classroom can be a viable resource in redefining what it means to teach and

learn history. According to an article titled, *Mingling 'Fact' with 'Fiction': Strategies for Integrating Literature into History and Social Studies Classrooms*, the authors argue “The use of fiction in history classrooms can serve as a potent vehicle through which to adhere to time constraints in addition to city and state learning standards for social studies and literacy, while simultaneously providing students with an enriching and thought provoking experience” (Turk, Klien, & Dickstein, 2007, p. 401). Another article titled, *The Return of Historical Fiction*, written by Mary Taylor Rycik and Brenda Rosler (2009, p.163) states that “Reading historical fiction provides students with a vicarious experience for places and people they could otherwise never know.” This is considered a benefit for students because it allows them to picture the time period in which they are studying. Students are able to “feel” what the character is representing. It helps students emotionally connect to the time period. Historical fiction also leads to a greater interest in the past.

While historical fiction may be a growing genre it is not always looked upon as good literature. In a study conducted by Chandra Power (2003, p. 426) she evaluates the issue of *presentism*, which she identifies as, “The imposition of a writer’s or a reader’s modern values, beliefs, or awareness onto a past era.” Her study focuses on books that have been accused of being presentist. She concludes that it is inevitable that a presentism will occur when reading historical fiction and that in order for someone to truly understand the past, they have to come to the reality that there may be beliefs, values, and awarenesses that existed in the past (Power, 2003). James Thom also addressed this concern in his book, *The Art and Craft of Writing Historical Fiction*, by stating “You must resist the propensity to see history only as you want to see it. You must look for reality beyond what you were raised to believe.” (Thom, 2010, p. 51).

Some other criticisms of historical fiction include, but are not limited to the ideas of distortion in which “only the positive qualities of a historical figure were revealed” (Mitchell, 2003, p. 275), historical perspective, and the “political correctness” of how a work is written by today’s standards. According to James Alexander Thom (2010, p.12), “Much of the history of many countries and states is based on delusion, propaganda, misinformation, and omission.” While not all critics of historical fiction agree, these overall concerns are often revisited.

The Impact of Children’s Literature on Young Readers

Children’s literature is a large part of children’s growth intellectually, developmentally, and emotionally. Children’s literature provides scenarios in which children can relate and often provides a coping mechanism for children facing various issues. Children are able to learn from characters within books that they read and often feel as if the characters within the book are “personal friends”.

Bullying is a major problem in many elementary schools. A study was conducted by Janis Entenman, Timothy Murnen, and Cindy Hedricks in 2006 based on victims and bullies in children’s literature. This study sought to find out how bullies were depicted in k-3 literature published from 1995-2003, how the scenarios related to real life scenarios, and how teachers could use literature in the classroom to address the issue of bullying. The study analyzed 25 children’s picture books that addressed bullying. The books were selected on the basis guidelines for crisis oriented children’s literature produced by Jalongo in 1983. A content analysis was conducted on each of the 25 books and a chart was created on the key components of each book. Using the matrix, the researchers were able to draw the following conclusions were made, most bullying fell into the category of teasing, name calling, and verbal intimidation. Also, they found

that the most common strategy for solving the issue of bullying was for the victim to stand up to the bully. This is one of the many issues related to children's everyday lives that are depicted within children's literature. The researcher in the current study will be using the content analysis methodology to examine this historical fiction and fantasy series known as the *Magic Tree House*.

A focus for children's literature studies today often involves a concept known as "bibliotherapy". The rationale surrounding this concept is that children can learn to cope with difficult situations through the use of children's literature. Children face many situations in their lives that can range anywhere from death to parental separation. Bibliotherapy is meant to be a means of helping students deal with life's challenges. In an article called *Bibliotherapy: Helping Children Cope with Life's Challenges* written by Michael Rozalski, Angela Stewart, and Jason Miller (2010, p.37), the authors state "Teachers can use experiences of characters in quality children's literature as a powerful tool to open dialogues with their students and help them relate the messages in the books to their own personal struggles." The purpose of this article was to educate teachers on the value of using trade books to help their students cope with difficult situations. The article provided information on selecting texts as well as preparing lesson plans in order to help students.

Another article titled: *Helping Children Cope through Literature*; written by Danielle Lowe (2009) provides a teacher's view of the impact of literature on children. Lowe describes her experiences as a classroom teacher and the impact of children's literature with her students. She states "To assist children through these difficult times, it is best to provide them with an outlet of expression" (Lowe, 2009, p. 12). She feels that "Expression through text offers readers of all ages the opportunity to find solutions through the characters within a story, and thus within

themselves” (Lowe, 2009, p. 1). This article also references the use of bibliotherapy within the classroom in order to help students deal with difficult situations. Situations that were identified within the article ranged from death or displacement from the home to violence and other stressful factors. The author does not recommend using “crisis” literature in an everyday classroom setting; however, she does believe that in certain situations students may need the help of literature.

