Picture this: a round, yellow bear, with Very Little Brains covers himself in mud, to look like a rain cloud of course, and uses a blue balloon, to match the sky of course, to float up to the top of a hunny tree to steal some hunny from the bees. You may recognize this picture from the story, *In which we are introduced to Winnie-the-Pooh and Some Bees and the Stories Begin*, from the book, *Winnie-the-Pooh* by A.A. Milne. Children love Winnie the Pooh stories, like the one described above. But most parents and teachers consider stories like Winnie the Pooh only useful for entertainment purposes. Reading for entertainment is a great skill for children to learn early on, because it builds in them the value of learning. Parents and teachers may choose other books for children to enjoy but still teach them something at the same time. For instance, *The Story of Snow: The Science of Winter's Wonder* by Mark Cassino. This book is written in the format of a story but is still able to teach children about the world around them, specifically the science of snow. What many parents and teachers don't realize is that *Winnie-the-Pooh* has the ability to teach children about the world around them in the same, if not better, way that *The Story of Snow* does. *Winnie-the-Pooh* falls under the genre of fiction, but more important to note is it's sub-genre of nonsense literature. It, and other books of it's kind have merit for more than their entertainment value. Although many consider nonsense literature to be purely for entertainment purposes, much nonsense literature like A.A. Milne's Winnie the Pooh stories are actually valuable to learners because they not only help children grasp the concept of language, but they teach them how to sift out the sense from the nonsense.

Nonsense literature may not be as well known a sub genre as science fiction, but

those unaware of the genre have still read nonsense stories. Some more famous stories that fall under the ‘nonsense’ category are *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* by Lewis Carroll, *The Cat in the Hat* and other stories by Dr. Seuss, and even the average nursery rhyme that every child sings or recites at a young age. Putting a well known story to the genre might lead to some information about the genre itself. As explained in Nonsense Literature for Children, “Nonsense is not the absence of sense but a clever subversion of it that heightens rather than destroys meaning. The very notion of topsy-turvy implies that there is a right side up. Essentially dyadic nonsense consists of humorous absurdities with double or split meanings of contrasts, reversals, and mirror images,” (5). Nonsense literature is commonly found in verse, but is also apparent in stories. Authors who write in the form of nonsense use a number of literary techniques to do so. Juxtaposition is a helpful tool to call attention to pairs that don’t really fit together. A narrator that only states the facts is often employed to put some realism into the nonsense. Parody is a common tool to highlight silliness. To keep the nonsense from reigning too heavily and causing the story to lose meaning, authors make use of heavy rhyme or meter or other forms of verse. They can also use alliteration and assonance for this same purpose. It is common in nonsense literature for inanimate objects to have the ability to think and feel. This is an effective tool for children, who relate with the notion of personifying objects. Nonsense is frequently found through faulty cause and effect scenarios in which the effect would clearly not result from the cause. More nonsense is found with reversals and inversions, lack of precision, simultaneity, arbitrariness and excessive repetition. Word play is commonly used in

nonsense literature in the form of puns, idioms, figurative language, portmanteau or combining two words to make one, and neologism or a newly coined word or phrase. These literary techniques are all well and good, but what do they do to help teach children about language and the world around them?

The idea that nonsense literature can help children grasp language and teach them how about words contradicts the thought of most people. Wouldn't it make more sense that words written in nonsense would make it harder for children to understand what words mean? "Intellectual development in children is heavily dependent on the acquisition through rote learning. Nonsense literature provides the inspiration to use words in an innovative way, whether in novel rhymes...or to "figure out" the verbal formula that will bring together the seemingly disparate parts of a problem," (99).
As explained by the techniques above, many forms of nonsense literature use repetition, rhyme, meter, and even made up words. Such forms of rhyming verse promote rote learning or learning through memorization and repetition. By starting out with words and rhymes that don't have a complicated meaning, children are able to play around with sounds and learn how to put words together. Kids are able to learn through experience by experimenting with words and sounds. By not having to worry about the meaning making strict sense, they can focus on the words themselves, how those words connect with seemingly random black symbols on a page, and how to decipher and use the symbols to read and write. Much nonsense literature focuses on sound over sense. It spells words phonetically instead of how they're actually spelled. It takes a liberty with words to give children the freedom to learn to use them in their own way.

