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Immersive Meta-Texts For Children and Their Effects“

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1. Introduction, Research Problem and Preliminary Propositions

As is known throughout literary and cultural studies, meta-texts, while by some praised for its narrative boldness, are not everyone's favourite genre, if one even chooses to acknowledge it as such. Children's literature, although highly valued due to the responsibilities it carries regarding the education of young readers, is also often seen as a step child in the academic community, frequently misjudged as simple and superficial. Meta-texts aimed at children, therefore, have always had a hard time attracting the attention of literary and cultural scholars. Seldom have meta-narratives for children, regardless of medium, been explored with the attention they deserve, hardly ever have their narrative singularities and meta-effects been analysed. Similarly, children's meta-narratives have also received next to no attention from effects research, which often analyses television and its effects on children but has never tried to explore the peculiarities that meta-stories for children might entail.

A post-modern subgenre, meta-texts, and metafiction specifically, are known for their post-structural characteristics such as self-reflexivity, acknowledging their own constructedness. Their critical outlook on themselves and the conventions that surround them has sparked discussions and disagreements, specifically in the literary community, in which some scholars reject metafiction's criticising nature, others not even viewing it as its own literary category. The study of metafiction and meta-texts becomes even more scarce when it comes to stories targeted at children. Possible reasons for this lack of interest differ from research field to research field. In literary studies, for example, the lack of trust in children's literacy and ability to grasp complex texts has led to the disregard of children's metafiction as a valuable literary source for children. Media studies, in contrast, focus on mass phenomena and pop culture, and while there are some meta-narratives that have received considerable attention, the genre is still considered to be niche entertainment (Grieve 2006, 375-376; Waugh 1984, 7).

In both cases, one should exercise caution when making such arguments. Children, while inexperienced with texts, should not be seen as a homogenous group of incompetent readers or media consumers. It may be true that appreciation of metafiction and its breaking of convention is certainly strongly linked with reading experience, but children's meta-texts often cater to children's lack of experience. As for media and effects studies, their tendency towards stories with mass appeal, while

understandable, often stands in the way of the study of unconventional narratives and their effects, and children's metafiction is a typical example here.

This discussion wants to make apparent just how exceptional meta-narratives can be, both for children but also as works of art. The two examples at hand are Lemony Snicket's *A Series of Unfortunate Events* and Disney's *The Weekenders*, whose popularity peaked at the turn of the century and that target pre-teenaged children around eleven or twelve years old. Both stories serve well as examples of experimental meta-narratives for children. Despite the fact that they differ in medium, the first being a book series and the second a cartoon, they share a characteristic that makes them stand out from other children's meta-narratives: they do not merely allude to their own constructedness but break the narrative frames even further so as to appear to be real, as will be discussed in chapters 5 and 6. This is interesting from two points of view: firstly, this is rather unheard of when it comes to meta-texts, and the examination of these examples could thus be of interest for studies of meta-texts. Additionally, the possibility of preteenagers not being able to identify fictional narratives as such could be highly interesting for effects studies too. Therefore, the examples will be investigated with the help mixing methods from different study fields. Regarding the analysis of the texts, close reading, as it is typical in literary and cultural studies, will be applied, with studies on meta-narratives and the study of formal characteristics of the respective media serving as theoretical background. After a general analysis of the texts with regard to the theory, two specific examples of each will be analysed in detail, one book of *Unfortunate Events* and one episode of *Weekenders*. Once the text-based analysis is finished, this thesis will make use of empirical research to identify possible effects created by the meta-texts, as is common in effect research. Qualitative research in form of guideline-based interviews will be conducted with pre-teenage children to examine their reactions to the two examples. In addition to this, methodology and demographic information will be evaluated too. The results will be analysed in detail to examine further the texts' formal characteristics and their effects on young audiences. So as to bring together the text analysis and the empirical evaluation, a final discussion will help determine any possible connections between the two parts.

Before delving into methodology, preliminary propositions have to be established in order to guide this examination. In qualitative studies in effects research, research

questions are not posed at the beginning of the thesis but rather formed at the end so as to guide further quantitative research. Thus, the following preliminary proposition will suffice to provide the analysis with some direction. The main focus of this examination will be to determine in what ways certain examples of children's meta-texts break conventions by trying to appear real rather than, or at least in addition to, hinting at their own constructedness. To do so, the exact narratological characteristics and narrative choices used in the two meta-texts at hand and their possible differences to other texts will be examined. With regard to the texts, the difference in behaviour between the two media at hand, television and literature, will also be investigated. Finally, in the empirical part of this thesis, it will be determined to what extent children distinguish between fantasy and reality with regard to these meta-texts.

Apart from striving for new insights into the matter of children's meta-texts, this thesis also wants to try and help bridge the gap between the social studies and the humanities, two disciplines that co-exist but do not often work together in their analyses. However, both literary and cultural studies and media and effects studies have valuable insights to offer, when it comes to the complicated narratology at hand, as well as its effects on children. Following Messenger Davies' (130-132) example, this thesis does not intend to determine the texts' educational value or judge the texts' usefulness in any way. The focus here lies on exploring the possibilities of children's meta-texts and pointing towards the power they possess, not merely regarding education, but simply in terms of stimulating fantastical worlds.

2. Children and the Distinction of Fantasy and Reality

Before focusing in detail on the works at hand, it is important to establish a theoretical basis for this investigation of not only the narratives and their characteristics but also children's ability to distinguish between reality and fantasy. Thus, the following chapters will provide insight into the general field of children's effects research as well as focus on findings regarding young media consumers and their ability to recognise reality and fiction.

2.1. Introduction and History of Children's Effects Studies

As far as effects research and children's media are concerned, children's media offerings and the resulting interest of media studies occurred relatively late in comparison to general mass media and its rise, as Critcher (2008) notes. Only in the

eighteenth century did children's literature start appearing in bookshops in Europe and the United States of America, beginning with fables and other books, which were in part enjoyable for young readers but not necessarily made for them. Towards the mid-eighteenth century, books for children were mostly intended to function as written guides, either concerned with the social values at the time or with children's education. However, more entertaining literature, containing rhymes and songs, soon followed and by the end of the eighteenth century the children's book market was flourishing, not only due to books but also periodicals for middle-class and working class children. Print media dominated society's media market for the following centuries, until the early twentieth century brought about the introduction of moving pictures. In 1915, film rose to international popularity, expanding notably after World War I. Again, the beginnings did not offer any content specifically created for children; nevertheless, film censorship was quickly introduced across countries so as to regulate film and age restriction to protect children. First film content targeted at children and their families started with the Walt Disney Studios and their animated shorts, with their first animated motion picture *Snow White* following in 1937. Radio followed soon, and in contrast to early film, it was available from the comfort of people's homes, making media consumption part of people's everyday lives. Although radio was mostly considered to be an adult medium, there have been reports about children's programmes in the USA. This, however, was not to parents' satisfaction, as children were mesmerised by the medium, and value judgments concerning media's educational influence on children were made. Despite these new forms of media, print continued to be a popular source for children's entertainment. The beginning of the twentieth century marked the introduction of comic books targeted at children, containing stories about detectives or boarding-school life, for instance. By the 1950s, the television had been introduced into American households, offering a new regular source of entertainment and education apart from the radio. At the beginning, children's programmes consisted of specific hours dedicated to content targeted at children, often containing hand puppets as main characters, such as *Children's Hour* in 1946 on the BBC. Later, more and more diverse television programmes for children followed, with the market flourishing in 1980s when not only Disney but also Hanna-Barbera and Nickelodeon Studios produced several different animated shows, the forerunners of today's cartoon series. The end of the twentieth century finally saw the introduction of video and computer games in many parts of the world, with children paying particular attention to new

technologies and learning their ways quickly. Similarly, new media today have captured children's attention, which, again, were not initially produced with children in mind but nevertheless proved to be just as accessible for young audiences (Cricher 93-99; *The British Library; Independent*).

One major issue that is noticeable throughout the history of children's media is the fact that adults have always been concerned about the media and its negative influence on children. As Springhall (qtd. in Messenger Davies 2010) notes:

“Whenever the introduction of a new mass medium is defined as a threat to the young, we can expect a campaign by adults to regulate, ban or censor, followed by a lessening of interest until the appearance of a new medium reopens public debate.”
(75)

This is still an issue today with social media and its increasing impact on young media users. As a possible reason for this, Drotner (qtd. in Cricher 92-97) states that these panics might be related to the fear of youth and its potential to shake established power structures of previous generations. Each medium has been accused of having negative effects on children in one way or another; novels already were made responsible for highly emotional reactions in young women and children. Criticism continued when film was introduced, and opponents of television and movies continued to criticise the medium's illusion of reality and its resulting influence on young minds. As for comic books and television programmes, they have received (and still do to some extent) much criticism for ruining the innocence of childhood, which in and of itself is a cultural construct and not only highly subjective but varies from culture to culture. Although constructive criticism is certainly useful when it comes to children's television, many of these claims seem to be connected to the aforementioned panics Drotner describes. There have been several theories as to how and why exactly these negative reactions by the adult public continue to arise. While these theories will not be discussed here, it is nevertheless important to note that the pejorative reactions are not necessarily exclusive to specific media nor the content of the individual programmes, but rather have to do with general sentiments by society towards media. This is not to say that stories for children should not be criticised, merely that irrational fear of a medium itself is neither necessary nor useful in an academic discussion.

Due to the public's great interest in possible negative outcomes of children's media consumption, the world of academics also took to examining the issue. With the wide-

spread introduction of the television set, the mid-twentieth century became the starting point for effects research in media studies, not just with regard to adults but also children. As for methodology, it has been believed that especially longitudinal studies of a quantitative nature would help to grasp children's media consumption, resulting in statistics about watching habits, length of television sessions, as well as interest in programmes according to different demographic backgrounds. While quantitative studies certainly have their advantages to provide representative findings regarding media consumption habits, individual media effects on children are better elicited through qualitative examinations. Therefore, this thesis will focus on qualitative analysis in the form of guideline-based interviews to develop a better understanding of possible deeper motives behind children's consumption of media and immediate effects of stories on children, in this case in the form of meta-narratives (Messenger Davies, *Handbook "Reality and Fantasy"* 71-78).

The early beginnings of the study field were marked by a growing concern regarding the negative influence of media, which often led to a strong bias among researchers. Many of the conducted studies focused only on the educational value of media offerings, dismissing or even condemning any programmes that did not fit the bill. Although changes are certainly visible in terms of research interest, value judgments still often guide children's media and effects research today. Messenger Davies, among others, finds this trend problematic: instead of studying media and their effects on children as phenomena of society, stories are always contextualised in terms of their educational purpose. Indeed, effects research is dominated by studies trying to argue for or against children's well-being when consuming media, leading to many guides and warnings as to what and how children should consume media. Although these words of warning have their *raison d'être*, the general connections between media and their effects have been vastly overlooked due to this development. In order to rectify this omission, this thesis, not least because of its literary and cultural studies background, does not want to take into account methods from effects research in order to make aware of the potential harm of stories, but rather explore their narrative possibilities and children's reaction to them (Messenger Davies, *Handbook "Reality and Fantasy"* 132-133).

2.2. Fantasy/Reality Distinction

One major issue of effects research has always been the fascination with the close-to-reality representations of audio-visual media, again due to fear of media's negative influence on children. This has led to research of children's distinction between fantasy and reality, with a special focus of children's television consumption.

Considering the public's demand to know about the possible dangers of their children's media consumption, it comes as no surprise that the scholars who study children's distinction between fantasy and reality have often looked for the harm especially in hyper-realistic depictions on television or other media. Messenger Davies (*Handbook "Reality and Fantasy"* 134) strongly criticises this over-protective stance in research, tracing it back to the beginnings of this research branch in the 1970s and 1980s, when the wish arose to teach children to learn what fiction is so as to help them protect themselves. I find this assumption problematic due to two reasons: firstly, the definition of reality and fiction can be a difficult one. On a superficial level, anyone will be able to tell that, for example, a cartoon such as *Tom and Jerry* is fictional, due to the obvious reasons that animals cannot act in such human-like ways and cartoons are animated drawings. However, reality does not merely denote physical reality, but can also include ideology and culture, and herein lies the problem with the definition of reality and fiction. A cartoon like *Tom and Jerry* might not physically be possible; what is real, however, is the difference in power and strength of different people, the oppression of one through the other. The cartoon receives further relevance considering its portrayal of black people as servants as well as its sexualisation of female characters. With these points in mind, society's worries for children and their distinction of reality and fantasy become less about their ability to interpret media and more about children's succumbing to society's morals, their acceptance of their current ideology as ultimate truth, as Messenger Davies also argues. Identifying reality is subjective, and subscribing to society's concept of orderly reality while neglecting fantasy could easily lead to ideological stagnation (*Handbook "Reality and Fantasy"* 134).

The other problem present here is that the disregard of fantasy does not only bring up problematic ideological questions, but might also result in underappreciating the importance of fantasy when it comes to the individual development of children. Fantasising as a practice is nevertheless vital to humans, developmental psychology

argues, so as to learn second-order thinking. Recognising other people's points of view can only become possible through fantasising, by trying to put oneself in other people's shoes. In addition, "the social, cultural and political skill of second-, third- and fourth-order thinking" are trained too, helping children become aware of ideological alternatives to the one they get to know as the ultimate truth, as is so vital in the discussion of fantasy and reality distinction. Storytelling and story consumption are dependent on the act of fantasising: imagining other people's emotional, ideological and physical selves and perhaps even questioning them is vital when consuming and constructing narratives. (Barret as qtd. in Messenger Davies, *Handbook "Reality and Fantasy"* 124).

The question that arises with regard to the study of the texts at hand here is in what ways the fantasy and ideology are connected to meta-texts. If fantasy, and thus stories, can be a type playground for self-finding and ideological alternatives for children, one has to wonder how children's exploration of ideology might change when reading meta-texts. This issue becomes even more interesting with meta-texts like the two examples at hand, which potentially have their consumers believe they are real. If children indeed believe such immersive meta-narratives to be real, this might not only be true for the stories' physical aspects but also their ideological layers. It seems possible that children could trust values portrayed in narratives more easily if they believe their physical contents are real. The likelihood of a connection between meta-texts and their influence on children's thought processes will be analysed more deeply in the course of the thesis.

Having dealt with the definition of reality, as well as the importance of fantasy and society's stance on it, it is now important to move on to ways in which children identify narratives as fantasy or reality. In general, when approaching children and their ability to distinguish between reality and fantasy, the first issue to address is not their media interpretation but rather their assessment of 'real' fantasies. Make-believe and magical realism play important parts in a Western child's world, with roleplay as the go-to game of many children as well as their belief in magical entities, such as Father Christmas or the Tooth Fairy. To say that children merely see them as realistic does not suffice, however. So as to understand their extraordinariness in the first place, children have to know what makes these creatures special, that they make things happen that could normally not be possible. In order to analyse children's assessments in this regard,

Sharon and Woolley (2004), for instance, asked children around the age of five to place images of different creatures into different categories. Instead of merely dividing between 'real' and 'fantasy', they also added a 'not sure' category to find possible points of confusion regarding the children's evaluations. Interestingly, Sharon and Wooley also added property attributions, such as social or physical features, which gives insight into the children's subjective understanding of creatures like the Tooth Fairy and shows possible ideological influence on their fantasy. In addition, adults were also asked to answer the same questions so as to compare across generations. The results suggested that, while many children around the age of three to five did not know creatures like Santa Claus or the Easter Bunny were not real, they did list the same attributes as adults did. This shows the willingness of younger children to believe in what is extraordinary, or even magical, while ideological parts of these fantasies are harder to shake throughout life. What is more, although this was not the original aim of the study, this suggests that children's ideological categorisation of such creatures, such as the masculine Santa Claus or the sweet fairy, stay the same way into adulthood, despite their being able to tell reality from fantasy. It will be interesting to see to what extent the children in this study do so, especially considering their older age (Messenger Davies, *Handbook "Reality and Fantasy"* 127-128; Sharon and Wooley 293-310).

Other than this examination, empirical studies so far have mostly concentrated on children's understanding of narratives and their physical reality, although cultural and ideological influences on their physical understanding have also been taken into account. To return to the distinction of fiction and reality in media, in her study for the BBC, Messenger Davies, for instance, talked to children from different Anglophone areas concerning the realness of an existing castle that was part of a TV series. The majority of children from Great Britain answered that the castle was real, whereas children from the United States of America tended to claim it was fake. Messenger Davies connects the difference to the children's different cultural and geographic backgrounds, as British children, more used to castles in their environment, were more familiar with real-life castles than US-American ones. In order to analyse these cultural differences but also the children's general assessment of the reality of the shows they were shown, categories were established. The children's doubts of the castle's realness, among others, were put into four categories, "special effects",

“literary/theatrical”, “impossibility (object behaviour)” and “impossibility (human behaviour)”. So as to interpret the children’s ability to distinguish between reality and fantasy, Messenger Davies then organised their reactions according to these different formal features relating to the clips they were shown and tried to find similarities regarding these characteristics. Generally, however, texts and their formalities have mostly been ignored in media studies. This disregard of texts and their characteristics in effects research has been criticised by Potter (1988): he claims that in order to understand children’s distinction of fantasy and reality, not only do their motives and cultural backgrounds have to be taken into account, but also the text and its formal features, its cues, as he calls them. He lists the following levels that should be considered when approaching people’s media consumption and the role of fantasy and reality: their experience with media, their ability to read formal features of different media and the many formal features themselves, the latter having been “virtually (..) ignored”, as he claims (Potter 38). Indeed, the crucial role played by texts and their cues play with regard to children’s understanding of fantasy on TV should not be underestimated. As was clear to see in Messenger Davies’ example above, the castle was interpreted by some children as a kind of special effect, by others as completely normal. This makes it clear that children’s ability to read such cues is of essence when they differentiate between physical reality and fantasy. This idea will be influential in this discussion, in which textual features will also be essential for the analysis of the texts (Messenger Davies, *Handbook* “Reality and Fantasy” 129-130; Potter 23-41).

What Potter describes here, essentially, is people’s media literacy as a crucial factor of distinction between fantasy and reality when it comes to media. Similar to fantasy/reality distinction above, media literacy holds in store a complex ideological layer. Messenger Davies (*Fake* 37) describes media literacy as the “recognition of [children’s] embodied reality in the form of institutions, codes, styles and products”. All these entities are products and conventions of society and culture, and thus, of ideology. Apart from that, Messenger Davies also pronounces the importance of adults in children’s development of media literacy. Although media experience does account for children’s growing used to codes and formalities, the initial learning process is dependent on another, more knowledgeable human and their guidance. Media cannot fully give feedback, answer questions or further explain its own characteristics. An adult is needed to teach the child about media and their symbolic language of content

presentation. This is difficult in and of itself, as this way, children already receive a limited point of view on media, guided by a small group of adults with formed value systems. Still, the combination of media literacy and the conventional use of signs by the content should provide media consumers of all ages basic tools to distinguish between reality and fantasy in media, at least in terms of physical reality. Depending on their age, their environment's use of media, and their access to media, children might then be either close to adult levels of media literacy or still be confused when having to interpret media content (Messenger Davies, *Handbook "Reality and Fantasy"* 122).

Although children's literacy has generally been widely examined, one issue that is unaddressed is children's reaction to narratives that contain unconventional formal features, even if children they are advanced in media literacy. Keeping the focus of this thesis in mind, the question resulting from this is in what ways are meta-texts affected by these insights. Meta-texts are known to break convention in order to make aware of their constructedness, and readers' media literacy and their ability to recognise media conventions is actively targeted by narratives to create a meta-effect while reading. Considering the examples at hand, which features, then, have to be present, absent or changed in order for meta-narratives to make its content appear real – or, in other words: how can the convention breaker's conventions be broken? Which formal conventions need to be broken to create this reality illusion?

In order to answer these questions and identify these characteristics, a theoretical framework has to be established, and while literary and cultural studies will prove most useful in doing so, it is important to keep in mind the insights of effects research. When it comes to this thesis, one obvious issue is the cross-media approach to immersive children's meta-texts, and the examination of both literature and a cartoon. A strong difference between written text and audio-visual text is the fact that while written text only consists of arbitrary signs representing something else, television representation can, in contrast, be absolutely exact in parts and, depending on the genre or programme, only makes use of a certain number of arbitrary features. At the same time, language, written and spoken, as a mode arguably comes closest to transporting messages as unambiguously as possible (although cultural and geographical backgrounds do play crucial roles in the reading of language). This can make their comparison difficult when trying to elicit children's understanding of meta-narratives

and formal features. Yet, the media's arbitrariness has resulted in cross-media concepts in effects research that relate to both written and audio-visual texts. Messenger Davies argues:

“If reading television does have parallels with reading (or processing) other kinds of media, including language, whether spoken or written, then we would expect some of the worms of television to be analogic to the forms of linguistic structures”
(*Fake 38*)

Congenial to this sentiment, several effects research studies have been carried out using linguistic or literary concepts for the analysis of audio-visual media. For instance, the linguistic concept of modality has been borrowed by Hodge and Tripp (1986, 73-100) and applied to fantasy and reality distinction in television. Focusing on cartoons, they categorise animated programmes as a type of “weak modality”, because children easily identified their fictionality. To find further correlation between children's abilities to identify programmes' as fictional or real, they also looked for the use of modality in children's language. Although a direct connection between children's own speech and their ability to distinguish between physical reality and fantasy seems unlikely, the modality concept remains useful when studying different modes of television representation and their formal features.

In a similar way, Messenger Davies, too, has related linguistic and literary concepts to television. For instance, she made use of the linguistic concept of active and passive constructions and translated it to the visual formal features of close-ups or zooms. In order to do so, she used the active sentence “The woman lifted the chair” and the passive sentence “The chair was lifted by the woman” and emphasised the fact that according to empirical studies, people saw the chair as the focus of the action in the passive construction, rather than the women. Following this, she showed two films of a woman lifting a chair, once showing the woman lifting the chair from afar, once with a close-up on the chair. As was the case with the passive and active construction, the chair was seen as the central point of the film when the close-up was used. Likewise, she also connects the literary concepts of metaphor and metonymy to television and its formal cues. Here, she argues that connotative uses of stylistic features in television can be compared to the use of metaphors in literature, naming gender-specific programmes and their typical formal characteristics. What is important to note here, is the fact that media consumers are not empty boxes to be filled at will, but active beings

whose own interpretation of these connotations is vital, making it a two-way rather than a one-way process (*Fake* 38-39).

These examples show that, due to the arbitrary nature of formal characteristics regardless of the medium, there are certainly ways of comparing different media and translating concepts made for one to another. This, as well as the ability of children to understand them and distinguish between fantasy and reality will be vital when discussing immersive children's meta-texts, the two specific examples at hand, and their effects on children.

3. Meta-Texts For Children

In order to examine the two meta-texts at hand, their peculiarity and their effects closely, it is important to examine meta-texts more closely as subgenre across media. The discussion of fantasy/reality above has shown the importance of formal characteristics in media consumption; with this in mind, meta-narratives in different media will now be approached. To do so, a general introduction to children's meta-narratives and its history will provide the basics needed for a close analysis and explain its position in literature and film. Afterwards, different characteristics of children's meta-texts across media will be examined in detail. The approach of formal characteristics as a focus for text analysis stems from effects research, and as has been noticeable above, the use of 'formal characteristics' in discussions of effects research has been rather vague. To analyse the two different media, this thesis will focus on their narratological features as formal characteristics, borrowing from literary and cultural studies. This will be done in order to establish a basis for the analysis of the texts at hand, *Unfortunate Events* and *Weekenders*, and the ways in which differ from the meta-textual 'norm'.