Continuing with the idea of literature as a coping tool, an article was written by Sherron Killingsworth Roberts and Patricia A. Crawford (2008) that also focuses on children’s literature and its ability to help children cope with difficulties in their lives. According to the article, “Books addressing real-life situations are effective with a wide range of age levels because their story lines ring true and they evoke real feelings” (Roberts & Crawford, 2008, p. 13). Literature can be used in many ways. Not only can it be used to help students cope, but it also teaches values and pro-social behaviors. Rather than referring to books as “crisis literature” to be reserved, this article calls for the use of books that represent real-life situations in order to “inform, comfort, and provide models of coping strategies” (Roberts & Crawford, 2008, p. 14).

Chapter 2 Summary

To summarize, the use of historical fiction within the classroom can be a viable resource in redefining what it means to teach and learn history. Children’s literature holds many functions in relation to the impact on children. While education is a major focus of children’s literature, many other uses are often revealed. Children’s literature provides our children with models that represent values, respect, hope, community, as well as coping strategies. Children tend to choose books in which they can relate to the characters. They may learn from these characters or the characters may just provide a feeling of not being alone. Either way, Children’s literature is very

influential and good quality literature can help students grow intellectually, developmentally, and emotionally.

The following chapter describes my methodology in conducting the research for my content analysis.

Chapter Three: Methodology

This thesis will explore the historical accuracy and educational connections within the *Magic Tree House* series by Mary Pope Osborne. The purpose of my thesis research is to determine, through the methodology of content analysis, if the facts provided within the *Magic Tree House* series are accurate enough to use as supplements within the classroom as well as what Next Generation Sunshine State Standards might be linked to particular books.

After an examination of the characteristics of historical fiction (McElmeel, 2009; Rycik & Rosler, 2009; Turk, Klien, & Dickstein, 2007), I began my research in terms of a pilot study by reading three of the books within the series to craft a possible schema for what a content analysis might find (Busch, et al., 2005). In the same vein as Cole's *Magic School Bus* series, Mary Pope Osborne decided to create a series for second to fourth graders that provided an intriguing fantastical storyline along with elements of historical fiction. *The Magic Tree House* series by Osborne is a newer genre called "a mixed-genre" because it has characteristics of both fantasy and historical fiction (Roberts S. K., 2010). Based upon a current search of the research literature, neither these books nor this genre appear to have been analyzed for the historical data within their content. According to an article published in *The Reading Teacher* called "The Return of Historical Fiction" (Rycik & Rosler, 2009): "Good historical fiction creates an emotional connection between children of today and their historical counterparts" (Rycik & Rosler, 2009). As I read through several of these books, I understand this quote more and more. Each book starts off with a fantastical element, the magic tree house, this helps students connect with the series and it grabs their attention even before they start reading. The historical and non-fictional elements of these books are imbedded within the storyline, so students would find these elements easy to read and understand. I believe that this is one of the reasons that this series is so

popular among children, and it also provided a strong rationale for me to further investigate this current series.

Fact-Checking Through *World Book Encyclopedia*

In order to conduct the study of the historical accuracy of the information provided within the series, a pilot study was conducted where each historical fact was documented and a validation of each fact via *World Book Encyclopedia* was provided. My choice on using the *World Book* instead of one of the other highly recognized encyclopedias, such as Compton's or Britannica, was based on the fact that *World Book* is geared toward a young student's perspective. The rationale for this choice is that it allows for the greater ease of replication of my study so that both teachers and students might capture the historical accuracy displayed, or perhaps not displayed, within *The Magic Tree House* series or subsequent, similar series.

I have included an analysis of half of the books within the series which includes the information that I have compiled. I have read the first six books in the series, and then used a table of random numbers to randomly chose an additional 8 books, making for a total of 14 books analyzed. Of the total 28 books in the *Magic Tree House* series, I read, evaluated, and analyzed half of the books to find possible factual references and to further examine their possible relationship to the Next Generation Sunshine State Standards. I created an analysis coding sheet for each book analyzed. The analysis coding sheets include the title of the book, the date of publication, the book number within the series, a brief synopsis of the book, the page numbers in which the bolded historical facts were found, a brief annotation about the historical facts, and a check of historical facts against a trusted encyclopedia , *World Book Encyclopedia*. Although some of the items were unable to be verified, this does not mean that they are not

factual, just that they could not be verified using the *World Book Encyclopedia* as the primary source.

The collection of data sheets was created to help the researcher determine possible educational implications that might be derived from this very popular series to this generation of young readers about the past. I have also included a reference sheet which lists all 28 books in the series and the linkage to the Next Generation Sunshine State Standards so that teachers may readily see and use the connections found within the *Magic Tree House* series books that were analyzed detail by detail. After completing my research, I have concluded that this series would be considered a strong supplement to the social studies curriculum, as well as across many other curricular areas, within the classroom curriculum.