Children learn sounds and speech before they learn to read. It's something they're familiar with. By taking that familiarity, authors who write in nonsense literature teach children about words and language in a way they are already comfortable with.

Nonsense literature is also a way for children to learn the real from the abstract, the actual from the imaginary, the sense from the nonsense. By being nonsensical, it helps kids see what is real and what is not. "It is the heretical mission of nonsense literature to teach the young that the world constructed by their elders is an artificial thing. Nonsense literature uses the spirit of playfulness to rearrange the familiar world. It thereby reveals that the rules we live by are not inevitable, nor do they exist on a purely objective plane and apart from human intentions," (94). Every time a nonsense story takes a step away from real and normal, a child is better able to understand what real and normal is. In the same way that a person can appreciate the light only by experiencing darkness, a child can understand the sense of the world by experiencing the nonsense. By it's very nature, nonsense gives permission to break the rules, make up things that aren't possible, spout words that don't mean anything and through that exploration, children can determine the actual from the imaginary. Children live in a very adult world full of things that they don't have the prior experience to understand. Nonsense literature puts that adult world into silly understandable concepts to help children make sense of the world they're living in. It can help them learn sarcasm and parody and what is meant to be taken literally and what is meant to be comic.

A.A. Milne makes use of many nonsense techniques in his *Winnie-the-Pooh* stories. Through these he teaches children sense and language. Take his use of rhyme

and verse for instance. *Winnie-the-Pooh* is not written entirely in verse, but it makes use of verse to help teach language skills. Winnie the Pooh is a book of stories. In the first story, the one described at the start of this paper, Pooh sings a little song while he is floating up by the bees: “How sweet to be a Cloud/Floating in the Blue!/Every little cloud/

Always sings aloud,” (20). It’s a silly rhyme to be sure and doesn’t make an overwhelming amount a sense. No one can *be* a cloud, and have you ever heard a cloud sing? But the rhyme of cloud, cloud, and aloud promotes memorization and repetition. It’s short and easy to remember. There is no music written with it in the story and yet it’s supposed to be a song. This gives the reader the freedom to concoct their own tune which will aid in memory. All of which is needed for rote learning. There are several similar songs that characters sing throughout Winnie-the-Pooh that are written in verse but Milne uses rhyme in his prose. ““That’s funny,” he thought. “I know I had a jar of honey there. A full jar, full of honey right up to the top, and it had HUNNY written on it, so that I should know it was honey. That’s very funny,”” (62). This quote from Pooh has several literary elements to distinguish it as nonsense, like the repetition, the juxtaposition of a misspelled word with the word spelled correctly and the rhyme. But let’s focus on the rhyme and repetition of honey and funny. When read aloud it almost takes on a sing-songy sound. It does the same thing that the actual song did above by encouraging rote learning.

Milne uses more than just rhyme to help teach language skills. For instance, the juxtaposition of misspelled words, with the same word spelled correctly as in the quote

above. In one sentence Milne spells honey correctly and ‘hunny’. A young child reading this can use this comparison to make sense of how words that might look like they’re spelled correctly because of how they sound are actually spelled differently. Milne does this again, often when dealing with the character, Owl. In one instance, Pooh goes to Owl to get him to write ‘A Happy Birthday’ on a honey pot for Eeyore’s birthday. Owl agrees. “So Owl wrote...and this is what he wrote: HIPY PAPY BTHUTHDTH THUTHDA BTHUTHDY,” (79). Owl’s concoction is obviously gibberish, humorous gibberish. The juxtaposition can help a child understand the humor from the reality as well as the correct use of letters from the incorrect.

One last example of Milne’s clever use of nonsense language to teach are the made-up words. “Because every Heffalump that he counted was making straight for a pot of Pooh’s honey, *and eating it all,*” (63). The picture next to this line about the Heffalump in the story is of an elephant eating Pooh’s honey. Since the illustration offers sense in the nonsense, a child reading this story can focus on the word heffalump, and play around with sounds to make sense of words in general.

Winnie-the-Pooh’s made up world in the Hundred Acre Wood, is a nonsense world that helps a child reader distinguish real from imaginary. Milne creates this nonsense world through a mixture of nonsense ramblings, faulty cause and effect, a matter of fact narrator and personification.