3.1. Introduction and History of Children's Meta-Texts

The study of meta-texts has most notably originated in the study of metafiction in literature. It emerged predominantly in the late twentieth century, although there have been occasional examples of metafiction prior to that. So as to understand the nature of metafiction, it is important to examine its widely accepted definition established by Waugh (1984, 6), who describes the term 'metafiction' as

“a term given to fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact in

order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality. In providing a critique of their own methods of construction, such writings not only examine the fundamental structures of narrative fiction, they also explore the possible fictionality of the world outside the literary fictional text.”

This definition mentions several important issues: first, the relationship between fiction and reality are a pillar for metafictional works, and this relationship is of especial significance in the case of the meta-texts at hand. Second, another essential point here is the distinction between the narrative and the “world outside”. Not only does this definition already show different levels of referentiality, but also the fictional text’s power to impact the world around it. Finally, the laying bare of the texts’ own constructedness is crucial here. According to Waugh, this has led writers and creators of meta-narratives not only to deconstruct their medium and its conventions but also the world they live in as a kind of construction. One might even assume that readers, thus, are also invited to consider both the work’s but their own world’s constructedness (4-9).

Post-structuralism has also been vital in the understanding of metafiction, having laid out the groundwork for concepts of referentiality, as Nöth (2007, 3-11) notes. The notion of different entities and their ability to reference themselves or each other stems from the study of the sign, a crucial notion in post-structuralism. Ferdinand de Saussure’s (cf [1915] 1974; qtd. in Messenger Davies *Handbook* “Reality and Fantasy” 123) distinction between the signified and the signifier has been especially influential here: showing the arbitrary relationship between a sign and a signifier has led to the different concepts of semiotic systems, their environment and the referential relationship between the two. More specifically, it can be differentiated between hetero-reference, a system referring to its environment, and self-reference, through which a system refers to itself. To return to metafiction, a text would therefore become metafictional when referencing itself, and this is also the case for meta-narratives across media. This can happen in different ways and on different levels, for instance by referencing its own production process or itself as a product; the possibilities are highly dependent on the medial constructedness of a narrative, as will become apparent below. By referencing themselves, meta-texts act in ways usual texts do not, as it has become narrative convention to hide texts’ production process and constructedness so as to not interrupt the main story. This way, metafiction defies

narrative convention: meta-narratives tell stories but do so in addition to their use of self-reference, making consumers aware of their constructedness.

As mentioned above, in the case of this study, the texts at hand do not merely seem to use explore self-reference to point out constructedness, but to create reality illusions. It can be argued that they make consumers believe that what they are watching or reading, such as the characters or the places, is in fact part of their system too rather than fictional, while using self-reference and different referential layers, which usually point out constructedness. Their unusual use of levels of the self and the other becomes especially apparent when studying the texts' narratological and medial singularities.

To return to more usual meta-texts and their defying of conventions, another interesting point to consider the earlier distinction between physical and ideological or cultural reality. If meta-narratives works by defying media and genre standards on a technical level, it follows that story and plot should be influenced as well, as are the messages and themes that are portrayed. As Waugh (11) notes, where texts without self-reference might arguably tend to perpetuate norms and conventions, meta-texts try to create a space where these seemingly natural conventions are challenged on both a technical and a content level. This corresponds with the distinction made earlier between physical reality and ideological reality: technical features, like physical reality, are touchable, literally visible alternations of texts and their reality. In contrast subjective and ideological themes are transported on the content level, which is similar to the ideological reality established above. It will be interesting to see during the empirical part of this thesis, if the children will distinguish at all between those kinds of realities when confronted with meta-texts. What should be noted here, however, is the fact that this does not mean that meta-texts for any audience are automatically free of convention and ideology, as Nel notes: rejection of one ideology means there is another one at play, declining the first one. Still, the potential of meta-narratives to challenge society's norms and thus to raise awareness of the existence of norms cannot be denied. Therefore, an investigation in terms of how meta-texts might influence children's perception of the world certainly is of interest, both for the humanities and social sciences (Nel, *Media Commons*).

Discussions of deconstructional ideas have shaped academic communities, and popular culture did not stay completely free of them either, including literature and film. Regarding children's meta-texts specifically, the academic community, be it from media studies, literary studies or film studies, has hardly looked at the small but blooming subgenre. Although many have called for closer inspection of metafiction targeted at children, such as Nikolajeva (2005, 219), only few studies can be found in this regard. One of these rare discussions has been led by Grieve (2006), who specifically concentrated on the role of play and reader involvement in metafiction for children. Reader involvement, she argues, is one key difference between children's metafiction and metafiction for adults. She points out the lack of experience children have regarding literature, meaning that children's metafiction cannot defy conventions too much without confusing young readers. This is a similar argument to the one made above about the distinction of fantasy and reality and its dependency on literacy. As was concluded there, a lack of literacy does not mean, however, that children do not or should not read metafictional texts, merely that the characteristics and aims of these texts might differ in contrast to metafiction for adults. As Grieve (377) puts it, "an author (...) who wishes to foreground fictional illusion as illusion, must ask how fiction can be created which will still engage and satisfy the reader". Ludic theory could be one answer to this question. In order to make young readers aware of fictionality, metafiction uses reader involvement as a form of play. This way, children can either feel part of the creation or the process of fiction, or in more extreme examples, actually take part themselves. Reader involvement, or immersive storytelling play an important role here. Only if readers are actively engaged, for instance by the help of an overt or covert narrator, can they actively become narrative creators themselves. One typical example can be found in the form of 'choose your own adventure' books, in which readers themselves decide which chapter to read next, therefore shaping the development of the narrative (375-378).

The research field of self-reflexive animation has paid more attention to children's meta-narratives, although it should be noted that the focus has always been on the narratives and their medial possibilities rather than on children as viewers. In their study of meta-stories in animation, Lindvall and Melton (1997, 212) distinguished roughly between three ways animation asserts its meta-state: firstly, by drawing attention to the process of filmmaking, secondly, by "alluding to other texts and

contexts beyond itself” making itself appear more realistic in the process, and lastly, by making its plasticity and raw material apparent to viewers. The second point is especially important: it points toward the imitation of reality, and thus, towards potential for reality illusion.

Both these examinations show how experimental children’s meta-texts and their use of self-reference can be. The texts’ constructedness is still pointed out, but rather by giving young audiences the feeling of being present during the construction process, or even by constructing texts themselves. It is this immersive element that will be essential for the analysis of the texts at hand and their illusion of reality, as will become clear in the following subchapter.

Having looked at important theoretical approaches as a way to introduce children’s meta-texts and research around it, it is time to have a brief look at children’s meta-texts in animation and literature as part of popular culture. As for literature, it has to be noted that meta-texts, depending on the strength and the number of meta-elements, cannot be considered to be part of mass media or easily consumable. The narratives’ deconstructive nature and its purpose of provoking readers and challenging their ways of thinking do not necessarily make their consumption as easy as mass literature tends to be. Therefore, perhaps, the early stages of literature did not feature much of it, let alone children’s literature; conventions had yet to be established, meaning their omission would not have had the effect it has today. Once the Western literary tradition, and especially the novel, was established, instances of metafiction, including the occasional work targeted at children, started to appear. Even before post-modernism was discussed by philosophers and thinkers, Charles Dickens’ *A Holiday Romance* (1868) and Edith Nesbit’s *The Story of the Treasure Seekers* (1899) provided metafictional literary entertainment for children in the early nineteenth century. Post-modernism influenced political and social conventions, especially after the World Wars, which also became evident in children’s literature, as Nel notes. The 1950s saw the introduction of the *Harold* series (1955-1963) by Crockett Johnson, a metafictional book series about a young boy creating his own world. Many picturebooks followed, bending the conventions of their predecessors in terms of the medium and the narrative. The nineties finally brought about the heyday of children’s metafiction, again especially with regard to picturebooks, perhaps due to their heavy use of visuals and therefore an opportunity of strong visual meta-elements. Examples

here are Spiegelman's picturebook *Open me, I'm a Dog* (1997) or Gravett's *Wolf* books (2005-2011). As for chapter books, Lemony Snicket's *A Series of Unfortunate Events* can perhaps be considered the most influential and successful openly metafictional series, and it will be discussed in detail below (Moss 79; Nel *PhilipNel.com*).

Not only picturebooks make use of the advantages of visuals when it comes to metafiction for children, but naturally, film and television make use of this asset too. Although film as a medium has long attempted to conceal its constructedness, audiences of the past three decades have become familiar with the medium to such an extent that creators are now more likely experiment. Especially animation has always been rather experimental, considering their lack of limitations as anything can be drawn and animated, and animators and writers have not been afraid to give viewers a peek behind the scenes. Specifically, Warner Bros. Animation produced several meta-cartoons the in early times of animation, the 1930s, 40s and 50s. The perhaps most famous one is "Duck Amuck", in which Duffy Duck discusses his being animated with his animator who also causes Duffy to react to his doodles in apparently real-time. Walt Disney Studios also released the occasional meta-cartoon, such as "Mickey's Gala Premiere" in 1933. The trend of animated meta-narratives has increased over the twentieth century, with all Western studios producing their fair share of animated meta-stories, and today, there is hardly a cartoon that does not at least feature strong instances of intertextuality, if not whole commentaries on animation itself or features making aware of the physical constructedness of cartoons (Lindvall and Melton 210-213; Siebert 155-161).

Both media, film in the form of animation and literature, have different ways of telling meta-stories, and while many artists and writers have already pushed the boundaries of these media, new instances of the genre can be found every day. With the development of metafiction and meta-texts, new boundaries constantly pushed, as is arguably the case with the texts to be analysed in this thesis.

3.2. Formal Characteristics of Children's Meta-Texts

As has become evident above, the aim of meta-texts is to defy conventions on a technical as well as on a content level, wanting to lay bare its own and society's constructedness. The texts at hand, however, seem to do the opposite. They pretend

to be real rather than constructed and therefore break the conventions of meta-narratives in turn. To understand how this is done, it is essential to first define characteristics of meta-texts, specifically on the formal level, as this will be the focus of this discussion. This is not to say that the content level is less important or will be left completely unexamined, but in order to look at the construction of the chosen examples in detail, the content level will only be discussed briefly when approaching the texts at hand.

As will become apparent below, the two main points to be analysed here are, on the one hand, narratology, and on the other hand, differences in media and their modes. Since meta-texts, and the two examples at hand especially, most strikingly play with different narrative levels, it is important to consider this feature and analyse how *Unfortunate Events* and *Weekenders* play with this characteristic to achieve a different outcome. In addition, the texts' differences in storytelling and meta-play will also be considered by focusing on their difference in media and mode.

3.2.1. Media and Modes

Before delving into the analysis of different narratological concepts in meta-texts as well as its stylistic features, it is essential to understand the difference of meta-texts across media.

What should be discussed first is the definition of 'media' that will be used here. In the course of this discussion and the following analysis, 'media' will be understood here as 'transmitter of a message' or a kind of 'channel' through which a message can be communicated, such as television, books and more. In her discussion of narratology throughout various media, Ryan (2009), however, prefers the definition of a media as a "languages" that shape (...) information". She argues that if one reduced the medium to its "hollow [pipe]", it would be hard to deal with gadgets such as phonographs in terms of storytelling. However, the first definition does not exclude artistic expression but rather is broad enough to include narrative storytelling as well as many other kinds of messages. What is more, the latter definition is difficult to combine with terms that describe the different semiotic codes, as Ryan calls them, that media feature in order to communicate, such as visual or language-based impulses. Here, these semiotic codes will be called 'modes'. To name an example, the book as a medium, specifically

the novel as a further sub-category, can make use of the modes of written language, sometimes illustrations and in rare occasions pop-up elements (263-264).

As for narratives across media, it is important to realise that there are basic differences between media and their modes and resulting narrative possibilities. Regarding meta-texts, this means that different uses of modes can result in different kinds of self-references. Modes are not exclusive to one medium; concepts like remediation, for example, have shown that there is definitive interconnectedness between different media and their use of modes. Ryan (266-272) differentiates three domains for the analysis of media in narratology: the semiotic domain, relating to the different modes such as language or music, the material-technological domain, describing the touchable technological nature of a medium, and the cultural domain. As for the semiotic domain, in the case of different media this defines the different modes these media make use of. According to Ryan, of all media and modes, language plays the most important role as a hyper-modal entity, as it works via several modes; language could be written text-based, for instance, or transmitted through auditory speech. Because of this, it could be considered more successful in its way of communicating, transmitting meaning more definitively. Intentions of the message sender can be clearly stated and understood, although cultural influences can certainly create distortions. What is more, all media can make use of language one way or another: books, of course, often solely make use of written language, whereas film and television largely use oral language and even here, written language can be found. In contrast, media that, for instance, only use visual impulses to portray meaning leave more room for interpretation, which can have advantages and disadvantages. Language as a hyper-modal entity is commonly found in almost all media, be it on the radio, in film or in computer games, either orally or written, and functions as a way of communicating on all narratologically relevant levels. The texts to be analysed here also consist of language to large extents, being a cartoon series and a book series. Due to the strong role language plays in narratology and media, it comes as no surprise that many foundational ideas and theories originate in literary studies, where language is the only or most important mode of storytelling. As for the cultural domain, it is also important to note the parallel to the earlier established difference between the physical level of reality and meta-textuality and the ideological reality and metafictionality. The cultural domain corresponds to the ideological level, whereas the

material-technological and the semiotic domain correspond to the physical level (although semiotic systems are of course not free of cultural and subjective influences, they are of a more technical nature than cultural impacts themselves).

Following this, Ryan demonstrates media's influence on the narration of a story as well as the importance of language. She distinguishes between several narrative components in stories across media: the spatial, temporal, mental and pragmatic component. The spatial component describes the setting as well as its individual characters inhabiting it, whereas the temporal constituent relates to time "by which this world undergoes significant changes caused by non-habitual events" (270). Additionally, the mental constituent defines the existence of intelligent agents with both cognitive and emotional processes, and finally, the pragmatic component which states messages must have meaning and closure to be successfully transmitted. She argues that, depending on the media and their available modes, not every medium is able to perfectly create narratives that are unambiguous. Different media, she concludes, thus make for different ways of storytelling, which is similar to McLuhan's renowned realisation of the medium being the message. It shows the importance of the medium and its modes when it comes to transporting a message or a narrative, and the ways in which messages change when transmitted via different modes (qtd. in Nöth 6). At the same time, different media also feature similarities in transporting messages, or more specifically here, stories.

With these components established, Ryan returns to the importance of the mode of language. While the use of visual modes alone can perfectly portray spatial dimensions and contain a sense of closure, they can lack in the definitive communication of agents and their emotional and mental worlds. The temporal component is also hard to portray with guaranteed success, for while there are cinematic conventions on communicating time jumps, these conventions do not explain themselves but have to be learned. Language can communicate all these relations, and while a certain sense of ambiguity will always remain due to cultural background or other influences, it is still the safest way to transport a narrative definitively. Meta-narratives are no exception here: although meta-elements vastly profit from visual or even auditory elements in self-reflexive narration, language here, too, is the most unambiguous way of making audiences aware of the fictionality and

'madness' of the text they are reading, its production process and their own consumption process (270-271).

So as to take a close look at the different influences of media on meta-narratives, it is important to consider cross-media concepts with regard to these narratives. In an effort to look at meta-narratives across media, Nöth has tried to translate literary concepts of narratology and self-reflexivity in ways that make them applicable to other media. She lists the aforementioned concept of self-reference versus hetero-reference as one way to analyse narratology across media. Meta-texts make use of this by identifying itself and making references to itself and its own constructedness, and these references are mostly to be found in the form of narratological singularities, as will become evident shortly. Different media as transmitters will then influence the use of signs and modes in meta-texts, creating different meta-narratives with a variety of possibilities of self-referentiality (3-11).

It is clear to see that different media and their modes influence the ways in which narratives, in this case metafictional ones, express stories through formal characteristics such as narrative levels. These differences will be taken into account in the analysis of narratology in meta-texts across media below.

3.2.2. Narratology

As has become evident, the examination of meta-texts and their characteristics is not possible without taking a close look at narration. There are also other stylistic features which create meta-effects, such as absurd use of alliteration. Still, meta-texts seem to rely even more so on their play with self-reference and narratology. Specifically, narrative levels are of importance here, mimicking the levels of a semiotic system, its environment and its reference towards itself, as will become clear shortly.

A close examination of narrative levels has been carried out by Nikolajeva (2005), not focusing on metafiction but rather children's literature in general, and much of her theory can also be applied to animation. In her discussion of the aesthetic of narration, she touches upon many different categorisations of narratives according to agents, reliability and other frameworks, including narrative levels similar to Nöth's distinction of self- and hetero-reference. In her approach, Nikolajeva (181-183) specifies similar narrative levels in more detail with regard to literature. The base level for the story, she argues, is the diegetic level, where the main characters and main events of a story

can be found, and “normally (...) the only narrative level in a text” (183). In addition, she lists more levels surrounding this one: the metadiegetic level that stands above the diegetic level and comments on or makes use of the goings-on of the diegetic level, and the hypodiegetic level that exists below the diegetic level and which acts as a sub-narrative to it. The speciality of meta-texts or, more specifically, metafiction, as Nöth notes, is their self-reflexivity, which is mostly expressed by laying bare these levels and the story’s constructedness. Thus, to relate these levels to metafiction, the mere existence of both the meta- and the hypodiegetic level can be considered metafictional. The metadiegetic level, on the one hand, makes readers aware of the diegetic level’s existence as a fictional story, the hypodiegetic level, on the other hand, often sheds light onto the reading situation itself, both reminding the reader of the works general constructedness. The meta-effect can become even stronger when the meta- and hypodiegetic level or their agents and occurrences are openly commented on or discussed in relation to the diegetic level (Nikolajeva 182; Nöth 4-6).

Apart from these narrative levels, Nikolajeva lists a variety of other narratological concepts. Especially useful for this discussion is her distinction of narrative agencies, which is similar to the narrative levels above but has a stronger focus on the agents participating in the narrative process. Here, she distinguishes on the one hand between the level of the narrator, the implied author and the real author: the first is either present as a character, telling the story, or not detectable but still existent, i.e. overt or covert (especially in film, narrators are mostly covert). The second relates to the readers’ the impression of the author, and the third describing the actual author. On the other hand, there are the narratee, the implied reader and the real reader: the first is “an agency within the text that is the recipient of the narrator’s story”, who can again be covert or overt. The second, the implied reader, describes an image of the readership implied by the text, and the third simply means the actual reader. Relating this to metafiction means the text becomes self-reflective by creating awareness of these agents or their processes. For instance, a narrator becoming aware of their role as a narrator could be considered a meta-effect, even more so if they go into detail about specifics of their narrating process. Likewise, if the narrator takes note of the narratee or the implied reader’s existence and comments on the fact, this could also be classified as a meta-moment. In animation specifically, the binary of the artist and the reader receives a lot of attention, especially the relationship between them. As

mentioned above, Lindvall and Melton call the cartoon's address of the reader as well as its strong emphasis on its own creator (or implied creator) two of the most important functions of self-reflective animation (Lindvall and Melton 209; Nikolajeva 171-173).

When it comes to narrative agents across media, specifically the narrator, one can also further distinguish between their irony and reliability. An ironic narrator, thus, might claim something but not mean it and can see "through actions, intentions, mistakes, and fallacies of the characters" (178). If said narrator is both ironic and personal, that means they are able to comment on their own flaws as narrator. With regard to meta-texts, a narrator commenting on their own abilities as a narrative agent is an example of self-reflexivity in and by the text and can thus be considered a meta-effect. In addition to this, a personal, ironic narrator is also unreliable by definition, meaning their statements and opinions cannot easily be trusted. Although this is not a meta-element per se, it is an automatic side product that will be of relevance in the analysis later on as well as the empirical study.

The final narratological concept working on a cross-media level to be considered here defines the narrator and their relation to the narrative levels outlined above. A narrator appearing as a character on the same level as the story they are telling is a homodiegetic narrator, if they are the protagonist they are autodiegetic narrators. In contrast, a heterodiegetic narrator exists on a different level as their story and its characters. In terms of the narrator's temporal distance, it can be distinguished between intradiegetic narrators, who tell stories as they are happening, and extradiegetic narrators, who recount stories from a distance. As is the case above, meta-stories across media and their laying bare their own constructedness would make aware of these specifications of their narrators. In both animation and literature, an extradiegetic narrator (written or through voice-over) could, for example, comment on the fact that they are not present but only telling their story retrospectively (Nikolajeva 184-185).

All these concepts provide many combinations of levels and agents as well as their relations to each other, and the more specific they get, the more complex narratives are. Metafiction often chooses to depict especially complex narrative situations so as to break conventions, and on top of that makes readers aware of the narrative complexity. Usually, children's metafiction, and meta-texts in general, do not aim to

challenge children's narrative competences, considering they are at times not developed enough to even understand conventions. Still, instances of meta-texts make use of them, often differing in the degree of the meta-effect to cater to different age groups. Meta-elements may simply be small hints such as the two different narrative levels in *Winnie the Pooh* or go beyond that, by commenting on the narrative situations or may even take the form of complex use of narrative levels and agents. The latter is certainly true for the two examples at hand, *Unfortunate Events* and *Weekenders* (193-194).

Although some narratological concepts can be used for various media, different media and their modes can also highly influence narratives, as has been shown above. Therefore, not every narratological distinction can be used for any medium. Despite the fact that the narrative levels and agents established above work both for literature and also for film and animation, one should not forget that, for instance, animation features more than merely an author or writer as main creative forces of the production. Withalm (2007) has further specified different levels of reference with regard to meta-texts which expand Nöth's concept of reference and self-reflexivity established earlier. Her cycle model, originally derived from concepts by Rossi-Landi's (1985, qtd. in Withalm 125-130) sociosemiotic levels as well as Stam's (1992, qtd. in Withalm 125-130) discussion of reflexivity in film and literature, describes thoroughly visual media such as film or television and refers to the processes of production, distribution, reception and the product. These different components will be considered in this analysis as well (Withalm 125-130).

On the level of production, texts refer to the production process, either its own or that of another text. This can vary according to the medium at hand; in animation, one will usually refer to the drawings or animated creatures being created, as is the case in "Duck Amuck" or, to name a more recent example, *Phineas and Ferb*. Even without visual signs of self-reflexive reference, a hint at the writing process of a programme can also count as a self-reflexivity. As for literature, or children's literature in this case, the work would include scenes of itself or another literary work being written or printed, such as in Ahlberg and Ingman's *The Pencil*. The next level, self-reference towards the distribution of a text, is hardly found in any medium, as this stage often includes making visible marketing strategies to help attracting audiences, which are still mostly concealed across all media. One rare example can be found in the *Unfortunate Events*

series, where Lemony Snicket comments regularly on his distributors' choices with regard to his writing (Snicket, *Wide Window* 145-146). In contrast, the level of reception is more commonly found in several types of media, as audiences and readers are depicted consuming a text or the very text they are already consuming. To name one extreme example, the animated short "Daffy Duck & Egghead" depicts the shadow of the audience member in the cartoon. Lindvall and Melton (212) also identify this 'reality' effect in other *Daffy Duck* cartoons and have defined it as one of three markers of self-reflexive animation. Meta-texts usually aim at making aware of its own constructedness, but this type of audience involvement seems to be an instance in which the cartoon either pretends to pretend to be real or give the viewer the impression they are part of the cartoon's fictional world. Adults, knowing television conventions and understanding that cartoons cannot be real, will probably view such an element as a pleasurable meta-effect. Children, however, who are more likely to believe in magical realism, as established earlier, might be more inclined to believe in a cartoon's reality, and thus in a kind of blurring of narrative levels. This way of breaking the meta-textual convention of breaking the fourth wall through audience involvement will become of great importance in this thesis and will be analysed further in the following chapters. When it comes to the reception of metafictional literature, this is most often found when the reader is acknowledged, which tends to come about with a guiding narrator. A conventionally metafictional example of depicting reading processes can be found in the picturebook *Wolves* by Emily Gravett (2006), in which the reader watches a rabbit reading another book (Siebert 158; Withalm 128-136).