Limitations

Although I was as thorough as I possibly could have been, there are still limitations to this study. One limitation is the fact that this study only analyzed half of the books within the series. The study could have provided more accurate data if it had been conducted using all 28 books in the series. Another limitation relates to the limited access to various knowledge bases. Some of the unverifiable facts included within this study may have been verified if the researcher had used other ways of checking facts besides the *World Book Encyclopedia*. I chose only to use this method because I wanted my study to be easy for students and teachers to replicate.

In addition to the two limitations listed above, there is the limitation of not using actual social studies curriculum or text books in order to relate the books to what the students learn about in different grades. This method was not used because I felt that it would be cumbersome to search all of the kindergarten through eighth grade text books. Not all of the schools use the same text and there are too many different publishers that would have to all be verified.

The books themselves also provide some limitations. The books are written to be read by beginning readers in first to second grade. The text format is extremely juvenile and would be inappropriate for intermediate students who read on grade level. While this is a significant limitation, these books would be great classroom resources for intermediate grades with struggling readers, reluctant readers, ESOL students, and ESE students.

The limitations in regards to this study include that only half of the books were analyzed, only one primary source of verification was used, that the actual curriculum used in schools was not tied to the study, and that the books are written to be read by younger readers in the primary grades.

Chapter Three Summary

The purpose of this study is to determine, through the methodology of content analysis, if the facts provided within the *Magic Tree House* series are accurate enough to use as supplements within the classroom as well as what possible linkage their might be to the Next Generation Sunshine State Standards. This Chapter has given an overview of the methodology of this study as well as its limitations.

In the next chapter, the analysis and discussion based on my research of the *Magic Tree House* books content can be found.

Chapter Four: Findings and Discussion

This chapter focuses on the findings of the research based on the data collected. In order to review the research up to this point, I have included a brief summary of the purpose of the research as well as how the research was conducted.

Summary of Purpose and Research

The purpose of this study was to determine if the *Magic Tree House* series would be a good tool to use in the classroom with regards to the social studies curriculum. My research also provided the links that each of the books made with the Next Generation Sunshine State Standards (Florida Department of Education, 2005). The research started by way of a pilot study that included three books within the series. After reading the books and checking the facts that I found within the books against the *World Book Encyclopedia* (World Book, Inc., 2010), I realized that what I had found provided a rationale for continuing with the study. Next, a literature review was performed in order to analyze other studies based on series books, historical fiction, and the importance of children's literature. After the literature review was completed, I decided to analyze half of the books within the series in order to provide a viable selection for my research. I used the first six books within the series and a table of random numbers was used to choose the last eight that would be used. In total, 14 books from the series of 28 books were analyzed. Each was read and notes were compiled of the facts within the books; these facts were then verified using the *World Book Encyclopedia* (World Book, Inc., 2010). After verifying the information, each book was linked to the Next Generation Sunshine State Standards. Below you will find my analyses and research findings based on the data collected.

Analyses of Books

Title: *Dinosaurs Before Dark*

Date of Publication: 1992

Book Number: 1

Brief Synopsis: This book is the first of the series and introduces the reader to Jack and Annie.

While playing in the woods by their house, they find a tree house full of books. The tree house turns out to be a magic tree house and Jack and Annie are whisked back to the time of the dinosaurs. With the help of a research book that they found within the tree house, Jack and Annie learn a great deal about the time and place that they have been transported to.

Page Numbers, Annotation, and Encyclopedia Check:

Page 15: Pteranodon is a flying reptile that lived in the Cretaceous Period (Verified)

Page 25: Triceratops is a plant eating dinosaur who weighs about 12,000 pounds (Verified- can weigh up to 16,000 pounds)

Page 39: Anatosuaruses lived in colonies (Unable to verify)

Page 49: Tyrannosaurus Rex is the largest meat eating animal (Verified)

Next Generation Sunshine State Standards: SC.1.L.17.2; SC.3.L.14.1; SC.3.L.15.1; SC.4.L.17.2

Title: *The Knight at Dawn*

Date of Publication: 1993

Book Number: 2

Brief Synopsis: In this book, Jack and Annie travel to the Middle Ages. They find themselves in a Castle during a huge feast. Along the way Jack and Annie find themselves being chased by castle guards, falling into a moat, and being rescued by a knight on a horse.

Page Numbers, Annotation, and Encyclopedia Check:

Page 18: Knights wore armor; helmet could weigh up to 40 pounds (Verified)

Page 19: Drawbridge crossed moat; moat was filled with water for protection (Verified)

Page 21: Hawk House is the inner ward of the castle (Unable to verify)

Page 22: Feasts held in great hall, fanfares played to announce dishes (Unable to verify)

Page 44: Trapdoor from storeroom to precipice over moat (Unable to verify)

Next Generation Sunshine State Standards: SS.K.A.2.4; SS.6.W.1.2

Title: *Mummies in the Morning*

Date of Publication: 1993

Book Number: 3

Brief Synopsis: Jack and Annie go to ancient Egypt. They find an ancient tomb and end up meeting a dead queen. They end up helping the queen find the book of the dead so that she can pass on to the next life. While on their journey, Jack and Annie learn about mummies and hieroglyphs.

Page Numbers, Annotation, and Encyclopedia Check:

Page 12: Grand funeral procession; coffins called saracophagus; led by four oxen (Verified)

Page 17: Pyramids called houses of the dead; nearly solid stone except for burial chambers
(Verified)

Page 23: Tomb Robbers stole treasures from mummies; false passages (Unable to verify)

Page 45: Ancient Egyptians wanted the body to last forever; dried it out with salt; covered in oil;
wrapped tightly in bandages (Verified)

Next Generation Sunshine State Standards: SS.6.E.3.3; SS.6.G.1.7; SS.6.W.2.5; SS.6.W.2.6

Title: *Pirates Past Noon*

Date of Publication: 1994

Book Number: 4

Brief Synopsis: Jack and Annie find themselves on an island in the Caribbean and captured by pirates. The pirates are looking for treasure and Jack and Annie must help them read the map if they ever want to make it home safe. They also meet the owner of the tree house and find out the purpose of their journeys.

Page Numbers, Annotation, and Encyclopedia Check:

Page 16: 300 years ago Pirates raided Spanish treasure ships in Caribbean (Verified)

Page 37: Captain Kidd= Famous pirate (Verified)

Next Generation Sunshine State Standards: SS.2.G.1.4; SS.3.G.4.1; SS.3.G.4.2; SS.3.G.4.3

Title: *Night of the Ninjas*

Date of Publication: 1995

Book Number: 5

Brief Synopsis: On their journey to ancient Japan, Jack and Annie meet real ninjas and samurais. They meet the ninja master and learn the ways of the ninja warriors. They also meet up with a samurai and must use their new knowledge to save their own lives.

Page Numbers, Annotation, and Encyclopedia Check:

Page 15: Ninjas lived in Japan ; 14th and 17th centuries (unable to be verified)

Page 31: Meetings in hidden caves; ninja master= wise person with secrets of nature (Unable to be verified)

Page 45: Samurai= fierce Japanese fighters with two swords (Verified)

Next Generation Sunshine State Standards: SS.1.G.1.2; SS.2.G.1.1; SS.3.G.1.2; SS.4.G.1.4

Title: *Afternoon on the Amazon*

Date of Publication: 1995

Book Number: 6

Brief Synopsis: In this book, Jack and Annie find themselves in the Amazon Rain Forest. Along the way they find out all about the exotic and dangerous animals of the rain forest. They find themselves lost and their mouse friend must help them if they hope to return home to Pennsylvania.

Page Numbers, Annotation, and Encyclopedia Check:

Page 13: Rain forest = 3 layers: top layer (forest canopy), the understory, forest floor (Verified)

Page 19: Many animals blend in with surroundings= camouflage (Verified)

Page 21: 30 million flesh eating army ants (Verified)

Page 28: Amazon River stretches 4000 miles from Brazil to Atlantic Ocean; basin contains over half of the rain forests in the world (Verified)

Page 42: Jaguar is biggest predator in western hemisphere (Verified)

Page 47: Vampire bats live in Amazon; suck blood (Verified)

Page 61: Mango tastes like peach (Unable to Verify)

Next Generation Sunshine State Standards: SC.2.L.17.2; SC.3.L.15.1; SC.3.L.17.1; SS.K.G.3.1; SS.K.G.3.3

Title: *Lions at Lunchtime*

Date of Publication: 1998

Book Number: 11

Brief Synopsis: Jack and Annie's adventures take them to the plains of Africa. While in Africa, Jack and Annie learn that many of the animals are connected and depend on each other. They also learn about the Masai people of Africa.