Lastly, self-reference on the level of the product can mostly be found as allusions to other texts, i.e. intertextuality and intermediality. Any intertextual reference automatically must be self-referential, if at least by acknowledging the fictionality of other works. Regarding intertextuality, the recent Cartoon Network series *We Bare Bears* features an episode called "Shush Ninjas" in which the audience follows the protagonists' day at the cinema with many references to film and animation. In literature, intertextuality is very common as well and can be found in almost every literary work, which raises the question whether any work of literature is therefore metafictional, with varying degrees. As for intermediality, Withalm does not necessarily consider this device self-referential. However, referring to another medium means to refer to the level of the material-technological domain, as identified by Ryan (268),

rather than the semiotic domain, as is more commonly the case in meta-texts. Thus, constructedness is still acknowledged, but rather in terms of medial constructedness. Again, *We Bare Bears* features many intermedial references, as for example in the episode “Chloe”, where for several minutes, the audience watches a computer presentation compiled by the protagonists (Withalm 136-138).

Analysing meta-texts with the help of narratological concepts shows the ways in which meta-narratives defy common literary conventions. Having established these conventions, it is time to move to the analysis of the texts at hand to see in what ways they follow or reject the conventions of meta-narratives.

4. Texts at Hand

In order to work with the qualitative interviews and examine the possible effects of meta-texts on children, it is essential to analyse the texts at hand in detail. The conclusions and insights of the past two chapters will be of immense help here. In terms of effects research and the distinction of fantasy and reality, it has been established that children can not only sometimes confuse fiction and reality, but also that the reasons for the difficulties of such differentiation lie within the formal characteristics of the text. Then, children’s meta-narratives and its characteristics were analysed with this in mind. It has been recognised that in self-reflection and laying bare the texts’ own constructedness, narratology and media studies as formal characteristics are essential. Children’s meta-texts, like those targeted at adults, breaks the convention of usual narratives, which tells stories by taking themselves seriously within its own narrative levels and does not give away its constructedness. In addition, children’s meta-narratives, it has been established, can be different from other meta-narratives in breaking convention by making use of playful elements and strong reader involvement, so young readers do not just notice constructedness but seemingly become part of the production process. Thus, children’s meta-texts would have to use weaker instances of metafictionality, merely by introducing metadiegetic levels to the story, for example, rather than commenting on them. With these points in mind, it is time to move to two more unusual meta-narratives targeted at children, namely *A Series of Unfortunate Events* by Lemony Snicket, the pen name of Daniel Handler, and Disney’s *The Weekenders*, created by Doug Langdale. As will be showed, they distinguish themselves from other meta-narratives by not merely using

meta-features to allude to their constructedness but also to create a reality illusions. The following chapters will first consist of analyses of the texts' singularities across their multiple books and series. Then, two specific examples - one book and one episode of each - will be examined and subsequently used for the empirical study.

4.1. Text Analysis

Below, *Unfortunate Events* and *Weekenders* will be looked at in their entirety in order to point out their singularities. With the help of media-specific text as well as concepts and features listed above, it will be showed that even among meta-texts for children, both works stand out due to their pretence to be real, as will become apparent. What should be noted before beginning the analysis is that both Lemony Snicket of *Unfortunate Events*, as well as Tino Tonitini of *Weekenders* will be considered as quasi-creators or creative behind the stories. Although Daniel Handler and Doug Langdale, of course, are the real authors who shaped the stories creatively and who included references to their own personal lives, their role and their influence will not be discussed here. Since this analysis wants to find sources for possible confusion of reality and fantasy for children and see whether young readers might mistaken the narrators for authors, a detailed examination of the authors' role in these stories will not be necessary. Thus, Snicket and Tino' alleged influence is more relevant to this discussion and will be considered more thoroughly than the actual creative decisions carried out by the real artists.

4.1.1. Lemony Snicket's *A Series of Unfortunate Events*

A Series of Unfortunate Events was written by Daniel Handler, who, for this series as well as several spin-off books and even some completely unrelated books, takes on the pen name of Lemony Snicket. He tells the story of the Baudelaire orphans, three intelligent siblings who have lost their parents in a terrible fire due to the villainous Count Olaf, who is after their fortune. However, Snicket, as it turns out in the course of the series, is not merely a strong personal narrator on a meta-level but in fact seems to have a place in the Baudelaires' story due to his love for their perished mother. The Baudelaires do not know about his existence or his quest to tell their story. Readers receive hardly any details about the relationships between characters, and the series intentionally ends with many questions left unanswered. Due to the story's narratological complexity, the concepts discussed so far will be essential in analysing

the story. Its media constructedness is also of significance, as will be demonstrated shortly.

Based on the theory established in earlier chapters, one first has to look at *Unfortunate Events* specifically as a text using the medium of the book as a transmitter of the narrative. Here, Ryan provides a useful distinction of different domains of media that will be beneficial for this analysis, namely the semiotic domains, the material-technological domain and the cultural domain. The semiotic domain includes the different semiotic systems or, in the case of media distinction, modes used in a book, which are either arbitrary or literal. *Unfortunate Events* makes use of arbitrary language in the form of written text, as well as visual impulses, namely illustrations and photographs. What should also be noted is the fact that even the written text-based mode has visual influences, in the form of iconographic depictions of language.

Next, the material-technological domain describes the physicality of the medium, which here is a book of sorts, either a paperback or a hardcover book made of ink and paper, but the story can also be purchased in the form of or an e-book. The latter could in this case drastically alter the transmission of the narrative, as *Unfortunate Events* relies in parts heavily on layout and illustrations, and most e-books cannot provide the right format for these effects to function.

Lastly, there is the cultural domain, which will not be looked at too closely due to the very focus of this thesis on physical reality, but which is nevertheless interesting. As has been established during the examination of children's ability to distinguish between fantasy and reality, as well as in the chapter on metafiction and meta-texts, reality can be further divided into physical reality and ideological reality. In relation to this, the breaking of convention by narratives can take place on a semiotic and technical level on one side, as well as a cultural level on the other side. Although this is not the focus of the analysis here, it should definitely be noted that even on a content level, *Unfortunate Events* attempts to defy social conventions. This is most notable in terms of its tearing down dichotomies: distinctions between good and bad, wise adult and inexperienced child or boy and girl are turned on their head, sometimes after having been carefully established. Especially the relativity of good and bad becomes apparent throughout the books, as the readers together with the Baudelaire children become aware that people's villainous behaviour is only despicable to those

on the other side of the feud, or of another mind set. The subjectivity of their evaluation people and their ideology become apparent starting with *The Vile Village*, the seventh book in the series, in which the Baudelaires become unsure of who is good and bad, and even questions their own goodness. There are many instances of the breaking of cultural and ideological conventions within the book series, that will not be examined further here, but certainly deserve attention (Ryan 266-272; Snicket, *Vile Village*).

To return to the three different domains, the semiotic level contains modes, their contents and narratological features, with the material-technological domain influencing modes and contents. The cultural domain will not be investigated further, but it will be interesting to see whether the children interviewed during the empirical study will pay attention to it, and if yes, in what ways (Ryan 266-268).

With these medium-specific characteristics in mind, it is time to move to the perhaps most defining analytical category here, namely narratology. Generally, *Unfortunate Events* is rather peculiar in its narrative, and this becomes already evident when looking at its basic structure. Instead of subscribing to the conventions of the typical three-act narrative structure, the story constantly tries to defy it, for instance, by announcing deaths or the arrival of new villains early on. What should be noted is that by doing this, at first sight the series very much behaves like the typical meta-narrative described above, making aware of its constructedness by doing away with conventional story structure creating awareness of conventions. However, these more common meta-elements are also part of the reality pretence, as will be explained in detail below.

Turning to the narrative concepts listed above, the first aspects to be examined here is that of narrative agencies, coined by Nikolajeva (171-173), which are rather blurred in the series. The agencies of author and reader, roughly speaking, are not simply made aware of to the reader as mentioned before. Rather, in addition, they are made to believe they exist in the same realm. Due to the books' physical appearance and the fact that Lemony Snicket is named as the author, the reader goes into the reading process under the impression that Snicket is the author. This illusion is further emphasised through the author's description at the end of each book, featuring a vague photograph of a man and a description of Snicket's job as author and his research of the Baudelaires (*Window Cover*, N.P.). Additional intermedial interplay

also helps on a more physical level: letters to the publisher that are water-stained or half-burned indicate a sense of reality by imitating another medium, corresponding to Withalm's (136-138) self-referential level of distribution and the product. However, as becomes apparent throughout the books, Snicket is not just the alleged author but also the narrator, so the levels of narrator and author are blurred and equated. This way, fiction and fantasy are intermingled: if the author is considered to be a real person by the reader and the author and the narrator are seemingly the same person, then the narrator has to be real too. Thus, there is a possibility that readers who, for instance, are not aware of the convention of the pen name could very well believe that Lemony Snicket is real, existing in the same realm as the reader. The effect is especially strong due to Snicket's constantly referring to the reader and their relationship as writer and reader. For instance, this becomes evident through Snicket's explanations of difficult words throughout the books, which give the impression that Snicket acknowledges the reader's existence and cares about their understanding of the story, as is the case in *The Ersatz Elevator*:

The book you are holding in your two hands (...) is one of two books in the world that will show you the difference between the word 'nervous' and the word 'anxious'. The other book, of course, is the dictionary, and if I were you, I would read that book instead (1).

Moreover, this reality effect is further strengthened by Snicket's suggestion of the possibility that the reader might meet the characters of the story, ("(...) neither did I [see his face], and neither will you" (Snicket, *Mill* 51)) as well as visit the same places, such as Prufrock Preparatory School (" (...) if you were to visit it now, you would find it an empty and silent place" (Snicket, *Academy* 83)). The use of the pronoun 'you' is significant here: one could easily regard it as the generic 'you'. Yet, there are strong hints that almost all of Snicket's 'you's do in fact address the readers, as he uses them not only explanations but also other instances ("I'm very, very sorry to leave you hanging like that, but as I was writing the tale of the Baudelaire orphans (...)") (*Room* 27).

In addition to his efforts to establish himself as part of the readers' realm, Snicket also seems to be part of the Baudelaire's story. Here, narrative levels are of importance. In *Unfortunate Events*, the most common narrative levels to be found are that of the metadiegetic and the diegetic level, the first being roughly personified by Lemony Snicket, the latter by the Baudelaire children. Occasionally, the hyperdiegetic level can

be found too, as the Baudelaires encounter stories within stories, in the form of movies, plays or books. The mere existence of these levels would already count as a meta-effect, but in addition to this, Snicket continually comments on his process of creating the narrative, on his research into the Baudelaires' lives as well as the writing process itself. These instances would make it seem as if the narrative merely argued for its own constructedness; however, the reality pretence lies in the relationship between all these levels carefully established by Snicket, or rather Handler. Snicket cannot fully be assigned to the metadiegetic level and this is due to his constant blurring of the levels. It plays an essential role in making the narrative and its characters appear to be part of readers' physical reality (Nikolajeva 181-183).

When taking into account the further distinctions of narrators on these levels, it is clear to see that Snicket acts as a homodiegetic rather than a heterodiegetic narrator throughout the series (Nikolajeva 184-185). This happens in various ways: most notably, he claims to have visited places, met people and consumed media identical to those that the Baudelaires visit, meet and consume. The first instance of this can be found in *Wide Window*, the third book of the series, in which he states to have done research at the Lachrymose Lake where the children spend their time in the book (128). The seventh book, *The Vile Village*, delivers further prove Snicket must be part not only of their world, but also their circle of acquaintances, as the Baudelaires witness the murder of Lemony's brother Jacques. From this point on, it is clear to readers that Snicket must be part of the universe he writes about and therefore almost every mention of Snicket or his family on the story level of the Baudelaire's can be regarded as self-referential (222). In addition to this, Snicket is in love with the Baudelaires' mother Beatrice. His love is expressed by, for instance, dedicating every single book to her ("To Beatrice – darling, dearest, dead" (*Beginning* Glossary)), and mentioning her throughout the text. Beatrice's identity as the Baudelaires' mother, however, only becomes absolutely definitive in *The Beatrice Letters*, one of the spin-off books, in which their mother's full name is revealed. Still, Snicket's constant mourning of a mysterious woman called Beatrice in combination with his persistence of uncovering the Baudelaires' fate, as well as their existence on the same story level soon causes the reader to suspect that Beatrice is the Baudelaires' mother.

Snicket's constant insistence on being real on the diegetic level of the Baudelaires, as well as existing the same realm as the reader, could potentially bring readers to believe

that Snicket as well as the Baudelaires are real. Where adult readers might consider the Baudelaires' stories to be unrealistic, the willingness of children to believe in unlikely events or magical realism suggests that it could be possible might believe in characters' stories. In combination with the establishment of Snicket as the author, narrator and actual figure in the Baudelaires' story and a lack of reading experience on the children's side could create a strong reality effect. The most significant instance that gives readers the impression Snicket as well as the Baudelaires might be real people, appears in *The Penultimate Peril*. First, the narrative levels between the Baudelaires and Snicket almost melt into each other. The story strongly suggests that the Baudelaires meet him at one point during the book, when he asks them to take a taxi with him, but they refuse. This encounter becomes the most homodiegetic moment for Snicket's narrator in the books. On top of this, he continues to address the reader as follows: "(...) or if it would have been better for you to step into that taxi-cab you saw not so long ago and embark on your own series of events, rather than continuing with the life you have for yourself" (252). Snicket addresses an alleged moment in the reader's life that is very similar to one that just occurred to the Baudelaires in Snicket's account of their story, suggesting that the reader, similarly to the Baudelaires, could have met and gone with Snicket. This is the ultimate moment of melting narrative levels and agencies, making it hard for readers to define Snicket's position in their realm and in the Baudelaires' narrative. Less experienced readers might consider this to be one more element that speaks for Snicket's and possibly even the Baudelaires' physical existence (Nikolajeva 184-185).

As for Daniel Handler himself, traces of his position as the real author can merely be found subliminally as part of the implied author. One of these instances comes close to suggesting Snicket's constructedness, thus almost breaking the reality illusion, namely during *The Hostile Hospital*. Here, Snicket has readers consider that perhaps all of it, Snicket and the Baudelaires and their lives might be invented by a creator who works above all these levels:

As I sit in this very tiny room, printing these words with this very large pencil, I feel as if my whole life has been nothing but a dismal play, presented just for someone else's amusement, and that the playwright who invented my cruel twist of fate is somewhere far above me, laughing and laughing at his creation. (214)

This allusion is interesting as it is the only actual reference to Handler's participation as the author, and has potential to break the entire illusion of realness that is so carefully constructed throughout the entire series. However, Snicket is quick to do away with this assumption as a meaningless metaphor, further establishing the very real pain of his life and that of the Baudelaires.

Other narratological concepts that strengthen the reality illusion even further, are unreliability and irony (Nikolajeva 178-179). Regarding unreliability, Snicket quickly becomes untrustworthy to readers. On the one hand, his constant emotional outbursts and his personal affiliation to the Baudelaires make it clear that all his accounts are rather subjective and, therefore make readers suspicious of the degree of truth in his statements. On the other hand, Snicket frequently, if seemingly unintentionally, creates an ellipsis of information, denying readers the facts that would help them make sense of the story. The way he does this reminds of oral storytelling, or oral accounts of real-life events during a conversation: facts and anecdotes are hinted at sometimes rather than explained thoroughly. Although this makes the reading more difficult, this conversational tone as well as Snicket's emotionality makes his writing more relatable, thus adding to the reality effect.

One characteristic that is hard to make out in the series is Snicket's temporal and, at times, spatial proximity to the Baudelaires', making it unclear whether he is an extra- or intradiegetic narrator. While he does sometimes mention his current location, it is never absolutely clear how far in the past the narrated events in the lives of the Baudelaires take place in relation to his own point in time. Only one definitive hint at the time difference can be found in *The Slippery Slope*, which also helps blurring of the narrative agencies further, when Snicket hides a letter to his sister Kit in the book, in the hope she will find it while reading it: "My dear sister, I am taking a great risk in hiding a letter to you inside one of my books (...)" (100). In this letter, he shares his whereabouts and his investigation of one of the places the Baudelaires visit in *Slope*. He also lets her know that he plans to arrive at Hotel Denouement soon, the main setting of *The Penultimate Peril*. This would mean that in the course of the series, he reduces the time difference between his account of the Baudelaires' events and the actual events until they meet in *Peril*. The mere fact that these kinds of assumptions can be made with regard to the events, their accounts, their publishing and their

temporal relationship also add another layer of physical believability to the reading process (Nikolajeva 184-185).

Finally, Withalm's self-referential cycle model should be considered here as well. Although its aim is to make apparent the different kinds of agents in cross-media business and therefore the various kinds of self-references, she also pays attention to self-references on the level of the product, including intertextuality. In *Unfortunate Events*, the use of intertextuality points towards the series' own constructedness but it also furthers the reality effect for young readers because they are of the impression that they share their literary history with Snicket, and thus share culture and possibly world with him too. Similar to the narratological concepts described above, this effect helps to make readers feel as if Snicket, and perhaps also the Baudelaires could be real. On top of this, Snicket turns intertextual references on their head by making readers actively aware of his use of them. Such an instance can be found in *The Slippery Slope*: here, Snicket compares Sunny's kidnapping by Count Olaf to the fairy tale of *Cinderella*:

But if you are interested in knowing how Sunny Baudelaire spent her time (...), there is another story you might read that describes more or less the same situation. The story concerns a person named Cinderella. (...) If you substitute the name 'Cinderella' with the name 'Sunny Baudelaire' and eliminate the fairy godmother, (...), you have a clear idea of Sunny's predicament (49).

Several elements of reader involvement come together here. For one thing, the intertextual reference to *Cinderella* as a fairy tale that both he and the reader have grown up with suggests a shared literary history. In addition, his addressing the reader with the pronoun 'you' guarantees a strong sense of reader involvement. This also serves as an example for the fact that creating awareness of constructedness does not necessarily break the reality effect: although the reading process is referenced, the narratological agencies are still melted through the use of the intertextual reference, thus making constructedness a part of Snicket and the reader's allegedly shared world.

To go a step further, in terms of self-referentiality on the product level, Snicket's pointing out the production process of the very book the reader is reading does not break the illusion of reality either. For instance, in the case of *The Miserable Mill*, he

ponders about the importance of what the first sentence of his story could mean before actually letting readers know what the first sentence of the book is:

Sometime during your life – in fact, very soon – you may find yourself reading a book, and you may notice what sort of story your book contains. (...) But this book begins with the sentence ‘The Baudelaire orphans looked out the grimy window of the train (...) wondering if their lived would ever get any better’ (...) So now that I’ve told you the first sentence (...) if you wish to avoid an unpleasant story you had best put this book down (1-3).

Self-references on the product-level, however, are also found in the form of intermediality on the semiotic level through visual mode. The series’ multi-modal constructedness constantly tries to make readers believe that they are holding a type of scrapbook in their hands, rather than a novel including illustrations and copies of photographs. In addition, other media and their consumption experiences are constantly mentioned, for instance when the Baudelaires visit a cinema (*Room* 79-81). The books’ constant referring to media, either by use or by description, create strong intermediality effects and they play a significant role in making readers believe the author and possibly the Baudelaires might be real. For instance, each ‘About the Author’ page contains a blurry photograph of the alleged Lemony Snicket, with each book giving different irrelevant details about the author. These photographs suggest that there is in fact an actual person to be photographed, the real Lemony Snicket as mentioned on the cover. The strongest examples of such visual intermediality, however, can be found in the form of the spin-off books. *The Beatrice Letters* contains a collection of hand-written letters and telegraphs written by Beatrice Baudelaire as well as Snicket’s niece, also named Beatrice; *Lemony Snicket – The Unauthorised Biography* is seemingly made up of photographs, newspaper excerpts, letters and more. Both feature intermedial snippets that correspond to Withalm’s (130) level of the product in her model of self-referentiality. They work so well because of their material-technological characteristic as a book, a novel, making its imitation of a scrapbook more effective. The apparent constructedness of both works has readers believe somebody actually wrote and compiled these works: apparently Snicket himself.

It is this mixture of self-references in the form of conventional meta-effects and the play with hetero- and homodiegetic narrator types that sets the series apart from other metafictional works. The two levels do not merely co-exist but they are connected through Lemony Snicket himself, creating a different kind of meta-sensation, almost a

paradox. The series is constructed, yes, but by a seemingly real person who documents allegedly real occurrences. Essentially, of course, this is a lie readers and especially children are encouraged to believe for the illusion to be effective. Still: the combination of the technical possibility of the book being non-fiction and Snicket's name as the author on it together with Snicket's persistence on being real, makes it a lie well-told. In contrast to most other meta-texts, which merely make the reader conscious of their reading process and reminds them of the work's constructedness, *A Series of Unfortunate Events* blurs the lines of the different narrative levels, on top of its metafictional behaviour. In doing so, the author Handler does not merely make the reader question their reading process but even more so the fictionality of the series. He does not just remind his readership of the series' constructedness but rather motivating them to question it, and this way, the series pretends to be real.

4.1.2. Disney's *The Weekenders*

As opposed to *Unfortunate Events*, Disney's *The Weekenders* provides immersive meta-effects via the medium of moving pictures, or film. The animated television series revolves around Tino Tonitini, a boy from middle school, as well as his friends Tish, Carver and Lor and their adventures taking place on weekends. However, viewers do not simply follow the friends passively, but rather are directly invited by Tino to join in. He acts as a kind of live narrator for the audience, as he stops the story to explain viewers what is going on, asks them to follow him or addresses viewers in other ways, such as asking for their experiences or opinion. In addition, visual impulses such as gestures by the characters towards the audience are also used to further the relation between viewers and the characters. In order to explore these singularities as well as their reality potential in detail, *Weekenders* will be analysed according to a similar schema as *Unfortunate Events*, and comparisons will be drawn where useful.

Again, as two different media are examined here, it makes sense to concentrate on the medial domains established by Ryan (266-270). In this case, the semiotic domain consists mainly of animation, which is one of many visual modes. Animation is interesting here, as while it cannot be defined as literal representation of the world, it does resemble reality, and is thus not completely arbitrary either. Apart from animation, language as a hyper-modal entity plays an important role, since language can be found as part of both the written text-based mode as well as the auditory mode

in the form of oral language. There are also a few instances of written text in the form of written announcements that indicate the current weekend-day, as well as an audio track in the form of characters' dialogue. Moreover, audio tracks containing sound and dialogue are used to further convey meaning. The series' general construction process will become especially important during the show's analysis according to Withalm's (136-138) cycle model. In addition to the semiotic domain, there is the material-technological component, through which *Weekenders* can be understood as television show, more specifically as an animated series. It is created by means of both hand-drawings as well as computer software, so as to create enough images to make the motives visibly move. Lastly, there is the cultural domain, and as was the case with *Unfortunate Events*, *Weekenders* is yet another meta-narrative that seems to push cultural and ideological boundaries as much as semiotic and technical boundaries. Although not as aggressively as *Unfortunate Events*, *Weekenders* also questions dichotomies such as that of feminine and masculine by taking traits from both categories and distributing them equally to all characters. Lor, for instance, likes sports but also falls for an older boy, whereas Carver is very fashionable but still struggles with traits that are considered masculine in society such as judging female suitors by their looks. Likewise, strong differences between 'good' and 'bad' are undermined as well, as several episodes end by showing that the apparent antagonist has a history and their own subjective motives. In contrast to *Unfortunate Events*, however, *Weekenders* does not question the superior role of the adult, and although there are positive and negative encounters with adults, every problem is ultimately solved by an adult, namely Tino's mother, who offers advice in each episode.

To relate Ryan's domains to narratology (266-270), the narratological concepts to be discussed here can be found on the level of the semiotic domains, which are influenced by material-technological components. The cultural domain will not receive much attention here, but will still be considered during the empirical part of this thesis.

Turning to narratology, Nikolajeva's (174-183) narrative levels and agencies shed yet more light onto *Weekenders* as a meta-narrative, and that creates an illusion of reality. As for the narrative levels, what is notable is the fact that, even more so than with *Unfortunate Events*, Tino cannot be completely assigned to either the metadiegetic or the diegetic narrative level. Although he is clearly part of the diegetic level and experiences adventures with his friends, he continuously stops time or slows it down

seemingly to talk to viewers and explain what is going on or to give his opinions on occurrences. In a way, the series goes so far as to make the diegetic level apparent to viewers. When he stops time, everything apart from Tino turns black and white, making the audience absolutely aware of his having entered the metadiegetic narrative level, leaving behind the diegetic level (“Home@Work” 01:09). Pointing towards the existence of these levels might raise awareness of the show’s constructedness, but there is also reality potential in them. As is the case with *Unfortunate Events*, viewer involvement is a key element here, and this is once more created by melting narrative agencies. The viewer is directly addressed constantly by characters, especially Tino, who continue to break the barrier between the agency of narration and reception. In addition, the narratee, the implied viewer and the real viewer melt together, when the fictional narrator and alleged creator Tino and his friends address the viewer, ask them questions and more. Though the characters naturally only address an implied viewer, the real viewer feels like the actual addressee, as if part of a conversation. In “Secret Admirer”, for instance, Carver receives an anonymous love letter and suspects it might be someone from the audience, seemingly pointing at the viewer and exclaiming: “(...) Everyone is a suspect, even you! No, not you, her! The one with the glasses and the halter top” (01:25). Like *Unfortunate Events*, *Weekenders* use of the pronoun ‘you’, indicating strongly that the viewer is being addressed. The visual mode of animation further intensifies the effect by having Carver point at people in the audience. The viewer does not feel like a passive spectator, but much rather like they are taking part in the action, as if they were meeting up with friends and spending the weekends together. The characters, it seems, can see them the way the viewers can see the characters (Nikolajeva 171-173).

Tino’s act of blurring narrative levels becomes even stronger when considering Nikolajeva’s (182-183) specification of time and space in the form of hetero- and homodiegetic as well as intra- and extradiegetic types of narrators. As for time, it seems clear that Tino functions as an intradiegetic narrator, as he narrates and explains happenstances as they occur. Even more than that, he almost seems to be in control of time, as he can stop it at will, no matter how precarious the moment might be. During a tense scene for Lor, when her crush comes to talk to her, Tino interrupts right in the midst of it, so as to point out the gravity of the moment (“Makeover” 02:24). Thus, not only is Tino an intradiegetic narrator but he also seems to be in control of

said intradiegetic level. As for his position as a hetero- or homodiegetic narrator, this is more difficult. Although he is continuously part of the story, which makes him a homodiegetic narrator, the fact that he continuously jumps to the metadiegetic level suggests that there are also heterodiegetic tendencies. Here, the viewer is of importance again: by leaving the diegetic narrative level, Tino tries to make the audience part of the scene. The jumping between levels is necessary for him to keep intact the involvement of the viewer, and thus a large part of the reality effect.

As has become clear, what is essential with regard to creating this reality effect is Tino's role as a narrator, as he is most prominent in communicating with the audience. However, this role as the narrator can also be complicated at times: like Snicket, Tino appears to be more than an average narrator. Although the medium of animation complicates this effect, *Weekenders* tries to leave viewers under the impression that Tino is not just the narrator but also the real creator or at least in creative control. However, it is not the animation process he is in control of, but instead he gives the impression that he is part of a live action production, similar to a reality show. Here, Withalm's cycle model comes into play: as has been pointed out earlier, she emphasises that especially when it comes to film, there are several stages of creating a product in addition to reception and the product itself, namely production and distribution. As for distribution, there are no strong differences in distributing an animated show and a live action show; however, during production of a live action show, a camera would have to be present in order for the scenery to be filmed, a production crew would be present as well as actors and other such elements. Animation, in contrast, is created through digital drawing and painting. When established as the creative force of the show, Tino is not in charge of animation in any way, but he acts much more like a director and a host. At times, rather than greeting viewers like friends, Tino welcomes the audience like a self-conscious television host rather than a self-conscious drawing. His powerful position as part of this alleged live action production is emphasised when his friends become the focus of the episode. They sometimes get to take over, but can only do so after asking him for permission ("Brain Envy" 02:38). Another instance can be found in "The Tao of Bluke", in which Tino is too busy trying to solve a puzzle, so he demands a host for the episode ("Hey, can we get somebody in here to bring everyone up to date?" (01:21)), but then lets him go as he decides throughout that he is not right for the job (11:03). As for his

position as a director, at the end of “Nevermore” Tino instructs one of his friends to act as a kind of prop for the episode’s outro (21:56). What the show does here is disregard its animated constructedness by persisting that it is, in fact, live action. Tino is presented not just as the narrator and character of the show but also as the director and host of the show. This way, the narrative agency levels between narrator and author, or in this case, creator, are blurred, creating another kind of reality illusion, different to the one described above, in which viewer involvement is crucial. However, the fact that there are two ways of reality illusion and thus two roles for Tino to fill, creates a problem. The existence of him as a host in a one-way communication on the one hand and his existence as a friend in a dialogical type of situation create a discrepancy: which reality pretence should young viewers buy into? Should they believe the show’s attempt to imitate a live action production, or should they feel immersed through viewer involvement? It seems they cannot work at the same time. If the viewer sits on the other side of a screen, watching characters with help of a camera, one has to wonder how they can be actively part of the action. The show’s own inconsistency in logic might strongly disturb its own reality effect.

A second problem in this regard which has also been hinted at above is the show’s strong medial barrier in the form of its animated constructedness, corresponding to the level of Ryan’s material-technological domain. In comparison, *Unfortunate Events* enjoys the comfort of the medium of the book, which could be labelled as fiction as well as non-fiction, and can thus appear physically real more easily. As an animated series, however, *Weekenders* does not have this option. The animated show is dependent on other ways of further insisting on its reality effect, and like *Unfortunate Events*, meta-effects help create this illusion. Withalm’s (128-130) cycle model can be used to point out how exactly the TV show attempts to do this. Her level of the product as part of her self-referential cycle model shows one way of keeping up the pretence, namely through instances of intertextuality and intermediality. To name an example for intermediality, the episode “Celebrity” portrays Tish’s accidental rise to fame as a television star and she is shown in front of the camera, acting (03:37). Likewise, in the episode “Real Fake” a film student wants to shoot a short film of Tino and his friends and their lives. The children are worried that their real selves might not be interesting enough so they decide to act in stereotypical and extreme ways in front of the student to seem more interesting. Here, an intermedial viewpoint shows the programme’s

shedding light onto the process of shooting real-life movies by putting its very own characters in the spotlight of a short film. The protagonists' research of their roles, their choosing costumes and the filming process are all highlighted in the course of the episode, making the constructedness of a live action series apparent (03:07-04:34). What is interesting here is that the show again only alludes to live action production and completely ignores animation. Still, due to its frequent pretending to be a live action series, these intermedial references become meta-elements. Once more, however, these allusions to constructedness are used here to further the reality effect, making the audience forget about the production process of animation. As long as it is the live action process that the audience identifies *Weekenders* with, as long as they buy into the lie of the production process, one step closer to the reality effect is already taken. Self-references to their alleged constructedness as a live action show, then, help here rather than disturb. Intermedial references can also be found in the form of the characters' active use of other media, especially during moments of audience engagement. This is especially noticeable whenever Tino or the current narrator of the episode explains something to the viewers and needs technical support in doing so. One such instance can once again be found in the episode "Brain Envy", in which Lor uses a remote control as well as slides only the audience can see in order to show the differences between her and Tish's brain (02:48). Like in *Unfortunate Events*, this is yet another example that shows that creating awareness of constructedness does not necessarily confirm a text's fictionality. Although Lor uses intermedial help, thus making the viewers aware of the general medial constructedness of the episode, she still does so in order to engage more closely with viewers, and thus the use of intermediality becomes part of the reality illusion rather than breaking it.

Regarding intertextuality, the one shared literary entity the show references is Shakespeare and his works. As Tish is a big fan of Shakespeare, his plays are frequently mentioned, either by quoting lines or even in form of the whole play being performed on stage within the series, as is the case in the episode "To be or Not to be". However, hardly any other specific references to literary or even film products can be found. This might be due to two works' difference in timeliness: *Unfortunate Events* never specifies its time period, and therefore does not have to refer to specific events or cultural products in order to seem realistic. *Weekenders*, on the other hand, is deeply entrenched in the early 2000s in terms of popular culture and trends, and

therefore would have to include intertextual references of that time. Due to legal reasons, this was probably not possible during the show's running time. Instead, the show makes references to phenomena or texts in popular culture that are very similar to what viewers are probably acquainted with. For instance, in "To be or Not to be", Tino and his friends exit the cinema, apparently bored, and above the entrance, the theatre's sign reads 'Stair Wars', indicating that children wanted to see *Star Wars* but misread the sign and accidentally ended up in the wrong movie (01:40). This way, a reference to the franchise can be made without actually having to address it openly (Withalm 128-130).

Another narratological concept to consider here is that of unreliability. Both Tino as a narrator, as well as his friends, constantly seem unreliable either due to their lack of knowledge regarding certain topics or their emotionality. In "Brain Envy", for instance, Lor talks about the anatomy of her, Tish's and a dolphin's brain. Her hesitant tone as well as her use of hedging devices here make it clear that she is not completely sure about the accuracy of her statements (02:48). As for the influence of emotions, Tish becomes less reliable at the end of the episode "Celebrity", when first, she promises that she has learned her lesson, only to have her arrogance take over again and go back on her promise (22:01). The difference in comparison to unreliability in literature, especially *Unfortunate Events*, is that the series does not try to leave the audience in the dark in terms of the occurrences of the series. Since the viewer is a third-person spectator, they can see and judge for themselves, thus unreliability does not influence viewers' knowledge. Instead, the device is used to as to have the characters appear more complex, more human, and thus, more real. Although this is successful in emphasising a two-way communication situation, it also makes for an even larger discrepancy within its reality effect, due to the show's live action elements (Nikolajeva 178-179).

Only once does *Weekenders* itself actively suggest that it might be completely fictional in an instance similar to the meta-effect mentioned above during the discussion of *Unfortunate Events*. In the episode "Real Fake" (11:16), Tino considers his and his friends' fictionality, wondering whether they all just might be fictional characters in a television show. As with *Unfortunate Events*, however, the moment of actual truth regarding what is real and what is not is ultimately brushed off as a light-hearted joke.

All in all, despite its efforts, the show's animated nature as well as its faulty logic in terms of its reality pretence makes it difficult for viewers to buy into the reality effect. Instead of only going for the imitation of live action or the very active viewer involvement, a mixture of both is used so as to create an illusion of reality, while fighting against the limitations of its own medium and modes. In comparison to *Unfortunate Events*, this makes the illusion less effective, and shows the importance of the medium in the narrative process, especially in this case of immersive meta-narratives. Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that the series tries hard to appear real, and again, the blurring of the narrative levels and agencies plays a crucial role, as does its persistence being live action. Although not as convincing in its techniques, the attempt is still clear to see, and there are numerous immersive, meta-effects throughout all episodes. The question that arises here is whether children really do feel immersed in the show by its unconventional use of narratological concepts and cinematic code, which will be analysed during the empirical study below.

4.2. Close Reading

The next step of the analysis contains close readings of the examples that will be used as part of the empirical study. These are, on the one hand, the third part of the book series *Unfortunate Events*, *The Wide Window*, and on the other hand "Shoes of Destiny", the third episode of *Weekenders*. This close analysis will again focus on the medial domains and the narratological concepts used above as well as make first conclusions as to which specific elements children might find especially immersive.

4.2.1. Lemony Snicket's *The Wide Window*

The Wide Window, the third book of *Unfortunate Events*, is in many regards the ideal book to use for the empirical analysis. In comparison to its predecessors, *Window* is more daring in its complexity of narratology and at the same time still rather expositional, regarding the Baudelaires' story, making it a good book to show to children who are unfamiliar with the series.

Mirroring the text analysis above, this section will first consider the book's characteristics with regard to Ryan's (266-268) medial domains. Regarding the semiotic domain, the modes used are written text, including iconographic representations of written language, as well as illustrations. However, in contrast to subsequent entries in the series, the illustrations here are still rather conventional for

a children's book. The material-technological domain defines it as a book, although the representation of modes might change if the book is consumed in form of an e-book, as has already been stated above. Finally, as for the cultural domain, *Window* is not as daring and convention-breaking as the later books in the series; Count Olaf is still regarded as the villain, while the Baudelaires are unquestionably the heroes of the story. However, in terms of gender, for instance, the book does try to break up the dichotomy between the feminine and the masculine. To name one example, Violet Baudelaire is a talented inventor and good at working with tools, which is not usually considered a feminine skill.

The first time a reader holds the book in their hand, the cover will already give them the impression that Lemony Snicket has to be the author. The front cover features an illustration of the Baudelaires as well as the title and, most importantly, it lists Lemony Snicket as the author, thus creating the illusion that Snicket has written the book himself (*Window* Front Cover). As for the back cover, it further supports the notion of Snicket as the author as well as narrator of the book, by providing a letter to the reader written by Snicket. Here, he does not only give a preview for the Baudelaires' story but further emphasises that he is both the writer and the narrator: "I will continue to record these tragic tales, for that is what I do" (Back Cover). It is the first time a reader has the impression that the narrative agencies of narrator and author seem to be blurred in the book. What is more, the letter also features first instances of directly addressing the reader ("You, however, should decide for yourself whether you can possibly endure this miserable story" (Back Cover)), which helps dissolve the barrier between the narrative agency of author or narrator and reader. Both elements strengthen the image of Snicket as a real-life person addressing another person, the reader. Further emphasising the illusion of reality, the letter concludes with a handwritten signature attributed to Lemony Snicket, as well as a seal featuring his initials. This gives the reader the impression that Snicket might have actually held the book in his own hands and signed it (Nikolajeva 172-173).

The blurring of narrative agencies becomes even stronger throughout the book. Without ever using his name to introduce himself, Snicket continues to write in the same writing style as on the book cover and frequently describes his writing process ("It is a terrible thing, their misfortune, so terrible that I can scarcely bring myself to write about it" (2)). These instances emphasise further that the narrator must also be

the author, namely Lemony Snicket as stated on the cover. Another example even features him commenting on his publisher's wishes regarding his writing, which evokes Withalm's (125-136) cycle model on the level of distribution and marketing: "The good people who are publishing this book have a concern they have expressed to me. The concern is that readers like yourself will read my history of the Baudelaire orphans and attempt to imitate some of the things they do" (*Window* 145). Again, although this reference points out the book's constructedness, it is the believability of the construction process that gives readers the impression that Snicket could really exist. What is more, this example also features the breaking of the barrier between the different agencies of narrator and author as well as the reader.

Another way the book furthers a reality illusion is by hinting at the fact that the reader and Snicket both exist in the same realm with a shared pool of literature and history through the use of intertextuality. At the end of the book, he uses intertextual references to fairy tales such as Snow White, and refers to World War I (212). Although experienced readers might see through this illusion, younger readers might be more open to believing the book's insistence on Snicket as a narrator and author who actually exists in their world. The fact that he exists in the same universe as the Baudelaires, as well as the reader could definitely give the reader the impression that Snicket, the Baudelaires and their adventures are physically real.

As for the narrative levels provided by Nikolajeva (182-185), *Window* stands out from the other books in the series in that it is the first one in which Snicket seems to move away from his role as a heterodiegetic narrator and becomes a homodiegetic narrator. This is done rather timidly, on the extradiegetic level and without his leaving the metadiegetic space; he always tells the story from afar, and yet the change is significant. For the first time, readers have reason to suspect that Snicket is not just the narrator, or even author, but also part of the Baudelaires' realm. The first instance to suggest this can be found at the end of chapter five, in which he tells the reader that he would love to go back in time and warn the Baudelaires about their future misfortunes. Although still extradiegetic with regard to time, Snicket would have to exist in the same universe in order to be able to travel back in time and see them, indicating his existing on the diegetic level. An even stronger example can be found soon after this one, when Snicket claims to have investigated the children's case: "My own research tells me that the children watched in mute amazement (...)" (*Window*

126). His research process is further described on the very last page of the book, where readers can find a telegraph by Snicket to his publishers, describing where he is currently investigating and how they can get hold of his script (N.P.). Again, taking into account Withalm's (125-136) levels of self-reference, these examples of meta-elements correspond to the level of the product, production, and distribution, but the meta-effect furthers the reality illusion rather than break it. This is because the distribution process and writing process make his role as a real-life person an author more realistic. The instance might point towards the work's constructedness, but this constructedness is part of the reader's and Snicket's shared society, in which books simply have to be written and printed by someone. What is crucial here is the fact that only the construction process of the books is pointed out, not his or the Baudelaires' fictionality – this is how the reality pretence can be kept up. This in combination with his authority as the author make him and the story appear real.

Lastly, intermediality, in contrast to other books in the series, is less frequent in *Window*. Still, one illustration at the beginning of chapter six makes use of handwriting as a different mode opposed to printed text. The first page of the sixth chapter in *Window*, for instance, has a combination of the two, featuring an illustration of a hand that writes the words "Chapter Six", which hints at a hand-written suicide note of a character that is discussed throughout the following pages (83). Generally speaking, this element alludes to the work's constructedness rather than make it appear more real. However, in combination with the narratological concepts, the visual meta-effects function as a humorous element that keeps readers entertained, without necessarily breaking the reality illusion (Withalm 130).

In sum, *The Wide Window* is a good example to show to children during the empirical study. Its blurring of narrative levels and agencies with the help of elements such as Snicket's name on the cover, his description of the production process and his putting himself on the level of the reader as well as that of the characters create a strong illusion of reality. It remains to be seen whether the interviewed children will believe the pretence.

4.2.2. *The Weekenders*' "Shoes of Destiny"

Similar to *The Wide Window*, "Shoes of Destiny", the third episode of *The Weekenders*, also serves as a good example to show to children who are unfamiliar

with the show. Due to its early position in the series, it is still rather expositional, making it easy for inexperienced viewers to follow. In the episode, Tino's friend Carver becomes one of the 'cool kids' by having fashionable shoes, but then realises that he prefers being with his friends. Following the pattern established in the previous section, the episode will be analysed according to the theoretical criteria established above, including Ryan's medial domains and concepts of narratology.

As for the medial domains, specifically the semiotic domain, "Shoes of Destiny" behaves much like other episodes in that its main modes include visual impulses, written text, as well as sound, both oral language and sound effects and music. As indicated above, language plays a hyper-medial role here, influencing both written text and oral speech. Regarding the material-technological domain, the episode is an eleven-minute-long television show, initially created to be consumed via television. Lastly, in terms of the cultural domain, like *The Wide Window*, "Shoes" challenges cultural norms. This does not merely happen as a side-product, but also as part of its main storyline: at the end of the episode, Carver realises his friends are already cool, and that he does not need to be friends with condescending people he does not like. This way, society's category of 'cool kids' is called in to question and delegitimised. In addition, gender norms are also turned upside down, when Carver demonstrates his love of shoes, a commonly feminine trait, and Lor cannot understand his fondness. Although the cultural domain will not be discussed in detail here, it will be interesting to see whether the children pay attention to ideological aspects of the show anyway.

In order to examine the episode's effectiveness in terms of the reality illusion, it is time to have closer look at the theoretical concepts. As stated above, *Weekenders'* main issue in successfully making viewers believe it is real lies in its production and communication logic, relating to the production level of Withalm's cycle model of self-reference. At some points, the show appears to convey that it is a live action television show; at other times, the show tries to appear real through active viewer involvement. In the case of "Shoes", the latter is much more prominent; in fact, there are hardly any allusions towards the fact that the show could be filmed like a live action series. This consistency in the reality effect should make it easier to feel immersed for viewers. Other than that, only stylistic features such as cinematography or editing create the feeling of a live action series; these will be discussed shortly. Again, the empirical analysis will show whether the illusion is successful. As has been described in detail

above, narrative agencies and narrative levels play crucial roles in creating an immersive consumption experience for viewers, causing them to feel as if Tino and his friends were real or as if they were part of the experience. Regarding further distinctions made by Nikolajeva (182-185) in relation to narrative levels, Tino frequently jumps from the diegetic level to the metadiegetic level and back, and thus changes between being a character of the story and a narrator. Similar to other episodes, “Shoes” makes aware of the metadiegetic level by turning the background behind Tino black and white (01:12). To go a step further, the narratological distinction between homo- and heterodiegetic narrator further shows that Tino’s position in the show is not completely clear. Although he is always part of the diegetic narrative level, he can also jump to the metadiegetic level at will. This effect makes it feel as if he was both with the audience as well as the characters at the same time. Regarding temporal conditions, he always acts as an intradiegetic narrator, able to stop time. He can do so even during tense situations, as for instance when he stops time and enters the metadiegetic level to tell viewers that Lor and Tish will soon realise that they might lose Carver to the popular crowd. His temporal proximity to the main story together with the strong viewer involvement, then, also invite viewers to feel as if they were watching the events unfold live on screen (07:59).

Narrative agencies, as coined by Nikolajeva (172-173), make the reality illusion ever stronger, by breaking the barrier between the viewer and Tino as the narrator. The theme song lyrics already invites the viewer to take part in the friends’ weekend (“Shoes” 00:50). Moreover, throughout the episode, Tino talks to the viewer not only in a very conversational tone, but also asks them to do things. After an introduction of himself and a presentation the issue of the episode, he leaves the picture, then moves his head back into the frame and says to the viewers: “Well, hi, what are you waiting for? Come on!”, indicating the audience should follow him (01:47). The pronoun ‘you’ here, as in *Unfortunate Events*, is crucial in addressing the viewer, creating a dialogical situation. Similarly, at the end of the episode, he also asks the viewer to “do him a favour” (11:12). The strongest break of narrative agencies, however, occurs halfway through the episode, when Tino wants to demonstrate how the cool kids view their surroundings. To do so, he uses a pair of glasses, the “Cool-O-Vision”, and seemingly puts them onto the viewer’s head, as if they were wearing the glasses themselves (03:45). This is certainly the strongest effect regarding the show’s reality pretence,

indicating that the viewers are in fact present at the scene. It will be interesting to see whether the children of the empirical study will feel immersed by this break of narrative agencies.

The next narratological concept to be discussed here is that of unreliability. Throughout the episode, Tino establishes himself as an emotional, unreliable narrator, who exaggerates in his imagination. This happens mostly in relation to Carver when Tino imagines that his friend might become so cool that Tino might only be able to meet him at red carpet events, as is demonstrated on screen ("Shoes" 05:27). During another scene, Tino conveys untrustworthiness by showing a slide of Carver's brain in comparison to a normal brain to the viewer to show its anomaly, obviously using biologically incorrect images of brains ("Shoes" 01:22). Both times, it is clear to the viewer that either Tino's emotions or his lack of knowledge interfere with his ability to provide correct information. However, this also helps strengthen the conversational tone between Tino and the audience, which in turn emphasises the reality potential of the series and, specifically, his character (Nikolajeva 178-179).