Page Numbers, Annotation, and Encyclopedia Check:

Page 10: Thousands of animals migrate to Kenya in spring (Unable to be verified: many animals live in Kenya)

Page 11: Animals cross the Mara River(Unable to be verified)

Page 15: Giraffe= tallest animal; powerful kick (Verified)

Page 16: Zebras= no two patterns of stripes the same (Verified)

Page 28: Hyena= next predator after lion (Unable to be verified)

Page 42: Masai people= African tribe known for fierce fighting skills (Verified)

Page 43: Honey guide (bird) leads Masai people to beehives (Verified)

Page 58: Lions rest after eating (Verified)

Next Generation Sunshine State Standards: SC.2.L.17.2, SS.K.G.1.4, SS.K.G.1.1, SS.2.G.1.3, SS.K.G.1.2, SS.3.G.1.3, SS.K.G.1.3, SS.6.G.4.2

Title: *Vacation Under the Volcano*

Date of Publication: 1998

Book Number: 13

Brief Synopsis: In this book, Jack and Annie are sent back to ancient Pompeii in the days of the Roman Empire. Their mission is to find the ancient library and save an ancient story. On their travels, they learn about public bathtubs, gladiators, gods and goddesses, and a deadly volcano.

Page Numbers, Annotation, and Encyclopedia Check:

Page 10: Pompeii; Romans vacation there (Verified)

Page 11: Large houses called Villas on Mount Vesuvius (Verified)

Page 19: Center of Roman Town=Forum (Verified)

Page 22: Soothsayers=future tellers (Verified)

Page 23: Public Bath houses; wash, play, swim, visit (Verified)

Page 25: Believed in Gods; Temple of Jupiter (Verified)

Page 28: Gladiators= slaves, criminals forced to fight in amphitheater (Verified)

Page 40: Pens made of small reeds; scrolls of papyrus paper; ink from octopus (Verified)

Page 43: Volcano in Pompeii after 800 peaceful yrs. 8/24 A.D. 79 (Verified)

Page 46: Sundial tells time by shadows (Verified)

Page 48: Magma and Lava (Verified)

Page 49: Pumiss; no lava (Verified- Pumice)

Page 50: Town was completely burned (Verified)

Next Generation Sunshine State Standards: SC.1.E.6.1; SC.2.E.6.1; SC.4.E.5.5; SC.4.E.6.2; SC.4.E.6.4; SS.3.G.2.4; SS.6.G.1.7; SS.6.G.5.3

Title: *Hour of the Olympics*

Date of Publication: 1998

Book Number: 16

Brief Synopsis: Jack and Annie are in big trouble. They are in ancient Greece and girls are not allowed at the Olympic Games. While they are there, they learn about how the ancient Greeks lived and how different it was from today's society.

Page Numbers, Annotation, and Encyclopedia Check:

Page 12: Olympic Games began in Ancient Greece; Olympia (4 yrs) (Verified)

Page 16: Greeks first to write plays; women not allowed to act (Verified)

Page 22: Men and women lived in different parts of Greek house (Unable to verify)

Page 23: Girls not allowed to attend school (Partially verified- Some girls were allowed to attend school, though it was very few)

Page 32: Olive tree sacred; Gymnasium invented by Greeks; Crowns made from olive trees
(Verified)

Page 38: Foot races = oldest event in Olympics (Verified)

Next Generation Sunshine State Standards: PE.3.M.1.1; PE.6.R.2.3; SS.6.C.1.1; SS.6.G.1.7; SS.6.W.3.1; SS.6.W.3.2; SS.6.W.3.3; SS.6.W.3.5; SS.6.W.3.6

Title: *Tigers at Twilight*

Date of Publication: 1999

Book Number: 19

Brief Synopsis: In this book, Jack and Annie are on a mission to free a dog from a spell. This mission takes them to a forest in India. While they learn about all of the animals of the forest, Jack and Annie work to save the endangered tigers from poachers in the area.

Page Numbers, Annotation, and Encyclopedia Check:

Page 13: Monkey=Langur="having a long tail" (Unable to be verified)

Page 18: Tigers sharpen claws on tree trunks (Unable to be verified)

Page 19: Wild tiger= eats 5,000lbs a year; leave elephants alone; avoid wild dogs (Unable to be verified)

Page 25: Python= not poisonous; squeeze prey; swallow large prey (Verified)

Page 42: Rhinos not usually dangerous; do not see well (Unable to be verified)

Page 43: Indian Rhino= endangered; poachers (Verified)

Page 48: Indian tigers= endangered; extinct (Verified)

Next Generation Sunshine State Standards: SC.K.L.14.3, SC.4.L.17.4, SC.1.L.16.1, SC.5.L.15.1, SC.3.L.15.1, SC.5.L.17.1, SC.4.L.16.2

Title: *Civil War on Sunday*

Date of Publication: 2000

Book Number: 21

Brief Synopsis: In their mission to save Camelot, Jack and Annie are whisked back to the time of the American Civil War. During their journey they meet a nurse named Clara Barton and help her with the injured soldiers. While helping with the soldiers, Jack and Annie learn about Clara Barton, drummer boys, slaves, muskets, and much more.