Lastly, the discussion will turn to Withalm's level of the product in terms of intertextuality and intermediality (130). As is typical for *Weekenders*, "Shoes" contains several instances of both intertextual and intermedial references. This most notably occurs in the form of viewer engagement as well as Tish's love for Shakespeare, as described above. Since this is one of the earlier episodes in the series, it is still essential to establish Tish's love for high literature, including her passion for Shakespeare. Therefore, Tish spends the entire episode using phrases from early modern English, as spoken during Shakespeare's time, such as when the cool kids approach ("Lo, yonder, the cool kids doth approach!" (03:31)). This is mostly used as a comic relief element, and at times annoys her friends in the course of the episode. Nevertheless, it is a reference to literary history that is shared by viewers, and helps create an engaging atmosphere, once more furthering the reality effect (*Shakespeare Online*). As for intermediality, the beginning of the episode has Tino use a remote control to put up slides of Carver's brain for the viewers to see. Again, this is used rather as a comic relief element, and even an instance showing Tino's unreliability, as the slide clearly does not show a normal brain but one with made up of different areas; in Carver's case, 'coolness' area has repressed all other brain parts. This instance would again rather point towards the show's constructedness, but due to the use of

intermediality in order to strengthen viewer involvement, the reality effect nevertheless stays intact.

As is clear to see, the episode is eager to create a reality illusion, while this case only rarely suffering from faulty logic regarding the production process. Indeed, compared to other episodes, “Shoes” seems to aim at creating a two-way conversational atmosphere rather than imitate the production process of a live action series. The reality illusion, thus, works through strong viewer involvement in this episode; it will be interesting to see whether children watching this episode will feel immersed and whether they question the production process at all.

In sum, narratology suggests that with the use of modes “Shoes of Destiny” aims to create a stronger sense of the conversational immersion logic instead of appearing real by imitating live action television, in contrast to other episodes. Since the strong viewer involvement works mostly through the breaking of narrative agencies, this episode is ideal to compare to the similar style of reader immersion in *Unfortunate Events*, specifically *The Wide Window*. It remains to be seen which of the two will be more effective in their reality illusion and whether *Weekenders* will be able to overcome its limitations as an animated show as well as its faulty logic. In order to investigate these concerns, the empirical study be useful.

5. Empirical Study

The empirical part of this thesis consists of several parts: first, an overview of the research methods will be given, which makes use of Messenger Davies’ comments on research regarding children’s distinction of fantasy and reality. Following this, the data that have been gathered from the different interviews will be evaluated and structured. Finally, the evaluated data will be analysed and interpreted with the help of the close readings and the theory established above.

5.1. Research Methodology

In order to confirm and correct the preliminary propositions regarding reality illusions in children’s meta-texts, a method of data collection had to be established before conducting the empirical study.

First, a theoretical survey was carried out to gain an overview of the field. The current state of research both in the field of self-reference in different media as well as the

field of children's literature and their effects were established. Afterwards, the works at hand, *Unfortunate Events* and *Weekenders* were analysed in great detail above according to their unusual metafictional behaviour and their effectivity as narratives for children. These insights served as a foundation for the empirical study.

Next, participants were selected. The minimum requirements for candidates were age (ten to twelve years old) and language (either bilingual or English native speakers). Resulting from this two girls and two boys were chosen to participate in the study. More on them and their demographic details can be found in the following chapter.

As far as the method is concerned, a method mix was chosen, as suggested by Messenger Davies, however, excluding quantitative analysis. She notes that, while quantitative research is more typical in order to elicit large-scale representative data on children's fantasy/reality distinction, qualitative analysis can provide further insight into children's motives, preferences and habits. Thus, the latter method was picked to understand the connection between the children's consumption experience and the texts at hand, as well as their formal characteristics, especially narratology. At the end of this discussion, these qualitative interviews will be combined with close readings of the works at hand so as to analyse accurately the exact relation between the children's reactions and the meta-elements (133-134).

The study consists of guideline-based interviews, which have been carried out according to Pflüger (2013, 97-105). During these, each child was first asked about their habits and preferences in regard to reading and television to provide a comfortable interview environment as well as to see, whether they had any experiences with metafiction in children's narratives. Following this, each candidate was presented with excerpts featuring a large number of meta-effects from the third book of *A Series of Unfortunate Events*, *The Wide Window*. Due to time restraints, it was impossible to let them read the whole book. As for *The Weekenders*, "Shoes of Destiny" from season one was shown to them in full length. After each reading and viewing session, they were asked to answer several questions about their opinions and their observations regarding both narratives, with a special focus on whether they considered the stories real or not. Afterwards, the children were asked to compare the two narratives and describe their differences and similarities, and lastly, to share their favourite parts. During the interviews, Messenger Davies' (127-136) examination of

children and the study of their distinction of fantasy and reality was kept in mind; she stresses the importance of the interview setting. When testing children's understanding of reality and fantasy through empirical experiments, the problem of the setting's constructed nature arises: how is it possible to test the ability of children to differentiate between reality and fantasy when the interview situation itself is already fake? This has been avoided here by breaking down hierarchy of interviewer and interviewee as much as possible. A discussion of equals was created, rather than using patterns of questions and answers to elicit children's opinions. In addition, the children were assured that there were no right or wrong ideas in this discussion of the works at hand but rather, all their thoughts were valid. This way, it was made clear that they were not subjects of an experiment but rather partners finding out what makes the narratives at hand so unusual in their storytelling processes.

In terms of data evaluation, Pflüger (97-105) suggests qualitative coding, which is the most common method that is based on Grounded Theory. Instead of building a scheme before going about the guideline-based interviews, a categorisation system as well as a coding system have been developed following the interviews. The system combines the most important topics of the guideline and new points that come during the interviews. The coding grid as well as the categorisation system can be found in the appendix.

After categorising the data at hand, content analysis will help make sense of the vast amount of information and filter the most important thematic points, while keeping in mind the preliminary propositions established earlier. Here, Pflüger (97-105) provides guidelines as to how this should be managed. Following her model, the data will be analysed in relation to the theoretical perceptions above, especially those discussed by Messenger Davies, as well as formal features in the form of narratology in relation to *Unfortunate Events* and *Weekenders*. Finally, the insights gained will help confirm or correct the preliminary propositions established at the beginning of this discussion and research questions for further studies can then be generated.

5.2. Data Evaluation and Results

Having gone into detail about the research methods and the models that will be used during the analysis, it is time to turn to the collected data. First, the demographic

questionnaires will be evaluated, then the guideline-based interviews will be investigated.

5.2.1. Demographic Questionnaires

Before looking at the guide-line based interviews, the participants' demographic details will be briefly laid out and analysed. What should be pointed out here is the fact that especially in the case of questionnaire, children as much as adults are likely to lie in order to make a good impression. Although all participants were made aware of the fact that there are no positive or negative answers to any of the questions, their answers might nevertheless be inaccurate at times.

In order to ensure their anonymity, they will be called by pseudonyms, Jason, Aaron, Lily and Anna. All children are currently between ten and twelve years old and either in fifth or sixth grade, which made them suitable for this study as they were within the target group for both narratives at hand. With regard to their first languages, all of them were multilingual, with three of them having one Austrian and one English-speaking parent, either American or Irish. Aaron, in contrast, was of Arabic and Austrian descent, went to a francophone primary school and then changed to an English-speaking school at the age of eleven. Although his English skills were certainly good enough to participate in this study, there was nevertheless a difference between his understanding of the texts at hand and that of the other children, as will become evident.

As far as their media consumption habits are concerned, Jason as well as Aaron claimed to watch from approximately one to three hours of television a day, whereas Lily noted that she watched several times a week and Anna said she watched less often than several times a month. The latter, however, is rather unlikely as Anna seemed to be rather informed in terms of the current television programmes for children. What was rather striking here was the fact that none of the children were particularly interested in cartoons, as all of them named live action television programmes as their favourites. As for their reading habits, Jason and Lily maintained that they read several books a month, whereas Anna and Aaron claimed they read a book in one week; however, Aaron later explained that he was not fond of reading and that it was due to school that he read a book per week. What should be taken into consideration here is that the children might have not answered honestly, so as not to

give the impression of being lazy. In addition, regarding their television habits, it was interesting that the children preferred live action shows, a fact that might have to do with their preteen age. It could also be one reason for *Weekenders*' imitation of live action shows, as their target group are preteenagers.

With these basic facts in mind, the interviews were conducted so as to explore the texts together with the children and discuss their reactions.

5.2.2. Evaluation of Guideline-Based Interviews

The evaluation of the interviews is structured according to different focus points, so as to understand the most significant issues that were raised. Some of these were pre-defined in relation to the main topics of this examination, others transpired organically throughout the interviews. The assessment will start by looking at the children's general experiences with children's meta-texts. After that the most important issue, namely distinction of fantasy and reality, will be examined: this has been divided into their recognising physical and ideological reality. Finally, the children's enjoyment of the different narratives and their narratology and their media will be explored.

5.2.2.1. General Experiences with Meta-Texts

To begin with, the participants' general experiences with meta-narratives will be analysed. Due to the nature of one-time hour-long interviews, only a limited amount of information could be gathered on the matter. The most important point here was to establish in what ways the children were already familiar with metafictional conventions so as to interpret their reactions to the texts at hand. Thus, they were asked to describe their consumption preferences and experiences of other cultural texts.

In order to create a conversational atmosphere but also so as to have a better insight into the children's experiences with television programmes and literature, they were first asked about their general media consumption habits. What was rather striking here, was the fact that already, the children started bringing up meta-narratives. Jason, for example, was the only one of the participants who did not name the *Harry Potter* series as his favourite book series, but rather the *Goosebumps* series, which also includes meta-elements, as he even identified himself ('In *Goosebumps*, the writers always go 'Welcome to my office'). His favourite show, the rather old *Drake & Josh* by

Nickelodeon, also has instances of meta-effects, as for example, the main characters always address the audiences in a documentary-like manner at the beginning of each episode. Lily, too, seemed to consume narratives that contained meta-effects. Even though she mentioned that the *Harry Potter* series was her favourite book series, she later noted that she generally preferred books that were set during the Second World War or based on real events. As an example, she named the highly metafictional *The Book Thief* by Markus Zusak as one of her favourite books, a novel set during WWII that deals with writing stories. In addition, among several shows with slight meta-effects, she named Nickelodeon's *100 Things To Do Before High School* as her favourite show, which, like *Weekenders*, features a prominent narrator that will at times look into the camera and explain what is happening, apparently to the audience. Although the protagonist here is not as ambiguous as *Weekender's* Tino in terms of her position between narrative agencies and levels, the breaking of the fourth wall can nevertheless be detected here. As for Anna, who was the youngest participant, she listed the originally French cartoon *Angelo Rules* as her favourite television programme, another slightly self-referential programme where the protagonist sometimes addresses the viewers to further explain plot points. Merely Aaron showed the least interest in meta-effects in relation to his general literature and television preferences, but also throughout the interview. He claimed his favourite television series was *School of Rock*, a spin-off television show of the original 2003 movie, which he liked because it was targeted at kids rather than teenagers, but which does not include any meta-elements in its current episodes. Similarly, he named the *Harry Potter* series as his favourite book series; again, while very popular with children of this age group, the series does not feature meta-elements.

Interestingly, all participants were able to draw parallels between the texts they were presented with and others they knew from their own consumption experience. Aaron, although otherwise least sensitive to meta-effects, was reminded of the Disney spin-off television show called *The Emperor's New School*, when confronted with the examples at hand. In the series, the protagonist is aware of the different segments of his show and will address viewers and discuss plot points of the episode with them. Likewise, the other participants compared the two texts to similar shows and books such as the *Wimpy Kid's Diary* series or Disney's *Liv and Maddie*, both of which contain slight meta-effects.

What is certainly clear to see here is the fact that meta-effects seem to have become a noticeable part of in texts aimed at children, although perhaps not as strikingly as in *Weekenders* and *Unfortunate Events*. Apart from that, first hints at the children's responsiveness to meta-texts became apparent here, with Lily rather interested in meta-narratives and Aaron showing hardly any curiosity for it.

5.2.2.2. Distinction: Physical Reality

The most significant issue examined in the course of the interviews was the children's reception of the texts as fantasy or physical reality. Indeed, as theorised earlier, there is strong evidence that the meta-effects in these texts created an illusion of reality for the four children. Rather than discussing the texts' constructedness, the participants played with the idea of the narratives and their characters potentially being real. As also suggested above, narratological concepts also seemed to be significant in generating this effect.

Out of the two texts, *Unfortunate Events* was to be the more successful example with regard to pretence of reality, and Lemony Snicket as a narrator played an important role here. Before analysing the children's takes on the matter, it is important to explain how their statements on the work's fictionality could be elicited. As has been mentioned, all children were provided with an image of the cover of one of the books, on which the writing "by Lemony Snicket" clearly credits him as the author (*Wide Window*, Front Cover). During the discussion, they were asked for the author's name; after hesitation, they all either looked at the cover and read out his name or asked the interviewer to repeat the name. When the latter occurred, which was the case with Anna and Jason specifically, the interviewer would then check the cover of the book, the children would follow the interviewer's example and they would read out loud the name together. This confirmation process of Snicket as the author was crucial in order to see whether any of them questioned the authority of narrative agency of the real author here established, in the form of the author's name on the cover. Following this, all participants read a selection of pages, containing various meta-element that have been analysed above. To begin with, the children were asked for peculiarities within the writing style and formal features. Here, Aaron was the only one to not focus on the narrating style at all but rather tried to make sense of the small pieces of information on the Baudelaires. In contrast, the other children were quick to notice the narrator:

even before finishing the pages, Jason asked whether the book was about writing books. Similarly, when Lily and Anna were asked what they thought about these pages, they immediately described the narrator and his writing style, both claiming they felt “guided” through the pages by him.

As for identifying the alleged author, Snicket, as the narrator, this was not simple for the participants. Apart from Lily, none of the children were absolutely certain that the first person narrator was Snicket, although after some discussion all came to the conclusion that he had to be. Anna and Aaron specifically needed additional readings together with the interviewer in order to establish who could be behind the ‘I’ in their excerpts, and especially Anna considered many other identities behind the narrator, including Violet Baudelaire and Count Olaf. This likely has to do with the fact that they were only given a limited amount of pages to read within a few minutes rather than being able to read a whole book or more over several days or weeks.

However, one point that all participants were certain about which was that Lemony Snicket, as the author listed on the cover of the book, had to be a real person. As Anna put it, he had to be real “‘cause he wrote the book“. Snicket’s name on the cover seemed to be an important trigger for the children here; the concept of pen names was not brought up by them. Likewise, when it was mentioned that Snicket claimed to have seen corridors made of human skull, Anna interrupted to ask whether he really had seen such a thing. Not only did she trust Snicket to be real here, but she also was willing to believe his having seen unlikely and scary places such as the one described, demonstrating how convincing the book’s pretence was to her.

Once each child assumed Snicket to be both author and narrator, the question was whether the children also went as far as to believe the Baudelaires’ story was real. This was especially difficult, as the children had not read much of their story but rather pages that focused on Snicket. So as to give them context, the plot was explained to them in addition to story elements visible in the excerpts. At first, when asked about the possibility of the Baudelaires’ story being real, the children were not as confident in their responses as they were regarding Snicket’s existence. Initially, all participants stated that the Baudelaires’ diegetic level had to be fictional, including the burning of their house and parents and the evil Count Olaf and his pursuit of them. Aaron, for instance, found reason for this in the form of the visual mode, the illustrations. When

presented with the book cover illustrations showing Count Olaf and the children, he pointed out that due to Count Olaf's evilness, visible from the blue-grey colour of his face, the Baudelaires' diegetic level could not be real ("Because their evil guardian (...) he also looks blue in his face (...) now I think: 'Ah, first thing: evil.'")

However, when confronted with Snicket's insistence of having been to the same places as the Baudelaires, the children had difficulties to make sense of whether the Baudelaires' diegetic could be real or not. To name an example, without being explicitly asked, Anna initially stated that she thought Lake Lachrymose was "probably fake", as she thought the name sounded ridiculous. In connection to this, she also declared the Baudelaires' story had to be fake, when further questioned. Later, however, she changed her mind on the existence of the lake. When asked to consider Snicket being able to do research on the lake, she suggested the book could be "based on a real story" and that Lake Lachrymose was probably real, but the Baudelaires and Count Olaf were not. Similarly, Lily was also not completely dismissive of the diegetic story's potential to be real. Although she could not believe the existence of an evil Count committing arson, she still suggested the book series was probably based on real events: "because [Snicket] could have, like, researched a few things, because maybe he based the story on something". In addition to this, Lily later mentioned *Unfortunate Events* again in relation to real stories; when describing her reading preferences, she claimed to be liking books which were based on real events, such as Snicket's series, again emphasising her belief in parts of the narrative. Like Anna and Lily, Aaron believed Snicket was real while the Baudelaires were not; however, he suggested that Snicket was trying to make readers believe in the story in order make it more thrilling. This is interesting, as Aaron, despite his little contact with metafiction prior to the interview, was the only one here who was able to make out the act of pretence. This points towards the fact that there could be a correlation between the fondness of meta-texts and the willingness to be immersed, which will be discussed further below. In general, however, *Unfortunate Events* still succeeded in convincing Aaron of Snicket's alleged identity as the author and narrator, giving him the impression the series was rather a story full of tricks written by a cunning and ever-present author.

What becomes clear here is the fact that Snicket's ability to jump around between narrative agencies and narrative levels was to have been the most significant reality

marker for the children. Other narratological elements, such as unreliability, were not addressed, which might again have to do with the fact that they only read a few pages.

As far as Disney's *Weekenders* is concerned, the show was not as convincing to the children as the book series. The two most important issues during the interviews were Tino's multi-level role as well as the discrepancy of the reality effect as described above. Regarding Tino's role, in contrast to *Unfortunate Events* above, the children had no problem identifying Tino as both a viewer-engaging narrator as well as a character in the episode. Jason specifically mentioned that he liked Tino's ability to jump across narrative agencies and levels: "That was smart (...) that he would explain to you what would happen, like what's going on. And then it's back to normal". Tino's breaking of levels was not merely noticed by Jason but appreciated, calling Tino his favourite character due to this "smart" behaviour. Lily went a step further regarding his breaking of levels and actively contemplated the existence of the metadiegetic and the diegetic levels themselves by identifying and interpreting the change in colours: "(...) He wanted us to focus on the thing that was still colourful". She identified the importance of the colourful objects and people in the frame as different from the grey background, thus pointing out the visual key difference between the metadiegetic and diegetic levels.

Although "Shoes" mostly sticks to the two-way viewer involvement in order to appear real, surprisingly, the children still seemed to notice a discrepancy regarding the series' production process. Specifically, this culminated during the scene in which Tino puts the "Cool-O-Vision" glasses on the viewer's head. Several things occur here: Tino's use of the glasses on the viewers, his jump from the diegetic to the meta-diegetic level, and a break of the narrative agencies between him as the narrator and protagonist and the viewer, creating a reality effect through viewer immersion. What was striking here was the fact that, despite the scene's strong dependency on viewer involvement, some of the children were confused as to which of the two different reality effects worked for them. Two of them, Lily and Aaron, saw similarities to live action in this scene. Both discussed the glasses as a film prop as well as the possible existence of a camera in this scene, which was brought up by the interviewer in every discussion but Lily's, who thought of this alternative herself. Aaron specifically went into meticulous detail to describe why it had to be a camera filming Tino: "It couldn't be a

lens [or] it's obvious it's for a camera, so they use a camera as a prop to see – to think he's putting it on.”

At this point in the discussions, the children were asked whether they considered the show to be physically real, and in contrast to *Unfortunate Events*, in the case of *Weekenders*, their answers were more hesitant, but still not absolutely negative. As was visible above, Lilly and Aaron, gave the impression that they considered certain elements of the show to be real. Although both negated when asked whether they did consider the cartoon characters and their world to be real, they still pointed out that there were voice actors who dubbed them, who were. Similarly, Anna saw real elements in the series auditory mode, but did not believe the characters to be physically real (“there could be people acting (...) but they couldn't be exactly the same”). More so, however, she was to be engaged in the reality illusion created through viewer involvement. When asked about the “Cool-O-Vision” scene, she did not go into detail about how it was produced but rather about its effect for her, as is evident here: “[...] We were part of the gang, and he would be putting it on like, look here, friend, put this on”. Anna described that she was feeling actively engaged by Tino's trespassing of the hetero- and self-referential level. This is reminiscent of Grieve's (375-378) comments on audience involvement as successful tool in children's metafiction and will be considered later on. As for Jason, he was the only one who was absolutely convinced *Weekenders* could not be real, assigning this to the show's medial barrier of it being animated. In general, as was the case in *Unfortunate Events*, this example shows the importance of narrative levels and agencies for the creation of reality illusion, and in what ways the discrepancy in logic apparently hinders the illusion.

The last issue to be considered here is that of Withalm's (130) product level in her cycle model, with regard to intertextuality and intermediality, which is mostly present in “Shoes” through Tish's Shakespeare references and Tino's use of slides. Indeed, the latter appreciated by several participants: Aaron, Jason and Lily all mentioned Tino's use of the slides of brains, Lily and Aaron both naming it their favourite moment of the episode. This gives possible insight into the engagement factor this scene seemed to have: the use of intermediality in combination with of viewer involvement worked well enough to make most of the participants list the scene as one of the favourites. The intertextual references to Shakespeare were picked up by Aaron: he

named Tish his favourite character due to these references, liking the way she talked “weirdly”. What is striking about these instances is that viewer involvement was apparently strengthened with the help of intertextuality and intermediality; it seems plausible that such elements could generally be potential sources of pleasure in children’s meta-narratives.

In sum, although the children differed in their interpretation of the texts, all of them were partly immersed by the meta-narratives at hand. As suggested above, *Window* medial advantage indeed came to play: the children did not question the authority of the author’s name on the cover and all connected Snicket to the personal narrator, entertaining the idea that the book was non-fictional. Interestingly, despite the medial barrier, three of the four children even considered parts of “Shoes” to be real. In both cases, blurred narrative agencies and levels achieved this reality effect. It will be interesting to come back to these insights during the interpretation of the two series, where they will be analysed and brought together more closely with the theoretical background established above.

5.2.2.3. Distinction: Ideological Reality

Apart from formal characteristics, the content of the texts was discussed as well, including their cultural or ideological components. Although not a strong focus during the close reading of the texts at hand, the children’s focus on this level calls for further examination of the matter. What should be noted here is the fact that the children would only discuss issues such as cultural dichotomies with regard to *Weekenders*. This is most probably due to the fact that in the case of *Unfortunate Events*, the children were mostly presented with pages pointing out Snicket’s role in *The Wide Window* rather than content on the diegetic level. Thus, the children concentrated more on the physical reality with *Unfortunate Events*, whereas *Weekenders* also elicited discussions about ideological reality.

One issue that stood out here specifically was the children’s interpretation of the episode’s core message. The episode “Shoes of Destiny” revolves around Carver, one of the protagonist and Tino’s best friends, and his quest to become one of the cool kids. When he succeeds, he soon realises that he misses his friends. When the cool kids encourage him to make fun of his best friends, he sees that his friends are the ones whose company he enjoys. When deconstructing this episode, one could thus

come to the conclusion that the categories of 'cool kids' and so-called 'geeks' are only arbitrary constructions created by society that can and should be overcome. So as to lead the children into conversation and to make sure they understood the episode's plot, all of them were asked to describe the plot as well as the core message of the story. Interestingly, the children all seemed to interpret the message in a slightly different way. This was already noticeable in their description of the episode's plot: all children listed Carver getting bored with the cool group as a major motivation to leave them, rather than missing his friends or feeling protective of them. Jason, for instance, credited Carver's act of leaving the cool group merely to their lack of entertaining leisure activities. This left the impression that to Jason, it was not Carver's sense of sense of loyalty to friends that made him realise who he wanted to be friends with, but rather his entertainment preferences.