Page Numbers, Annotation, and Encyclopedia Check:

Page 12: Civil War 1861-1865; Called “War Between the States”; Blue=North=Union; Gray=South=Confederate (Verified)

Page 13: More people died in this war than in any other war’s put together (Verified)

Page 19: Field hospitals set up near battlefield; More than 3,000 women nurses; only men were nurses before that (Partially verified; could not verify that only men were allowed to be nurses before the war)

Page 33: 1800’s-states divided over issue of slavery= led to civil war (Verified)

Page 36: Clara Barton= famous nurse; “Angel of the Battlefield” (Verified)

Page 56: Civil War= last war to use drummer boys; beats gave orders to soldiers (Unable to be verified)

Next Generation Sunshine State Standards: SS.4.A.4.2, SS.K.A.2.4, SS.5.G.1.3, SS.5.G.1.6

Title: *Revolutionary War on Wednesday*

Date of Publication: 2000

Book Number: 22

Brief Synopsis: In this book, Jack and Annie are on a mission to save Camelot. This mission takes them back to the time of the Revolutionary War. General George Washington is about to cross the Delaware River and is having doubts. Jack and Annie help to restore his confidence and save history.

Page Numbers, Annotation, and Encyclopedia Check:

Page 12: U.S. Made up of 13 colonies; Revolutionary War 1775-1782 (Dates are slightly different 1775-1783)

Page 13: British wore red uniforms; called the “redcoats” (Verified)

Page 26: 12/25/1776; Delaware River Crossing (Verified)

Page 27: 2,400 Patriots gather at Delaware River (Verified)

Page 30: George Washington’s speech; Thomas Paine (Verified)

Page 33: George Washington commander in chief; elected in 1789 1st president (Verified)

Page 46: Hessians=German Soldiers (Verified)

Next Generation Sunshine State Standards: SS.K.A.2.4; SS.1.C.3.2; SS.5.A.5.1; SS.5.A.5.2; SS.5.A.5.3; SS.5.A.5.4; SS.5.A.5.5; SS.5.A.5.6; SS.5.A.5.7; SS.5.A.5.8; SS.5.A.5.9; SS.5.A.5.10

Title: *Stage Fright on a Summer Night*

Date of Publication: 2002

Book Number: 25

Brief Synopsis: While searching for a “special magic,” Jack and Annie find themselves in Elizabethan England. Here they learn about the London Bridge and meet a famous play-write named William Shakespeare.

Page Numbers, Annotation, and Encyclopedia Check:

Page 11: 1600, London, England= Queen Elizabeth the First (Verified)

Page 12: London Bridge crossed Thames River; fell down and rebuilt (Verified)

Page 19: London Bridge led to entertainment; The Bear Garden (Unable to be verified)

Page 21: Bear Garden= animal fighting= common sport; illegal today (Unable to be verified)

Page 26: First theaters built in old England; performances during the day; everyone could go (Verified)

Page 27: Seating depended on price paid (Verified)

Page 69: William Shakespeare= 1564-1616; wrote 37 plays; poems and sonnets (Verified; wrote 38 plays)

Next Generation Sunshine State Standards: SS.K.G.3.2, SS.1.G.1.4

Title: *Thanksgiving on Thursday*

Date of Publication: 2002

Book Number: 27

Brief Synopsis: Jack and Annie travel to the time of the Pilgrims in this book. It is Thanksgiving Day and Jack and Annie learn the “real story” of Thanksgiving. Along the way they learn about the Pilgrims and meet an Indian named Squanto.

Page Numbers, Annotation, and Encyclopedia Check:

Page 9: 1620: Mayflower sailed from England to America; people wanted religious freedom; called Pilgrims (Verified)

Page 11: Landed in Massachusetts; John Smith named area Plymouth (Verified)

Page 14: Pilgrims brought animals and seeds from England; Squanto taught them how to grow corn (Verified)

Page 31: Squanto=catching eels (Verified)

Page 35: Squanto= dig for quahog clams; hard shell clams; live a long time (Unable to be verified)

Page 36: Pilgrim children worked hard (Unable to be verified)

Page 43: Pilgrims called vegetables that grow underground roots (Unable to be verified)

Page 44: Above ground vegetables called herbs (Unable to be verified)

Next Generation Sunshine State Standards: SS.K.A.2.1, SS.1.A.2.3, SS.K.A.2.2, SS.2.A.2.1, SS.K.A.2.4, SS.2.A.2.3

I have also included a reference sheet which lists all 28 books in the series and the linkage to the Next Generation Sunshine State Standards so that teachers may readily see and use the connections found within the *Magic Tree House* series books that were analyzed detail by detail. After completing my research, I have concluded that this series would be considered a strong supplement to the social studies curriculum, as well as across many other curricular areas, within the classroom curriculum. The next page includes this reference sheet.

Book Number	Title	Next Generation Sunshine State Standards
1	Dinosaurs Before Dark	SC.3.L.15.1 SC.1.L.16.1 SC.4.L.17.2 SC.3.L.14.1
2	The Knight at Dawn	SS.K.A.2.4 SS.6.W.1.2
3	Mummies in the Morning	SS.6.W.2.5 SS.6.E.3.3 SS.6.W.2.6 SS.6.G.1.7
4	Pirates Past Noon	SS.2.G.1.4 SS.3.G.4.2 SS.3.G.4.1 SS.3.G.4.3
5	Night of the Ninjas	SS.1.G.1.2 SS.3.G.1.2 SS.2.G.1.1 SS.4.G.1.4
6	Afternoon on the Amazon	SC.3.L.15.1 SS.K.G.3.1 SC.3.L.17.1 SS.K.G.3.3 SC.2.L.17.2
7	Sunset of the Sabertooth	SC.1.L.17.1 SC.2.L.17.1 SC.4.E.6.3 SS.3.A.1.1
8	Midnight on the Moon	SC.1.E.5.2 SC.4.E.5.4 SC.3.E.5.1 SC.5.E.5.2 SC.3.E.5.4 SC.5.P.13.1 SC.4.E.5.2 SC.3.P.11.2
9	Dolphins at Daybreak	SC.2.L.17.2 SS.K.G.3.2 SC.5.L.14.2 SS.1.G.1.4 SC.4.E.6.2 SS.3.G.1.3

10	Ghost Town at Sundown	SC.K.L.14.3 SC.3.L.15.1 SC.1.L.16.1 SC.4.L.16.3 SC.2.L.16.1 SS.5.A.6.2
11	Lions at Lunchtime	SC.2.L.17.2 SS.K.G.1.4 SS.K.G.1.1 SS.2.G.1.3 SS.K.G.1.2 SS.3.G.1.3 SS.K.G.1.3 SS.6.G.4.2
12	Polar Bears Past Bedtime	SC.5.E.5.3 SC.3.E.5.2 SC.1.E.5.1 SC.3.L.17.1 SC.2.L.17.1 SC.5.E.7.6 SC.2.P.13.4 SC.5.P.8.3 SC.6.E.7.6
13	Vacation Under the Volcano	SC.1.E.6.1 SC.4.E.6.2 SC.2.E.6.1 SS.3.G.2.4 SC.4.E.5.5 SS.6.G.1.7 SC.4.E.6.4 SS.6.G.5.3
14	Day of the Dragon King	SS.6.G.2.3 SS.6.W.4.1 SS.6.G.2.4 SS.6.W.4.8 SS.6.G.2.5 SS.6.W.4.9
15	Viking Ships at Sunrise	SS.K.A.2.4 SS.6.W.1.2

16	Hour of the Olympics	PE.3.M.1.1 PE.6.R.2.3 SS.6.C.1.1 SS.6.G.1.7 SS.6.W.3.1 SS.6.W.3.2 SS.6.W.3.3 SS.6.W.3.5 SS.6.W.3.6
17	Tonight on the Titanic	PE.2.C.1.4
18	Buffalo before Breakfast	SS.2.A.2.1 SS.5.A.2.2 SS.2.A.2.2 SS.5.A.6.6 SS.2.A.2.3 SS.5.G.1.3
19	Tigers at Twilight	SC.K.L.14.3 SC.4.L.17.4 SC.1.L.16.1 SC.5.L.15.1 SC.3.L.15.1 SC.5.L.17.1 SC.4.L.16.2
20	Dingoes at Dinnertime	SS.K.G.3.1 SS.6.G.5.3 SS.2.G.1.3 SS.6.G.2.2 SS.3.G.1.3
21	Civil War on Sunday	SS.4.A.4.2 SS.K.A.2.4 SS.5.G.1.3 SS.5.G.1.6
22	Revolutionary War on Wednesday	SS.5.A.5.1 through SS.5.A.5.10 SS.K.A.2.4 SS.1.C.3.2
23	Twister on Tuesday	SC.2.E.7.4 SC.5.E.7.2 SS.4.A.4.2 SS.5.A.6.3
24	Earthquake in the Early Morning	SC.5.E.7.7
25	Stage Fright on a Summer Night	SS.K.G.3.2 SS.1.G.1.4
26	Good Morning, Gorillas	SC.1.L.17.1 SS.6.G.1.3 SS.3.L.15.1

27	Thanksgiving on Thursday	SS.K.A.2.1 SS.1.A.2.3 SS.K.A.2.2 SS.2.A.2.1 SS.K.A.2.4 SS.2.A.2.3
28	High Tide in Hawaii	SS.K.A.1.1 SC.5.E.7.6 SS.3.C.3.3 SC.6.E.7.2 SS.3.G.3.1 SC.6.E.7.6

Analysis of Collected Data

Based on my research, these books would be a viable resource for teachers to use in their classrooms and for students to use independently. More than half of the information that I have collected from the books checks out against the information presented by the *World Book Encyclopedia* (World Book, Inc., 2010) on the various subjects. I collected a total of 86 facts from all of the books analyzed and I was able to verify 60 facts completely and 2 facts partially. This left only 24 facts that I was unable to verify. This however does not mean that the facts are not verifiable, just that they were not verifiable using the *World Book Encyclopedia* (World Book, Inc., 2010).