Most significantly, however, most children did not grasp the episode's overturning of the societal category 'cool'. During his summary of the episode, Aaron, for instance, actively emphasised the legitimacy of categories such as 'cool' himself by further clarifying them. He described the conflict between the two groups, correcting the cool group's choice of the word 'geek' which he thought was not suitable, as geeks have glasses and spots and never went outside, which was not the case for Carver and his friends. In addition, when asked about the message of the episode, he stated that people did not have to be cool but rather should stay with the friends they belong with. Likewise, both Jason and Anna stated that the message of the episode was that one can also be satisfied without being part of the cool kids, as Anna put it here:

"If you want to be a cool kid, but you think your friends are more important to you, stick with your friends, because it doesn't matter if you're the lowest or the highest, what matters is that you have a friend and someone to talk to."

Merely Lily, despite listing the lack of entertainment with the cool kids as a major point for Carver's decision to leave the cool kids, was the only one to redefine the adjective cool in this context: "Doesn't matter if you're cool or not, as long as your friends – like, you have your friends, that's cool". Although she also worked with the categories 'cool' and 'geek' during the discussion, she was still the only one who re-assigned the term 'cool' to describe Carver's original group of friends rather than preserving the definition provided in the episode.

In sum, neither Aaron, Anna or Jason questioned the categories of cool kids versus other people. Even though they identified that Carver would be happier with his original friends, they still subscribed to the categories of 'high' and 'low', 'cool' and 'geek', suggesting that Carver, Tino and the rest belonged to the lower half of a scale. As was the case above, it has to be noted that the participants are hardly grown-up and fully developed in their opinions, meaning they might well change their minds or phrase the issue differently when they are older. However, as is evident with Lily, it seems that the redefinition of these social categories is possible at that age. Considering her sensitivity and fondness for meta-texts, the question arises as to whether there is a connection between the fondness for meta-narratives and questioning social norms.

Another issue that was rather striking during the discussions of the show was that of gender. Specifically, the girls paid attention to the difference in boys and girls during the episode. This is especially interesting as *Weekenders* does not conform to gender roles, as mentioned above. Both Anna and Lily were especially drawn to the character of Lor, who neither dresses nor acts in ways that girls would be considered 'girly' by western society. The two participants found that Lor was "funny", Anna putting particular emphasis on Lor as a girl who "[acts] like a boy". When asked how she felt about this, she claimed that she still liked Lor and would not mind if she had a female friend who acted that way. Lily went a step further and noted that Lor was her favourite character of the show: "At the end, she put bunny ears on Tish and she was more of a – yeah, I like her". What is striking here is the fact that the two girls, both of whom were able to warm up to both meta-texts if to a somewhat different extent, also preferred the female character who does not subscribe to society's concept of femininity. Again, there could be a correlation between the enjoyment of meta-narratives and the likeliness to question cultural norms.

Further evidence for this can be found in Aaron and Jason's choice of favourite characters. Jason was the only one to like Tino best, who also breaks conventions, both on a cultural level in terms of his emotionality as well as through his role as cross-diegetic narrator. Jason also had a lot of contact with children's meta-narratives prior to the interview, according to his own claims. Only Aaron appeared to have relatively little interest in meta-texts, and interestingly, he was also the only one to name Tish as his favourite character. Although a complex character herself, in comparison to the others, Tish is the least convention-breaking in this episode: her clothing style, her

interests and her love for rules and studying make her a culturally conventional girl. Given the little research in the field of children's meta-narratives and their effects, there have been no studies on a possible connection between the consumption of meta-narratives and the deconstruction of cultural norms. Still, considering the genre's own wish to deconstruct conventions, this definitely seems plausible and will be investigated later on during the final interpretation.

5.2.2.4. Enjoyment: Comparison

Finally, the children were asked to compare their thoughts about the two meta-narratives, and once more, their general fondness for meta-texts appeared to play a role here. Both boys noted that they preferred the show over the book, as well as Tino as a narrator and addresser of the audience over Lemony Snicket. When asked why, a major factor for both was to be the medium, as both preferred watching television shows over reading books. Apart from that, an additional issue here for Jason was Snicket's laying bare the production process of the book. Comparing the two texts, Jason criticised the narrator's first-person narration. When it was pointed out to him that Tino did so too, Jason noted a difference between the two narrators: Snicket used his role as a level-jumping narrator to point out the constructedness of the text, for instance, by mentioning the publishers. In contrast, Tino used this device to engage viewers. It becomes clear that, while Jason generally enjoyed meta-narratives, it was the interactive aspects he preferred rather than becoming aware of a text's constructedness. Again, this is interesting in relation to Grieve's thoughts on interactivity in children's metafiction (375-378).

Likewise, Aaron claimed that Snicket was too "adult" and thus less relatable than Tino, who acted like a child; thus, Aaron also preferred viewer involvement, and like Jason, felt that these allusions to constructedness were not appropriate for a novel, only acceptable "at the end of the back cover, [where] you can say anything that you want". He as well as Anna preferred Tino as the less didactic narrator. Despite Anna's dislike of Snicket's authoritative narration-style, she still enjoyed both the book and the show and was not able to pick a favourite. Once again, Lily stood out here as she was the only one to prefer Snicket's narration over Tino's. When asked for the difference between Tino and Snicket, she stated that, in contrast to what she felt was redundant commentary by Tino, Snicket provided personal insight into his own life and offered

advice and guidance, which Lily enjoyed. Although all children had different opinions on the narrators and the texts, it becomes clear that one thing none of them enjoyed was the didactic behaviour of both narrators, if to different extents. Again, this will be considered in more detail below.

In sum, the results align with the findings taken from the discussions of the texts: both *Unfortunate Events* and *Weekenders* contain strong reality potential, making all children believe in the texts' physical reality to different extents. Tino and Snicket as level-breaking narrators are the main source for reality illusions. These illusions, in turn, are then either intensified by certain features, such as Snicket's name on the cover, or weakened, as in *Weekenders*, due to the inconsistency of its reality effect. More specifically, Lily seemed to be most interested in the texts' meta-elements and considered their potential to be real the most. In addition, she was also most inclined to think critically of the texts she was given, such as when redefining the adjective "cool". Aaron, in contrast, was rather unfazed by the metafictionality and focused on the diegetic levels of the stories rather than considering the narrators on their metadiegetic levels, even when hardly any content was provided. What is more, he was also rather accepting of the categories and conditions provided by the texts at hand, hardly criticising them. As has been mentioned above, a connection between a fondness for meta-narratives and the willingness to believe in the fictional narrative's potential reality, and even critical, deconstructive thinking could be possible. This connection as well as the children's belief in the works' physical reality will be further examined during the interpretation of the results, where the empirical study and the theoretical base will come together.

5.3 Interpretation of Interview Data

In the course of the interviews, some of the assumptions in the text analysis could be confirmed, but also new issues arose, which will be discussed here as well.

Firstly, it was clear to see that *A Series of Unfortunate Events* was successful in conducting its reality illusion. Although the Baudelaires' diegetic level and its potential reality were a source of confusion for the children, all of them accepted Snicket as the real author as well as the personal narrator in the book. The main source of this reality illusion stemmed especially from the breaking of narrative agencies and levels, specifically the barrier between reader and narrator or author and that between

heterodiegetic- and homodiegetic narrator. Despite the children's first doubts about places, such as Lake Lachrymose, the events that Snicket claimed to have lived through, or even the illustrations throughout the book or on the cover did not convince the children that *Window* was in fact fictional. Especially the girls believed large parts of the story to be real or grounded in reality, which is interesting as both of them also showed most interest in meta-narratives outside the interviews. This would go beyond Grieve's (375-378) identification of reader involvement as pleasurable element in children's meta-texts, and shows the power that lies in such an immersive reality effect. If children, especially those prone to consume meta-narratives, are likely to believe in stories that could hardly be true, the question that arises as to what this effect can do to them. It shows the responsibility that comes with creating such immersive narratives, as creators do not merely tell stories but help shape children's realities.

The main source of this reality effect and the successful breaking of narrative agencies lies, on the one hand, in Snicket's name on the cover of the book, which gave all children undoubtedly the impression he had to be the author. On the other hand, Snicket's activities as the alleged author and narrator also played a significant part: his frequent metafictional descriptions of the different levels of production made his role as the author more believable, be it writing the book, doing research or his communication with the publishers. Instead of pointing out the work's constructedness and fictionality by using these self-references, Snicket, or rather Handler, only seemed to further convince the children of the work's having roots in reality. The breaking of narrative agencies was strong enough to convey this effect on its own, even without the supposedly real photographs of Snicket at the end of the book or his letter to the reader on the back cover, which the children did not get to read. The children's trust in his legitimacy went so far as to have the two girls believe in parts of the Baudelaires' story, as was shown above. Even the boys, despite their not believing in the Baudelaires' story and their not enjoying the meta-elements pointing toward the work's constructedness, still believed in Snicket's existence as the author and narrator. None of the children even played with the idea of 'Lemony Snicket' possibly being the pen name of someone else. This shows the immense amount of trust these young readers had, and perhaps other readers their age have, in the authority of the author and their influence on the work. In addition, their trust in Snicket as the author also suggests

that young readers might not differentiate yet between the narrative agencies at all, be it between narrator, implied author and the real author or those on the side of the reader. Although this claim can by no means be taken as representative for all child readers, there was nevertheless strong evidence for their large amount of trust during the interviews, and quantitative studies might be able to shed further light onto the matter.

As for *The Weekenders*, the reality illusion succeeded partly, mostly due to Tino's addressing of the viewer. The effect, however, was not as smooth as in *Unfortunate Events*. Although Tino and his breaking of narrative agencies were effective, the show's imitation of live action series in its production process was an apparent source of confusion for the participants. Regarding the strong immersive effect, all children but Lily enjoyed Tino's conversations with the viewer, all feeling like a part of the friend group depicted on screen. Here, they especially liked the interactive moments between Tino and themselves as viewers, including the brain joke he tells with the intermedial help of slides, as well as his use of the "Cool-O-Vision" glasses. Again, the strength of the reality effect confirms Grieve's (375-378) statement that metafiction (or meta-narratives in this case) becomes accessible when children are made an active part of the narrative. However, the creators' responsibility when creating stories with such reality potential should once more be emphasised here.

Despite the strength of the reality effect in the form of immersion, the children appeared distracted by the episode's imitation of a live action show, as already suggested during the text analysis. The combination of using both immersion and the imitation of live action series and its production process in order to create the illusion of reality turned out to be problematic for the full success of the illusion. Lily and Aaron were especially confused by Tino's use of the glasses, which was interesting as this moment does not openly imitate any live action production processes but rather seems to work through immersion. In addition, both suggested the use of a camera as a part of capturing this moment, contemplating the creation of the invisibility effect and identifying the glasses as a prop, while the visual effect had to be carried out by the camera itself. The question that arises here is in what ways the episode triggered them to assume the connection to a live action production. One reason might be the two participants' lack of knowledge about the production process of cartoons. In relation to this, another problem that disturbed the effectiveness of the reality illusion for the

children was the show's constructedness in terms of animation. Although some of them might not have been certain about the production of a cartoon, all knew that an animated show could not be real. Thus, the immersion was not enough to make the children forget about the medium at hand completely. Still, one should not underestimate the immersive strength in Tino's involvement of the viewer, which three of the four children claimed to enjoy, especially compared to Snicket's narrator.

One problem the participants had regarding the texts' ways of immersing the audience was their narrator's strong didactic element. With both narrators, it was pointed out by the children that either the further explanations, the advice or the strong focus on morality felt annoying. Regarding Tino's commentary on the current goings-on in the episode, Lily found it "unnecessary", whereas Jason noted it felt outdated, as children's shows today did not feature characters stating the message of the episode so obviously anymore. As for Snicket, Aaron claimed to find the constant interruptions out of place and not appropriate for a narrator, and Anna, too, felt annoyed by Snicket, specifically due to his advice for the reader. Notably, despite the children's general enjoyment of the breaking of narrative agencies and the resulting immersion, they still would have preferred narrators who are less didactic in their communication of information. One has to wonder whether they would have preferred meta-diegetic and agency-breaking narrators who are more emotional. Lily, for instance, pointed out her fondness for Snicket's emotionality. Additionally, many of them mentioned meta-programmes with agency-breaking narrators who used their conversation with the audience so as to talk about their emotional state rather than to provide information. What should also be noted is the fact that Snicket does share his feelings more in the subsequent books of the series, and that the children only were able to read excerpts of *Window* rather than the whole book. Again, no representative claims can be made here due to the study's qualitative nature, but it could be possible that more emotional narrators might have helped in establishing the connection between the narrator and the audience and thus also perhaps supported the reality effect further.

Finally, the last issue to be considered here is the children's strong reaction to the role of cultural norms and conventions in the form of ideological reality. As briefly discussed during the text analysis, both texts do not only break conventions regarding children's meta-texts and its formal characteristics, but also cultural norms. When returning to the distinction of fantasy and reality, this type of questioning social norms or

deconstruction can be found on the level of ideological or cultural reality as defined in chapter three. In the excerpts the children were given, such convention defying was especially part of *Weekenders*' "Shoes of Destiny", in which not only the protagonists break gender norms, but the general episode also evolves around redefining the social category 'cool'. Interestingly, there seemed to be a correlation between the children's affinity and prior contact to meta-texts and their reaction to the episode's likeliness to break social conventions. Aaron, for instance, was least fond of meta-narratives, judging from his comments on the texts at hand as well as his personal literary and television history. In turn, he also did not redefine the term 'cool' but rather judged the different groups in the episode in terms of their popularity, and in addition, listed Tish as his favourite character, the only protagonist who did not defy social norms in her behaviour during the episode. Lily, in contrast, had the most contact with meta-narratives across media prior to the study and, correspondingly, also appreciated the convention breaking in "Shoes". Not only was she the only one who realised the subjective worth of the word 'cool' by reusing it to describe Carver's initial friends, but she also claimed to like Lor best, a socially unconventional girl. Considering meta-narratives, their history in deconstruction and their roots in post-structuralism and post-modernism, a correlation between the fondness for the subgenre and its readers' openness to defying social norms seems reasonable. As both theories have helped establish the arbitrariness of social conventions, it only makes sense that cultural texts influenced by these ideas would contain the potential to defy conventions on a technical and a content level. In turn, readers with an affinity for the genre might also be more open to questioning norms. At this point, more research is needed on children's meta-texts by literary, cultural and effects studies so as to examine the issue further.

Having interpreted the children's statements in more detail based on the theory that was discussed above, it is now time to bring together the different insights that have been gathered.

6. Final Discussion of Results and Confirmed Theses

The final step of the analysis consists of a final interpretation of the different ideas and thoughts gained above as well as the review of the preliminary propositions established in the beginning. Here, the different theoretical viewpoints examined in the

first chapters as well as the text analyses and the empirical study are considered one last time so as to make definitive statements regarding the issue of immersive children's meta-texts, specifically the texts at hand, and their reality potential.

In order to begin this discussion about children's meta-narratives, it was essential to generate preliminary propositions that would guide this analysis. So as to confirm or correct these propositions, it was important to verify first whether other texts across media had such potential and in which ways academic communities had already dealt with it. Here, media and effects studies became of interest, which especially concentrate on children's reactions to different media, including their ability to distinguish between reality and fantasy. During this examination, several points could be established, namely that children could indeed get confused by texts. This is dependent on their cultural as well as individual experience with narratives, but also has to do with formal characteristics of the text. The latter issue especially has mostly been ignored in effects research, with the exception of a few studies on television effect, such as by Messenger Davies (1997, 2008, 2010 etc.). What is more, when approaching the issue of identifying reality, it has been established above that it is essential to distinguish between physical reality and ideological or cultural reality. Although ideological reality was initially not the focus of this thesis, it turned out to become of interest during the empirical study. With these thoughts in mind, it was then time to move on to children's metafiction and its formalities, so as to identify the reality potential in their structure. Here, the general basics of metafiction were established, specifically the genre's focus on creating awareness of constructedness, but also the importance of reader or viewer involvement in meta-narratives for children. This allows children to become active agents in the narrative process, both in animation and literature. The main source of this potential seemingly lies in narration, which then became a strong focus during the rest of the discussion, together with medial characteristics of different narratives. Useful concepts of narratology regarding children's metafiction were collected and adapted, including narrative levels, narrative agencies, intertextuality and intermediality as well as different medial characteristics. After establishing this theoretical background, partly taken from effects studies, partly taken from literary studies, it was then time to apply these concepts to the texts at hand, *A Series of Unfortunate Events* and *The Weekenders*. Their medial singularities are of essence, as it turned out: *Unfortunate Events* profits from its medium, since as

a book, it can hide behind its potentially being non-fiction, whereas *Weekenders*' reality potential is weakened by its animated constructedness, as children already know that cartoons cannot be real. The latter's reality effect is hurt even more by the fact that *Weekenders* brings two different immersive logics to the table in the attempt to appear real; yet, this effort is nevertheless easy to detect. *Unfortunate Events*, in contrast, was more consistent in its reader involvement tactics. What both texts do have in common is their breaking of narrative agencies and levels as a main source for their use of viewer or reader involvement, through which both try to appear real to their audiences. Their own constructedness is still acknowledged, but incorporated in this reality effect, as was shown above. These effects were then also confirmed during the empirical study: *Weekenders*, as suspected, was not considered to be real, but its reality potential in the form of production process and immersion was nevertheless discussed in detail by the children. *Unfortunate Events* succeeded to a greater extent, as the participants did indeed believe at least in the author's existence, and even partly in the diegetic narrative level of the Baudelaires.

The question that arises now is in what ways the preliminary propositions can be confirmed or have to be corrected and which research questions can be drawn from this research process. The most significant one here is the reality potential in children's meta-narratives, whether there was any, and if yes, in what ways the texts at hand pretended to be real. In close relation to that it was then important to find out which formalities created such a reality effect, with particular focus on narratology and medial characteristics. Lastly, the success of the potential reality pretence was further inspected with the help of an empirical study, based on the interviews of four pre-teenaged children. As for the first thesis regarding the reality potential of immersive meta-texts, evidence for this claim could be found in the case of the texts at hand. That is not to say that all meta-narratives targeted at children and that are immersive automatically feature this kind of illusion. Still, by rejecting the conventional use of narrative agencies and narrative levels in children's narratives, both *Weekenders* and *Unfortunate Events* seem to successfully convey this reality effect both in theory, as was apparent in the text analysis, as well as in practice, as the study suggested. More specifically, *Unfortunate Events* is more successful due to its medial constructedness as a book that can also be non-fiction, and Snicket's strong involvement of the reader by breaking the barrier between reader and alleged author. The empirical study was

further able to confirm the reality effect as well as the predicted problems that were identified throughout the text analysis, but new insights were gained too. It has become clear that immersive children's meta-narratives and its use of strong narrators could lead to didactic elements that might be too overbearing for children. What is more, new observations were also made in relation to Ryan's cultural domain and ideological reality defined above. The cultural domain was not analysed in detail during the text analysis. However, as became evident during the empirical study, children do pay particular attention to content and cultural realities conveyed in texts. There were many hints that pointed at a correlation between children's affinity for meta-texts and their openness to the questioning of their own environment and its constructedness. These propositions make for interesting research questions that future quantitative research as well as more detailed qualitative research can be based on. It has to be noted that this is one of very few examinations of children's meta-narratives to determine its possible effects. Many more discussions on the matter have to be carried out in order to determine the genre's different functions as well as effects on consumers. Its narrative potential, however, has certainly become visible in the course of this study, and children's meta-texts especially should be embraced by creators and academics alike, rather than deemed too difficult for child readers and viewers.

7. Limitations and Outlook

This thesis has tried to delve into the matter of immersive children's meta-narratives by combining different study fields. Both literary studies as part of the humanities and effects studies as part of social sciences have been used to analyse the texts and the interviews, taking advantage of the two different disciplines. However, there have also been several limitations with regard to the field of study. Firstly, not much research in either literary and cultural studies nor in effects research can be found regarding the study of children's meta-texts. Considering the vast narrative potential, it would be interesting to investigate whether these characteristics could also be found in other examples of children's media. Generally, a categorisation of narratological singularities and stylistic features in children's meta-texts and their use would be of interest in literary and cultural and film studies. Similarly, a closer look at children's meta-narratives by effects research would also certainly generate striking results regarding the children's interpretation of such texts.

Secondly, the frame of this study as a Master's thesis resulted in a lack of resources, in terms of time as well as data to be investigated. Ideally, another attempt at such a project would feature more participants and more time with them so as to have them view several episodes or read one entire book. To do so, several researchers would certainly be of use, rather than just one. In addition, this would help to deal with a large workload in a reasonable amount of time. On the other hand, more people attached to such a study would also provide a larger variety of outlooks on the matter and account for a discussion setting during the conduction of the study. An interdisciplinary team, for instance, comprised of scholars of literary and cultural studies as well as effects research and even psychology, considering meta-narratives and their possible effects on young readers' deconstructional abilities, might be of use here.

Apart from that, due to this study's qualitative approach, no representative claims could be made. For the purposes of this examination's, it was the right way to approach the matter of meta-narratives and their effects for the first time. Still, considering the lack of work that has other wise been done regarding the topic, a quantitative study ought to follow in order to investigate the matter from a top-down perspective. Here, a large group of children could be worked with; they could be shown either several meta-narratives or one meta-narrative in comparison to a non-metafictional one to identify differences in the children's reception and the narratives' effects.

Regarding literature in general, recent effects research has largely neglected children's reactions to literary texts, certainly also due to the little attention paid towards children's books in contrast to new media. However, such investigations are necessary so as to make more definitive claims about metafiction and its effects and to draw comparisons. What certainly has to be noted is that these studies should in no way deem certain media or narratives more useful than others. As mentioned in the introductory chapters, the driving force of effects research with regard to popular culture should not be didacticism but a strive for knowledge. If anything, research of different kinds of genres across media should attract attention to the countless possibilities that lie within narratives.

Although this study was successful in providing evidence regarding the preliminary theses generated at the beginning of this examination, these additional advances into

the matter of children's meta-texts and its effects would certainly allow for a more representative and varied look at the issue.

8. Conclusion

To sum up, this extensive look at the issue of immersive children's meta-narratives and their effects was successful in reaching the goals set at the beginning of the study. This thesis established preliminary propositions regarding reality pretence in certain meta-texts targeted at children; these were mostly confirmed and corrected and added to where necessary and transformed into research questions. The key in doing so was to find blind spots both in literary studies as well as effects studies and take the best of both worlds to create a multifaceted discussion of children's meta-narratives, including its features and its possible effects. It has been established that immersive meta-stories for children, specifically the two examples at hand, do contain a certain potential for reality pretence. This is largely due to the texts' narratological and medial singularities, with specifically audience immersion as the driving force. Additionally, the further investigation of reality and the empirical study showed that there might be a connection between the development and encourage deconstructional thinking in children and their enjoyment of meta-narratives. Although this study has several limitations that have to be taken into consideration, this bottom-up view on the matter certainly provided solid hints at the effects that meta-texts have on readers. As stated above, the study of narratives and their effects certainly deserves more attention by the academic community and hopefully, this was only one of the first stepping stone of many to follow.