After reading half of these books, I also have a better understanding of why they have become so popular. Not only are the books geared toward the emotional side of elementary students, they are also accurate in the information that they provide. Students are able to learn about different time periods and what it was like to live during that time just by traveling along with Jack and Annie. All of the settings in the books that I have read are accurately portrayed and the information matches what has been previously published about the time period and events, including dress and cultural norms. Even the historical figures that are portrayed in the books are accurate. There are not any fake dialogues that are meant to seem historical; all of their dialogue can be verified as historical if it is relevant to the story line.

Through this research I have explored the many dimensions of this fantasy/historical fiction genre, keeping particular vigilance upon the characteristic of historical accuracy. Each book is able to maintain its historical perspective and the bias' that may be present in other books is removed by the fantasy element of the story. I was also able to match each book within the series with appropriate Next Generation Sunshine State Standards. My expectation that I would

be able to show that the *Magic Tree House* series is a good supplement to be using in classrooms was correct.

The following chapter provides concluding remarks about the study, educational implications, as well as ideas for future research.

Chapter Five: Concluding Remarks and Educational Implications

This chapter provides the reader with the educational value of the *Magic Tree House* series based on the research. I have also included a summary of the purpose for the research as well as the findings included in this paper.

Summary of Research and Findings

The purpose for examining the *Magic Tree House* series was to determine if it would be a good supplement to social studies curriculum within the classroom, as well as to link it to other content areas by exploring the Next Generation Sunshine State Standards. The research was conducted through a content analysis of half of the books within the series. The research also included a literature review of other studies based on historical fiction, children's series books, and the importance of children's literature.

After compiling the research, my conclusion was that these books would be a good resource to use in the classroom and can be used across numerous content areas.

Concluding Remarks

With the data collected in the pilot study, I noticed that the *Magic Tree House* series contained valuable and factual information. Going further, my study evaluated the content within these books in order to confirm their merit for being used within today's classrooms. I conducted this content analysis using the books themselves, the Florida Department of Education website (Florida Department of Education, 2005), as well as the *World Book Encyclopedia* (World Book, Inc., 2010). My research findings are presented in two parts which include an analysis and brief synopsis of the information gathered from the book as well as whether or not the information was able to be verified and what Next Generation Sunshine State Standards can be linked to each

book. It is my opinion, based on the research included within this study; that these books would be a great resource to use within the classroom across many content areas.

Educational Implications

I would suggest using this series as a supplement in your classroom, in addition to the regular curriculum. The books could be used as a read-aloud before a lesson, as a motivational tool, or even as a project that enhances the core curriculum. While the books are written at a second grade independent level, I believe that they would be a good resource for older struggling readers, ESOL students, ESE students, or reluctant readers. Overall, I believe that these books would be a great addition to core curriculum within the classroom.

Future Studies

After completing this study, I would recommend the following research opportunities:

1. A replication of this study using all 28 books in the series would be appropriate and valuable.
2. A study using the books within this series linking them to other state standards and/or national common core standards.
3. An analysis of teachers' uses of the books within the classroom as well as their feelings on using the books.
4. Further research on the popularity of the books based on students' opinions and thoughts.
5. A study including the use of numerous mediums to verify facts and information included within the series.
6. A study based on the research books that correlate to each of the original 28 books in the series.

APPENDIX A: RESEARCH GUIDES

Book Number	Book Title	Nonfiction Companion
1	Dinosaurs Before Dark	Dinosaurs
2	The Knight at Dawn	Knights And Castles
3	Mummies in the Morning	Mummies & Pyramids
4	Pirates Past Noon	Pirates
6	Afternoon on the Amazon	Rain Forests
7	Sunset of the Sabertooth	Sabertooths and the Ice Age
8	Midnight on the Moon	Space
9	Dolphins at Daybreak	Dolphins and Sharks
12	Polar Bears Past Bedtime	Polar Bears and the Arctic
13	Vacation Under the Volcano	Ancient Rome and Pompeii
16	Hour of the Olympics	Ancient Greece and the Olympics
17	Tonight on the Titanic	Titanic
22	Revolutionary War on Wednesday	American Revolution
23	Twister on Tuesday	Twisters and Other Terrible Storms
27	Thanksgiving on Thursday	Pilgrims
28	High Tide in Hawaii	Tsunamis and Other Natural Disasters

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