Metafiction is a literary branch that has been coined as the end of literature, when really, it should be seen as a successful continuation of not just literature, but of narratives across media. The fact that meta-narratives are able to appear to be a part of their consumers' own real world, despite their core aim to show constructedness, shows the vast narrative possibilities of these stories. In addition, the hints found concerning its ability to possibly help young readers deconstruct and question the arbitrariness of their environment is astonishing. That is not to say that other fictional narratives do not carry creative potential, but to disregard metafiction as a fruitful narrative literary category is certainly not advisable either. Instead, further studies on

metafiction and meta-narratives in general ought to reveal their benefits in terms of their effects as well as its rich potential as pieces of art.

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Appendix

Coding Grid and Categorisation System

Topics	Answers
BLOCK 1 General Experiences With Metafictional Narratives	Jason: Interviewer: Your favourite show is Drake & Josh? That is so cool. Jason: Yeah. Interviewer: Awesome. Is it still on Nickelodeon or something? Jason: Yeah sometimes, but when it's late. Interviewer: Oh I see, right. Jason: I only watch it on Saturdays. Interviewer: That's so cool that you like that. Jason: There's a movie as well. (...) Jason: Cause it's funny, and it reminds me – I always visit my cousins in Ireland and it reminds me of that somehow. (...) Interviewer: What kind of books do you like? Is there a book that you recall that you liked as of late? Jason: Like, the Goosebumps series. Interviewer: Goosebumps, ah. There was a movie of that as well, right? Did you see that? Jason: Yeah. Interviewer: Did you like it? Jason: Yeah, it was good. (...) Jason: Like, it's uhm – always at the end of the chapters, it goes like, for example, if it will take – I can't come up with an example right now – So, there's a woman in the book who turned into a bird and it was so loud, and then "I woke up and I saw a feather right next to my bed" and then dot dot dot – (...) Interviewer: Uhm, the person also says "If you do not want to read the story (...) this is your last chance to put this book down" Uhm, what do you think about that? Jason: I mean, a lot of books I read, that was in them, but like, not in the chapter, but at the right beginning, like before the chapter started. Like, in Goosebumps, the writers always go "Welcome to my office. Don't mind that Zombie that's running after you. He just has lunch" or something like that". (...) Jason: Yeah it's different, because in cartoons today we don't really learn lessons like that. Interviewer: Oh you think so? What cartoons do you watch?

Jason: Well, I actually don't watch cartoons. But I have friends that do and they always tell me about an episode they saw (...) Well I saw "The Peanuts"-

Aaron:

Interviewer: I see. What is your favourite TV series?

Aaron: School of Rock.

Interviewer: School of Rock? Is that a TV series, isn't that a movie?

Aaron: No, there's another one on Nickelodeon, School of Rock, they're kids and they're at school, of course. And their teachers and their parents don't know what they do or their principal of the school, so they have to sneak out. (...) It's on Nickelodeon.
(...)

Interviewer: Okay, that's cool. What is it you like so much about School of Rock, for example?

Aaron: It's actually quite funny and it's for kids. It's the series I'm used to watching, there's a new season coming out, season three, it's out already, or season two. And there – two kids will be in love, apparently in this series.

Interviewer: Oh, your favourite book series is Harry Potter? That's cool!

(...)

Aaron: I watched all the movies.

(...)

Interviewer: Oh, so you've read the books?

Aaron: Yeah, I've read the two, I need the other ones.

Interviewer: What did you like so much about them?

Aaron: The first one, it had more details than the movie.

Interviewer: True.

Aaron: Because I found out the movies give less details, because the books, they're so fat, and the movies not so much.

Interviewer: True, and then there are so many scenes they left out in the movies as well.

(...)

Aaron: ... remember, like, I never see these people in my books, because I read really scary books and I never see these, they're like only people. A bit like this, but then it confuses and then it gets a twist a bit in the middle and then you'd think they're alive but they're not or something like that. And then yeah, that's –

(...)

Aaron: For me, I hate reading.

Aaron: I'm not a reader – I'm horrible at reading.

	Interviewer: What is so interesting though is that you said you read a book a week. Aaron: Yes like, in school I read a book a week. I get every week a new book. Aaron: Yeah, for school – I only read my homework, that's what I do, nothing else. (...) Aaron: That's also a thing I find out – because, do you know the series Kuzco? Aaron: Yeah, with the king. He also stops the picture, but he doesn't say what he did wrong, he says "Don't pay attention to them" and then - Interviewer: Do you mean the movie or the show? Aaron: The show, like the series. Because there's one on Disney Channel. (...) Aaron: Like, for Kuzco, he makes a mistake and then he stops it and draws a circle on the mistake he made, but he stops it to say what it is, like, what he's doing there. But with Kuzco, it's different because he just circles what the problem is without telling what he did wrong. Lily: Lily: It's called like Nickelodeon Channel. Lily: And there's like lots and lots of things. Interviewer: I know. So you like everything on there? Lily: Yeah. Interviewer: Is there – would you say there is a specific one that you like best though? Like, I don't know, what is there, like "Bella and the Bulldogs"- Lily: - Yeah, I like that. Lily: "100 Things before High School" Interviewer: - before High School". Lily: Yeah, I like that one. Yeah, I think that's my favourite. (...) Lily: And always in the evening, my mum says I have to get to bed but I still read like an hour. Interviewer: (laughs) I used to do that as well. And Harry Potter is your favourite book? Lily: Yeah, I read all like a million times. Interviewer: That's awesome. Are you watching "Fantastic Beasts"? Lily: Yeah. (...)
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Lily: That reminded me of Nickelodeon because usually they do, like, a bit, and then it stops and she goes “narrow it down” and then you get to see everything that happened.

Interviewer: Where, for example?

Lily: Like “100 things before High School”

Interviewer: Yeah, that’s true, they do that as well. During these moments, who was he talking to?

Lily: You, he was talking to the person that was like watching.

Interviewer: Okay. Do they do that in “100 things to do before High School” as well?

Lily: Uhm, no, not really. I’m not sure.

Lily: Oh wait, but she like thinks to herself, that was – so she like says “What am I supposed to do?”, but like not to you or -

Interviewer: Okay, so like she doesn’t say it to you as a viewer but she really just says it-

Lily: Yeah, but like on Disney Channel, in “Liv and Maddie”, yeah they like talk to you.

Interviewer: That’s true, in “Liv and Maddie” they talk to you, that’s true. Do you like that?

Lily: Yeah, I think actually I like that, because then I like know what happens – yeah.

(...)

Interviewer: Okay, cool, great. Apart from that, I have a couple of pages from a book that I want to show you. The book is called “A Series of Unfortunate Events”, have you heard of it?

Lily: Of Lemony Snickers?

Interviewer: Yeah, Lemony Snicket.

Lily: Yeah!

Interviewer: Do you know that?

Lily: I don’t know it but I’ve heard of it.

Lily: Well, I think there’s also a film about it.

Lily: My brother watched it, and I came in the middle and I was like, is that Lemony Snickers, and he was like yeah, and then I left again.

Lily: Oh wait, and do, like, do they like get sent to like different people and that guy wants their money from their parents or something like that?

(...)

Lily: Well, I read a lot and I usually read things like Lemony Snickers or I read lots of stories on the second World War. So I like watching films more about cartoons but I like reading more about real things or like based on real things or something.

Interviewer: Okay, I see.

Lily: Uhm, and I’ve already read “The Book Thief”, which has like 600 pages. By Markus Zusak.

(...)

Lily: Yeah, because I think when you watch a sad film and the music is even more emotional or something. And when you read, it says, I don't know, "I'm really sad" or something, and you could feel it but not as much as when you see something cry or something.

Interviewer: Okay.

Lily: That's why I like something funny when you ...

Interviewer: Okay, I see, so you'd rather – so because, emotions are maybe a bit more extreme in a cartoon, you'd rather have that be good and the book be sad

Lily: Yeah, yeah.

Anna:

Interviewer: Can I have a look? Oh, you like "Angelo"? That's a cool show! You watch Cartoon Network?

Anna: Yeah.

Interviewer: Is that your favourite TV channel or do you like others more?

Anna: I really like Disney Channel.

Interviewer: Disney Channel. What kind of shows do you like on Disney Channel?

Anna: Uhm, sometimes I catch a glimpse of "Violetta", but not always. But I also like – what's that – I think it's called "Zack & Cody".

(...)

Interviewer: Okay, you like "Angelo", that's cool, that's a cool show.

Anna: Yeah.

Interviewer: What do you like about "Angelo"?

Anna: What do I like about "Angelo"? I just like that he's always up to something and that he's always up to something with his – Sherwood and-

Interviewer: - his two friends.

Anna: Yeah, his other friend who is a girl.

(...)

Interviewer: Oh and your favourite book series is "Harry Potter"?

Anna: Yeah.

Interviewer: Cool. Have you read all the books or have are you-

Anna: Not yet, I'm still processing but-

(...)

Anna: (...) "Diary of a Wimpy Kid", cause there's always one boy and he's always like, Summer's coming up but I don't really like that.

Interviewer: Okay, you said Tino reminded you of "Diary of a Wimpy Kid", do you like "Diary of a Wimpy Kid"? Yeah? Have you read a couple of those or – mhm.

(...)

	Interviewer: it's called "A Series of Unfortunate Events" Anna: I know that book! Anna: I've watched the movie. Anna: Yeah it's interesting because their, like, Uncle wants to kill everyone so he can have the money but - Interviewer: So there's not a lot I have to show you here then. So you know the plot, it's about the Baudelaire orphans, right, and they're kind of always running away from Count Olaf- Anna: Because he blew up their house and their parents were still in there and yeah.
BLOCK 2 Physical Reality 2.1 A Series Of Unfortunate Events 2.1.1 Narratology & Formal Features	Jason: Outside of recording: Asked whether the book was about writing a book. (...) Jason: I didn't read a lot, but the kids – I didn't get - Interviewer: Yeah, you didn't have to, that's fine. (...) So is there something you noticed about the pages that I showed you? Jason: Yeah. Interviewer: What was that? Jason: He kept on talking about the book. Interviewer: Okay. The book, by the way, is by someone called Lemony Snicket. Jason: What's the name? Interviewer: Lemony Snicket. It's a guy. That's just information that you might want or not. So they were just talking about how the book was written, right? Did you like that? Jason: Well, I mean – what's the book called again? Interviewer: It's called – that one specifically is called <i>The Wide Window</i>. and the series is called <i>A Series of Unfortunate Events</i>. Jason: I, well, from the parts that I read I don't think it's a suitable title. Interviewer: Okay. Jason: Cause all that he is talking about is the book. I mean, but yeah, sounds interesting. (...) Jason: I liked it to a point. I mean you could say that in an interview or something, how it was, writing that book, and yeah. Interviewer: Uhm, the person also says "If you do not want to read the story (...) this is your last chance to put this book down" Uhm, what do you think about that? It's an interesting thing to write on the second page of a book. Jason: I mean, a lot of books I read, that was in them, but like, not in the chapter, but at the right beginning, like before the chapter

started. Like, in Goosebumps, the writers always go “Welcome to my office. Don’t mind that Zombie that’s running after you. He just has lunch” or something like that.

Interviewer: Oh, that’s cool. That’s interesting. So, there’s someone who says “I”, right? Like, “I’m sorry to inform you ...” “I’ve seen many terrible things ...” “I cannot imagine what it was like to be there ...”. Did you – who do you think the “I” is? Like, who is “I”?

Jason: (has a look at the pages)

Interviewer: It’s everywhere, basically.

Jason: Well now I think it’s a character in the story.

Interviewer: “I” is a character in the story?

Jason: Yeah. Cause sometimes you see that in books ...

Interviewer: Okay, well sometimes, there is an “I”-narrator in books, right? But then the “I” person say that they wrote the book, so how could they be-

Jason: I don’t know. I don’t know. It’s confusing.

Interviewer: It’s confusing, right? So who was the “I” person talking to, telling this to?

Jason: Us.

Interviewer: Us? Right, so again, the audience, in a way? The readers?

Jason: (nods)

Interviewer: Uhm, the person went through a couple of things here, can you remember some of these situations?

Jason: Oh yeah, I saw a corridor made of human’s skulls – what?

Interviewer: Right, that’s somewhere in there (...) Fun. Interesting. So I just told you that the author is called Lemony Snicket. Do you think the “I” person is Lemony Snicket?

Jason: Is this an autobiography though?

Interviewer: That’s a good question. They never tell us, so I don’t know.

Jason: Then I don’t think so.

Interviewer: You don’t think so?

Jason: Except for the beginning. He wrote it, so ...

Interviewer: Yeah, I guess that’s true. So, in the beginning it might actually be him, because he does say “I’m sorry to inform you ...” and then here of course, there’s the publisher thing, with the publishers of the book. So is it Lemony Snicket here too?

Jason: (hesitates) Yeah, probably.

Aaron:

Interviewer: That’s what the cover looks like, and it’s about those three kids and in the first book, that’s the cover of the first book, in the first book they become orphans after their parents-

Aaron: die?

	Interviewer: Exactly, that's how you become an orphan. Their parents die in a horrible fire Aaron: Ew. Interviewer: Yeah that's bad and (...) it's the three kids, and then they're sent to someone called Count Olaf, who is their new guardian, but then it turns out that Aaron: - he's evil. Interviewer: Yeah, he's evil and he really just wanted to be their guardian to have all their money, because they've inherited a lot of money now. And then basically they manage to escape in the first book but then he follows them around and disguises himself – as just a new person at the new guardian's house. Aaron: That's funny. Interviewer: That's basically how the story goes. Anyway, the book is written by Lemony Snicket- (...) Interviewer: Uhm, I see. Did you notice anything about the narrator? The person who narrated it? Aaron: Nah. Interviewer: For example, here it says "I have seen many amazing things in long and troubled life history". Who is the I? Aaron: I think the author is trying to write about herself a bit in the book, when she was a child, but without losing the parents, maybe, so she was writing a story, and then she found that she should write a bit about herself as a kid or something like that. Interviewer: So the author - Aaron: - could be, like, the girl. Interviewer: Okay, so you think the author is one of those kids. But then, they talk about the girl in third person, because they say "Violet, Klaus and Sunny", that's the three names. So, but then there's still an "I" talking about Sunny, Klaus and Violet – so that could not be the "I", right? Aaron: Maybe – no, maybe it's the – wait, it's maybe the narrator trying to think – to convince who ... I don't know. Interviewer: I know, it's kind of complicated, right? The "I". Aaron: Yes. Interviewer: But they wrote a lot about the whole process, right? Aaron: Yeah. Interviewer: It's kind of like "Oh the good people who are publishing this book have a concern" which is about the publishing of the book that you're reading. Aaron: Yeah. Interviewer: Uhm, and then the "I" says: "Please allow me to give you a piece of advice even though I don't know anything about you". So, who is the "I" talking to here? Aaron: Maybe the – I don't know actually, quite. I think maybe the person from the book or, like -
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	Interviewer: Let's see. Okay, let's read it together. "The good people who are publishing this book have a concern that they have expressed to me. The concern is that readers like yourself will read my history of the Baudelaire orphans and attempt to imitate some of the things they do. So at this point in the story, in order to mollify the publishers, the word "mollify" here means "get them to stop tearing their hair out and worry", please allow me to give you a piece of advice, even though I don't know anything about you." Aaron: Uhm, she's talking to us. Interviewer: Okay. Aaron: I think, to the people who are trying to read and there's some point in the thing – if she didn't - Interviewer: If you don't know much about the - Aaron: No, if you don't like the book, you can put the book down, or keep going if you like it so- Interviewer: Oh yeah, that's here. (...) Aaron: So like, if you don't like sad or something like this, you can put it away, she doesn't actually care if you like it or not. Interviewer: Okay, I see. Did you like that when they talk to you as a reader like this? Aaron: No. Interviewer: How come? Aaron: Because it seems weird for me. Because I like books which you're not talking to, only what you read and know. But then they end, like at the end of the back cover, you can say anything that you want. But I like the "If you don't like this book, you can put it down", that's okay for the first thing, and then you can stop with the "I" thing and just keep going with the narrator, or something like that. Interviewer: So first, the "I" is fine, or at the back of the book, but for the rest of the story, you'd prefer for that not to be the case. Aaron: Yes. (...) Aaron: Not quite funny, or nice. Interviewer: I see. So if the "I" person, whoever that is, is talking to the reader, who is the "I" then? Aaron: The author. Interviewer: Oh, the author of the book. Aaron: Or – yeah, the author. Interviewer: Okay, so the author is Lemony Snicket? Aaron: Yeah. Interviewer: So is Lemony Snicket the "I"? Aaron: I think so – I don't really know. Interviewer: You're not sure. Aaron: I'm not sure. Interviewer: Yeah, it's a bit difficult, right? Aaron: Yeah.
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Interviewer: Oh, but then here it says that the “I” person was there, where Aunt Josephine’s house toppled into the lake. He wasn’t there at the same time, but he or she did research on the thing and talked to someone who was there. So, the author was at that place where Aunt Josephine’s house used to be.

Aaron: Creepy.

Interviewer: Yeah. But then also, they wrote the book.

Aaron: Yeah.

Lily:

Interviewer: Okay, cool, great. Apart from that, I have a couple of pages from a book that I want to show you. The book is called “A Series of Unfortunate Events”, have you heard of it?

Lily: Of Lemony Snickers?

Interviewer: Yeah, Lemony Snicket.

Lily: Yeah!

Interviewer: Do you know that?

Lily: I don’t know it but I’ve heard of it.

(...)

Interviewer: And then it’s also written by Lemony Snicket, that’s what the author’s called, right?

Lily: Yeah.

(...)

Lily: I think he was talking to us at the beginning. He was warning us not that we read this book. And I’m pretty sure every time something bad happened he guided you through, like, saying “I also had to research everything about it”. And yeah.

Interviewer: Okay, cool. Did you like that?

Lily: Yeah I liked it. I thought it was like someone guiding you through the book. I thought it was like someone reading what you’re thinking.

Interviewer: Right, that’s cool. So, it’s cool that you liked it. So was there a lot of plot there?

(...)

Lily: Actually, no. Because straight away he already started saying that the man who is coming “I have to tell you something”. And then it really started.

Interviewer: Okay.

Lily: He’s not much – like, before house burned, it’s not like it straight away happened.

Interviewer: Right, so first there’s this introduction and then-

Lily: - it happens.

Interviewer: - things start to happen, right.

Lily: Cause usually, in a normal book you would say how the fire is going down, or like, the house burned and they rushed out or something like that. Or they, like, they were waiting and then they

	found out straight away, or something. But it was straight away there. Interviewer: Just that it happened. Lily: Yeah. Interviewer: I see. So, uhm, you said there was someone guiding you through everything. Who is that someone? Lily: I think it's Lemony Snickers. Interviewer: You think it's Lemony Snicket? Lily: Yeah. Interviewer: Did you, so the person who keeps saying, wait I have something here – so the “I am sorry to inform you”, the “I” would be ... Lily: I don't know, maybe like someone from police? Or firemen or something, who have seen that the fire has – and then telling the children, “I'm sorry to inform you that your house has burned-“ Interviewer: No I mean, as in – not in the plot part but as in, someone describing- Lily: Oh, yeah. Interviewer: Like, “The adventure will be exciting and memorable ...” blah blah “If you are interested in a story filled with good times, I'm sorry to inform you that you are most certainly reading the wrong book” So who would the “I” be? Lily: Lemony Snickers. Interviewer: That's him. Lily: Yes. Interviewer: Okay – just to make sure we're talking about the same thing. Okay, so you said you enjoyed his guiding you that way. How come you enjoy – like for example, in comparison when Tino in “Weekenders” explained stuff that way, you thought it was unnecessary. But here you liked it. Why did you like it here? Lily: Cause I think in the show he was like telling more what happened before. So like, what's going down, pretty much. Like he really wanted to be a cool kid and he tried really long. And here, it is like “I think that if you don't want to read this book then you should turn around”, and yeah, something like that. So he like put his feelings into and here he just said, like, what's going to happen. Interviewer: Okay, I see. So here, it was a lot more personal, whereas here, Tino was just stating the obvious in a way. Lily: Yeah. Interviewer: Okay, I see. So, Lemony Snicket is what, is he the author? Lily: Yes. Interviewer: Okay. Because his book – his name is on the cover, right? But then, you said something about “He's doing research on the matter”, right? Lily: Yeah. I think I read something that he said that.
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Interviewer: Yeah, I think he does – “My own research tells me that the children watched in mute amazement”, so uhm, it seems – so he basically wrote this book, right and then he did research, and then he wrote the book.

Lily: Yeah.

Interviewer: But then at the same time, he seems to be writing the book and he seems to be writing it to us, the readers, right?

Lily: Yeah.

Anna:

Interviewer: Yeah – not a whole book, just a couple of pages. And it's called “A Series of Unfortunate Events”

Anna: I know that book!

Interviewer: You know that book? That's cool, have you read it?

Anna: I've watched the movie.

Interviewer: Oh you watched the movie, okay cool. Did you like the movies?

Anna: Yeah it's interesting because their, like, Uncle wants to kill everyone so he can have the money but -

Interviewer: Okay that's good, so you kind of already know that plot, that's good.

(...)

Interviewer: Oh yeah, and as you might know, the book is written by Lemony Snicket. Okay.

(...)

Interviewer: What did you like about them?

Anna: Well that they were explaining what was happening and they were giving advice what not to do, but it's probably fake.

Interviewer: Oh you think it's fake – like, the advice is fake?

Anna: Maybe? I don't think there's a lake called – lagoon or something.

(...)

Anna: Uhm, there it's like: “Please allow me to give you a piece of advice. Even though I don't know anything about you, the piece of advice is as follows: if you ever need to get to Curdled Cave in a hurry, do not under any circumstances steer a boat across Lake Lachrymose during a hurricane because it is very dangerous, and the chances of your survival are practically zero.”

Interviewer: Okay. So you think the lagoon is fake? So that way, the advice would also be fake?

Anna: (nods)

(...)

Interviewer: Right. You said there was someone giving you advice. Who do you think was giving advice here?

Anna: The aunt?

Interviewer: The aunt, I see.

	Anna: I think she did that because they needed to go there because she knew who that Count Olaf would come and- Interviewer: Uhm, so the person saying "The piece of advice is as follows" – so – "even though I don't know anything about you" – so the "I" is who, then? Like – where does the sentence start – oh here: "So at this point in the story, in order to mollify the publishers-" Anna: Oh, the publishers. Interviewer: Okay. Wait – let's read all of this together, because I'm not sure myself right now. "The good people who are publishing this book ..." – did the aunt then write the history of the Baudelaire orphans that we're reading here? Anna: Yeah ... Interviewer: Yeah? Okay. Uhm how about here, like on page 2, for example, it says – someone is describing Damocles Dock and just the different places that Violet, Klaus and Sunny are going to. And then it says: "If you are interested in reading a story about thrillingly good times, I'm sorry to inform you ..." So there "I" is who here then? Anna: The au – like, no, the author? Interviewer: For example – I don't know, it could be anyone. So would you think the "I" would stay the same, writing about the Baudelaire history – here and here and here. Anna: Yeah. Interviewer: And then it says "I have seen many amazing things in my long and troubled life history. I have seen a series of corridors built entirely out of human skulls" and so on- Anna: Really? Interviewer: I don't know – have they? I don't know. "But I cannot imagine what it was like to see Aunt Josephine's house topple into Lake Lachrymose". Anna: (gasps) The uncle" Interviewer: Oh, you think it was him? Anna: No, he wouldn't do that – no, he wouldn't say that. Maybe the girl. Interviewer: You mean Violet? But then Violet is mentioned as well. You said, it might be the author right? Anna: Yes, I think so. Interviewer: Okay, so it's a bit complicated, as we can see. Anna: Yes. Interviewer: But we think it might be the author, okay – so the author is called what again? Lemony- Anna: Lemony Snicket, yeah. (...) Interviewer: Uhm so the author, maybe Lemony Snicket, kept giving advice, right? Did you like that? Anna: (nods)
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2.1.2 Real Or Not	Interviewer: Why did you like that? Anna: Well maybe not so much – it might be a little boring, just giving advice, like it might get a little boring after a while, so yeah. Interviewer: So if it happens for too long, you might not enjoy it that much. Anna: Yeah. Interviewer: Okay – who was the person giving advice to though? Anna: Us. Interviewer: Us, okay – so the reader? Anna: (nods) Interviewer: Okay, I see. I think here you can see that the person went through a lot, like for example they saw – they did research about Aunt Josephine’s house toppling into the Lake Lachrymose – okay, so – do you know what research is? Anna: Yeah. Interviewer: Right, it’s when you talk to people and you kind of try to find out what happened. (...) Jason: Interviewer: Okay, yeah, that makes sense. So is Lemony Snicket then – if he is the “I”, is Lemony Snicket a real person then? Jason: (hesitates) Yeah? I mean, he’s the author of the book. Interviewer: Yeah. Yeah, I guess that makes sense. Cause his name is on the book. So he is the author? Jason: Yeah. Aaron: Interviewer: Okay, so would you say that the story is real then? Aaron: Not exactly, no. Because it could happen to anyone, I don’t feel like it’s real because uhm, remember, like, I never see these people in my books, because I read really scary books and I never see these, they’re like only people. A bit like this, but then it confuses and then it gets a twist a bit in the middle and then you’d think they’re alive but they’re not or something like that. And then yeah, that’s - Interviewer: Okay, so – is the author real then, if you think the story isn’t real? Aaron: Yes. Interviewer: Okay, but here the author says “My own research tells me that the children watched in mute amazement” How would they be able to research this when they were writing the book?
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Aaron: I think she tries to make people think it's real, and then she makes a twist like what I said and says she writes or researches – I think it's like in the book, what she thinks and what she did and stuff like that.

Interviewer: Okay, I see – so the story is not real.

Aaron: No.

Interviewer: But Lemony Snicket is real.

Aaron: Yeah.

Interviewer: Okay.

Aaron: Because their evil – guardian -

Interviewer: That's Count Olaf.

Aaron: Yeah.

Interviewer: Okay. So because of their evil guardian it would not be real.

Aaron: Yeah, because he also looks blue in his face.

Interviewer: True, but then that's a drawing, right?

Aaron: Yeah. It could be like their colour, and then it would be like "Ah, he looks okay, he's nice" but then in the story "Ah he's evil" because now I think, ah, first thing: evil.

Lily:

Interviewer: So uhm, would you say that Lemony Snicket is real?

Lily: Yes.

Interviewer: Would you say the story about the Baudelaires, about the children is real?

Lily: No.

Interviewer: Okay, but how can he do research?

Lily: Maybe because he could have like researched a few things, because maybe he based the story on something, so maybe he could have, like, researched about how the children felt in that moment and referred it back to his book.

Interviewer: Yeah, I guess that makes sense.

Lily: But I'm pretty sure that it's only based on it, because I'm not sure a person would set his brother's or whatever's house on fire to get a fortune, I mean-

Anna:

Interviewer: So here it said that the person did research on the thing, right? On her house falling down. But then here for example, as you read out loud earlier, that we should not sail about in attempt to get across Lake Lachrymose, right? Is – if the author was able to do research on Lake Lachrymose, uhm is it real then?

Anna: Yeah.

Interviewer: Okay, so we could, if we wanted to, sail across it.

Anna: (nods) – Oh and maybe, he's giving us advice not to.

2.2 The Weekenders 2.2.1 Narratology & Formal Features	Interviewer: Oh right, he's giving us advice not to do it. But, would you say it exists though? Anna: Yeah. Interviewer: Uhm, what about the Baudelaires and Count Olaf, do they exist? Anna: No. But it could be based on a real story. Interviewer: Oh, I see – so you mean, Lake Lachrymose might exist but then just not the kids and Count Olaf? Anna: (nods) Interviewer: Okay. What about Lemony Snicket, the author – does he exist? Anna: Yeah, 'cause he wrote the book. Jason: Interviewer: Did you like it? Jason: Yes, it was very good. (...) Jason: Yeah it's different, because in cartoons today we don't really learn lessons like that. Interviewer: Oh you think so? What cartoons do you watch? Jason: Well, I actually don't watch cartoons. But I have friends that do and they always tell me about an episode they saw (...) Well I saw "The Peanuts"- Interviewer: The movie or the show? Jason: The movie as well but the show, the old show- Interviewer: Well, that's really old too. Jason: Our teacher, two years ago, in fourth grade, she kept on showing us episodes and stuff. Interviewer: Okay, did you think that was kind of like that, like with lessons and everything? Jason: No. Interviewer: Well, see – but that's quite old too. But yeah, I guess there is quite a heavy lesson here. So you said you liked it? Jason: Yeah (...) Interviewer: What about it did you like? Could you tell? Jason: Like, other cartoons that my friends talk about, it made a lot of sense and stuff. (...) Interviewer: I see, okay. Who was your favourite character?
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	Jason: The kid who – the main character. Not the one who went with the cool kids but- Interviewer: I've got their names here. It's Carver, Lor, Tino and Tish. Jason: Tino, yeah. (...) Jason: Because he is the smartest and he just, yeah, just that, he's smart and uhm - Interviewer: That's fine. Can you tell me in one or two sentences what the show was about, like the episode? Jason: The episode was about Carver trying to be cool and join them, and yeah, and uhm – but then realises it's boring because cool kids only make fun of the loser kids. And that they just stand there and lean on stuff. Interviewer: Yeah that is boring. As you said, there was kind of a lesson at the end, so what would you think was the lesson to be learned? Jason: You don't have to be cool, you can be yourself. Interviewer: Okay, yeah. Pretty straight forward. Do you agree with that? Jason: Yeah. Interviewer: Okay. Has that ever been something that you've seen or that you've experienced? Jason: Yeah, it's something I've experienced. Interviewer: I guess everyone does at school. Okay cool. So you said you liked Tino best – did you notice anything special about him as a character? Jason: That he knows a lot and just that he's a good boy. Interviewer: Okay, I see. Like, sometimes, he – obviously he talked a lot more than the others, I think. Jason: Yeah, that as well. Interviewer: And then sometimes when he talked he would kind of freeze the picture and everything around him would go black and white, what did you think about these moments? Did you like them, did you not like them? Jason: That was smart that you – that he would explain to you what would happen, like what's going on. And then it's back to normal. It's always the main characters that I like most. Interviewer: Do you think the other people around him could hear him when he was doing that? Within the cartoon? Jason: No because at one part, he would – so, his two other friends that wanted him to be cool, they would freeze, so he would go "Okay, these two friends will – if he joins the cool, he won't hang out with us. In one, two, three." Interviewer: Oh right, true. Okay, so when he was doing that, who was he talking to? Jason: The audience, the viewers.
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Interviewer: Okay, but then sometimes – like at the beginning and at the end he would use this - uhm

Jason: Button, right?

Interviewer: Yeah it was a button, well, he would use that to like show slides, so who was he showing those to, also the audience?

Jason: Yeah but – yeah.

Interviewer: Okay, and then there was this other instance where you have these glasses, these glasses he would put on. Do you remember that?

Jason: No.

Interviewer: Wait I can show you.

(...)

Jason: Oh the glasses, for the audience.

Interviewer: Yeah, the cool-o-vision. Right, so that was also for the audience, like, for us, to understand what's going on?

Jason: Yeah.

Interviewer: Okay.

Jason: But that didn't make sense that they'd only see cool people, because then later on one of them says "We also like to make fun of geeks like them"

Interviewer: That's true. So it didn't really work, because they did see them when they had to.

Jason: Yeah.

Interviewer: Okay, did you like it when he talked to the audience, so when he talked to you?

Jason: Yeah, that's in movies as well sometimes, like cartoon movies. Actually when I was younger, but yeah.

Interviewer: Okay, so you don't think that's boring or stupid?

Jason: No, well, depends on which series it is – if it's My Little Pony or Dora – Dora-

Interviewer: Yeah, Dora The Explorer, right, there they do that.

Jason: Then I wouldn't like it, but yeah, I liked it here, so.

Aaron:

Interviewer: So, did you like that show?

Aaron: Yeah. Was quite funny.

Interviewer: Yeah? What did you think was funny? Or who did you think was funny?

Aaron: How the guy, how the brain theory, what he did -

(...)

Aaron: Tino, his brain theory is in the front because of Carver, because he wants to be cool, and he says that for the cool ones, they have very little and then for Carver, he has a big one, everything is squashed for the cool.

Interviewer: Right, that's pretty cool. Who did you like best of the four?

	Aaron: She (points at Tish). She's funny. Interviewer: She's funny, right? Aaron: Yeah. Interviewer: She did the Shakespeare thing. Aaron: And she talked weirdly. (...) Interviewer: Yeah. Uhm, the – who would you say was the narrator? Aaron: This guy. Interviewer: Tino. Aaron: Yes, Tino. Interviewer: Did you like Tino? Aaron: Yes, he's ... Interviewer: Why? Aaron: He was worried if he had to lose him and then his friend becomes to cool and he ignores them and stuff like that. Interviewer: Okay. Did you notice anything special about Tino, as opposed to the others? Aaron: No. Interviewer: No? He was just one of them? Aaron: Yeah, normal person. Interviewer: Okay. I don't know if you noticed, but sometimes he would freeze the picture and everything would go black and white but him. What did you think about these moments? Aaron: That's also a thing I find out – because, do you know the series Kuzco? Interviewer: You mean, Kuzco's – uhm, where he goes to school? You mean the Disney one? Aaron: Yeah, with the king. He also stops the picture, but he doesn't say what he did wrong, he says "Don't pay attention to them" and then - Interviewer: Do you mean the movie or the show? Aaron: The show, like the series. Because there's one on Disney Channel. Interviewer: Right, that's very similar, isn't it? Aaron: Yeah, that's what I was thinking between the ... Interviewer: Uhm, what did you think about these moments when he stops the picture? Aaron: Uhm, nothing, he's trying to – I think he's the narrator because he's like – he stops the – he's the main person who belongs in the story, and then come his three friends. So he's the one who's, like, the most important one and yeah, that's it. Interviewer: Okay, when he stops the picture, who is he talking to? Aaron: To us. Interviewer: Oh to us. Aaron: Yeah or like – yeah, to us. Cause his friends are not there, so, to us, I think.
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	Interviewer: Okay, so he talked to you. Or to a camera maybe? Aaron: Yeah, to a camera, like from the camera to the thing and then to the movie – I think the kids think “Ah, they’re talking to us” but they don’t know of their camera. Interviewer: Okay, but would you say – okay. Did you think his friends noticed when he was doing that? Aaron: No. Interviewer: No, okay, so he freezes the picture – and he talks to a camera or to us. Aaron: Yeah like, from a camera to us. Interviewer: Okay, so through a camera to us. So he talks to the camera and through the camera, it comes to us? Aaron: Yeah. Interviewer: Okay, I see. But then also in the beginning – Okay, a camera. But then, there’s this other moment, where he has these glasses, if you remember that? And he puts them - Aaron: on. Interviewer: On us or on the camera? Aaron: On the camera – no, he disappears, so I think he puts it on, he puts it on the camera and then it makes everyone invisible. Interviewer: Right, because he wants to show us how the cool kids are seeing things. But then – so he’s putting the glasses on the camera, or on us? Aaron: On the camera, I think. Interviewer: Okay, but then why is it glasses? Aaron: I don’t know. It couldn’t be a lens, so it’s obvious it’s for a camera, so they use a camera as a prop to see – to think he’s putting it on. Interviewer: So he used a camera on purpose because if he had used a lens, it would be obvious that it would be a camera. Aaron: Yeah. Interviewer: Okay. Aaron: Because if he – in the old times, they would read the books with one lens or something like that, but then – it’s more popular to wear glasses, these glasses. If you wear lenses, it looks like you’re opening the camera for seeing if it’s not – so it’s easy to think they’re using high technology for the thing. So they put it on the camera so it looks like – so it doesn’t look like a lens but they put the white, see-throughy inside and make it disappear like stuff like that. Interviewer: So, I see. So he was just using these glasses to make it look like it was glasses but really - Aaron: - for him to wear, but it’s lenses, and I think they put, like, plastic strings in front of the camera so it doesn’t look like he’s putting, like the camera is putting it on, and then they disappear. Interviewer: Okay, I see. But he was talking through the camera to you.
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	Aaron: Yeah. Interviewer: Okay. Just to ask you again, did you like that? Aaron: Yeah, I think that was fascinating. Interviewer: Okay. Do you like it in Kuzco? Aaron: Yeah. Interviewer: You like it there as well, okay. Why do you like it? Aaron: Because he also talks about what mistake he made. Like, for Kuzco, he makes a mistake and then he stops it and draws a circle on the mistake he made, but he stops it to say what it is, like, what he's doing there. But with Kuzco, it's different because he just circles what the problem is without telling what he did wrong. Interviewer: But he does. Aaron: He just tells us what they're doing, also between the series and stuff like that. Lily: Interviewer: So uhm, did you like it? Lily: Yeah, I thought it was funny. Interviewer: It was funny? That's cool. What did you think was funny? Lily: Uhm, I thought it was funny like he, like, thought about about the brain. Like, he said that this guy's brain who wants to be a cool kid is ... (...) Interviewer: What was your favourite moment of the episode? Lily: My favourite moment was when Tino like described his brain at the very beginning, where he says how when coolness is everything, everything else gets squashed. Just the cool – yeah. Interviewer: That was funny. How did he do that again? Lily: Well, he said like – he saw like a picture of the brain and like, 'watching TV' was really small, and 'cool' was like really big. And then usually, the small one is cool and everything else is ... Interviewer: Okay, yeah. And he had like a remote control, right? Lily: (nods) Interviewer: Yeah, right. So who would you say was the main character? Lily: Uhm, well I think Tino was the main character. Interviewer: Uhm, he kind of narrated the show, didn't he? Lily: Yeah. Interviewer: Did you like him? Did you like that he kept narrating everything? Lily: Yeah I liked it but I thought that he's a bit like, like he was, well he was like pretending like he was kind of like the boss, pretty much, because he was talking about everyone and everything. So, it was like, he thought he was – the person who says "Now we
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walk there” and everything, the way it would be playing if you would just hear it on TV, or something.

Interviewer: Oh I see. So he commented on the things that they were about to do.

Lily: Yeah.

Interviewer: Okay, even though we were seeing them?

Lily: (nods)

Interviewer: I see. Did you like that?

Lily: Well I thought it was a bit annoying, cause we’re watching a film and I don’t really need to – or like “They are walking into the shop”, something like that.

Interviewer: Right, okay, I see. Is there anything else that was special that you noticed about him?

Lily: Uhm, no I ...

Interviewer: Okay. Well, sometimes he would – you said that he kept commenting on stuff and narrating everything, then sometimes he would freeze the picture and everything around him would go black and white and he-

Lily: Yeah.

Interviewer: And then he would kind of – or, what did you think about these moments when that happened?

Lily: I thought he was like, he wanted us to focus on the thing that was still colourful. Or maybe for us to think about what just happened in the video. That reminded me of Nickelodeon because usually they do, like, a bit, and then it stops and she goes “narrow it down” and then you get to see everything that happened.

(...)

Interviewer: Okay, that’s cool – but you didn’t enjoy it as much here, you said?

Lily: Sorry?

Interviewer: You didn’t enjoy it as much here, because you said you didn’t like his commenting on-

Lily: Oh, I did not not like it, I just thought it was not necessary. Because we actually don’t really need to know if he’s walking into the shop or not because we can see it.

Anna:

Interviewer: So, did you like that show?

Anna: Mhm.

Anna: Well, that Tino was like the main character, that reminded me of “Diary of a Wimpy Kid”, cause there’s always one boy and he’s always like, Summer’s coming up but I don’t really like that. (...)

Interviewer: Okay, you said Tino reminded you of “Diary of a Wimpy Kid”, do you like “Diary of a Wimpy Kid”? Yeah? Have you read a couple of those or – mhm. That’s cool.

	(...) Interviewer: Okay. So you said Tino is the protagonist and he's kind of like in "Diary of a Wimpy Kid" where- Anna: He's like the diary himself. Interviewer: He's like the diary-? Anna: Like, his daily life. Interviewer: Why is he like a diary himself? Anna: Because he just says things that's happening in his life, that he forgot to do something, and he just explains it to everyone that's watching. Interviewer: Okay, I see. Is there something else you noticed about him? Anna: No. Interviewer: Okay, well sometimes he would freeze the picture and everything around him would go black and white but him. Anna: Oh yeah. Interviewer: And what did you think about these moments? Anna: They were also really cool. I would say every part of it was nice and interesting. Interviewer: Okay, uhm you said that he comments on things, right, and that was usually when he would kind of turn – or when the picture would go black and white around him. Anna: Yeah. Interviewer: And you said – who was he talking to at that point? Anna: To us. Interviewer: Oh to us, to those who are watching. Did you like that? Anna: Yeah, it felt like you were actually in a conversation with him. Interviewer: Okay. And, is that something you enjoy, when that happens? Anna: Yeah. Interviewer: Well there was one specific instance where he's doing the same thing again- Anna: - oh yeah, there he's showing the bullies - Interviewer: - exactly. Anna: He puts the glasses on me and I can only see like the yogurt and everyone else is nothing to them. It's like a speck of dust. Interviewer: Mhm, right. And he has glasses – who do you think he's putting the glasses on – or what is he putting the glasses onto? Anna: Us. Interviewer: Oh, us, okay. Anna: It's like we were part of the gang, and he would be putting it on like, look here, friend, put this on. Interviewer: Okay. Cool. Anna: And it actually feels like he's putting it on you, so.
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2.2.2 Real Or Not	Interviewer: Right, because it's like you're looking through it. That's true. Cool. Do you think there might also be a camera involved somewhere in this, is there a camera filming him or not so much? Anna: No, animations. Interviewer: Oh, it's animation. Okay, I see. Yeah, I mean that makes sense, because they are cartoons, right. Aaron: Interviewer: Okay. Uhm, so he's talking to us through a camera – if there's a camera, does that mean he's real? Aaron: No. Interviewer: Okay. Aaron: Maybe the ac- it's cartoon figures, like a cardboard or a painting to move, but it's the voice of the actor, or something like that. Because also in movies you can put the voice of the actors but not the real person. Like in Harry Potter, I can put Harry – no, Daniel Radcliffe as Harry Potter, he – you put like a cardboard of the elves for Harry Potter and he puts his voice for Harry Potter. If there's a different movie of Harry Potter, you can still put his voice there without the actor. Interviewer: So you can basically dub people, that's what you call it. Aaron: Yeah. Interviewer: You can use different voices for characters, like, if it's cartoons or real life stuff, you can use these voices. Aaron: Yeah. Interviewer: Okay, so you would say that – so he talks through a camera to us but he is not real. Aaron: Yeah. Interviewer: But the voice- Aaron: is real, yeah, because they cannot do a fake one. They can do fake one but it's actually quite hard to do it. Lily: Interviewer: I see, okay, interesting. So he was talking to a viewer, or to you. So you didn't not like it. There was this other moment, wait I have a picture of that, where he puts glasses on you. Lily: Oh yeah. That's when he said, how the cool kids like think or see. I don't know why, I didn't actually understand that, really. Interviewer: Okay.
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	Lily: Because that's not even physical- I mean, you can't actually, I mean, that's not even true. Cool kids don't even actually see like this, I guess, I mean, I don't know. I think they don't. Interviewer: Yeah, probably not. I guess, yeah. It's probably physically not possible. Lily: We don't know because it's a cartoon. Interviewer: Yeah, I don't know, but he was putting on glasses on the viewer right? Lily: Yeah, the camera pretty much, I guess. Interviewer: On the camera? Lily: Yeah, like there's a camera that's like filming everything and that makes it look like you are looking through it now. Anna: Interviewer: So he's talking to us like we're in the gang an part of the conversation, but are they real? Anna: No. Interviewer: Could – they couldn't be real, why could they be real? Anna: They could be – there could be people acting like sort of – but they couldn't be like exactly similar, exactly the same. Interviewer: So there could be actors of sorts, but not them specifically could be- Anna: Yeah.
BLOCK 3 Ideological Reality A Series Of Unfortunate Events	Aaron: Interviewer: It wasn't a lot, as you can see. So did you like these pages? Aaron: Yeah, interesting. It was actually quite interesting. Interviewer: Uhm, what did you find interesting? Aaron: How uhm – they don't know how to use the steering boat with the pedals at the end. Like, the steering boat, how to use it without wind. Interviewer: Okay, uhm, so, what else did you think was interesting about them? Or, what else did you notice, doesn't have to be interesting but what else did you notice about the pages that I gave you? Aaron: Yeah, it was – there, they didn't know if the aunt was there or taking them for – to the home. And I found it interesting how they saw the building falling down from the fire, in the fire. I wonder why they did not call help to help to save their parents or get water to help and save their parents to survive or something like that. Interviewer: But then – that wasn't in the pages though, right? It just was - Aaron: Well they said, breaking down the house -

The Weekenders	Interviewer: Oh, but that wasn't from the parents – sorry, you couldn't know that – but that was from Aunt Josephine's house, but yes. Aaron: Oh. (...) Jason: Interviewer: I see, okay. Who was your favourite character? Jason: The kid who – the main character. Not the one who went with the cool kids but- Jason: Tino, yeah. Jason: Because he is the smartest and he just, yeah, just that, he's smart and uhm - Interviewer: That's fine. Can you tell me in one or two sentences what the show was about, like the episode? Jason: The episode was about Carver trying to be cool and join them, and yeah, and uhm – but then realises it's boring because cool kids only make fun of the loser kids. And that they just stand there and lean on stuff. Interviewer: As you said, there was kind of a lesson at the end, so what would you think was the lesson to be learned? Jason: You don't have to be cool, you can be yourself. Interviewer: Okay, yeah. Pretty straightforward. Do you agree with that? Jason: Yeah. Interviewer: Okay. Has that ever been something that you've seen or that you've experienced? Jason: Yeah, it's something I've experienced. Interviewer: Did you notice anything special about him as a character? Jason: That he knows a lot and just that he's a good boy. (...) Jason: Oh the glasses, for the audience. Interviewer: Yeah, the cool-o-vision. Right, so that was also for the audience, like, for us, to understand what's going on? Jason: Yeah. Interviewer: Okay. Jason: But that didn't make sense that they'd only see cool people, because then later on one of them says "We also like to make fun of geeks like them" Interviewer: That's true. So it didn't really work, because they did see them when they had to. Jason: Yeah.
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Aaron:

Interviewer: So, did you like that show?

Aaron: Yeah. Was quite funny.

Interviewer: Yeah? What did you think was funny? Or who did you think was funny?

Aaron: How the guy, how the brain theory, what he did -

Aaron: Tino, his brain theory is in the front because of Carver, because he wants to be cool, and he says that for the cool ones, they have very little and then for Carver, he has a big one, everything is squashed for the cool.

Interviewer: Right, that's pretty cool. Who did you like best of the four?

Aaron: She (points at Tish). She's funny.

Aaron: And she talked weirdly.

Aaron: Like in the olden days, where they speak – because they didn't know how to speak English or American in the olden days, they had to speak like a bit weirdly sometimes.

Interviewer: Interesting. Can you tell me what the episode was about?

Aaron: It was about Carver going to the cool kids, so they looked in the shopping mall for – they looked in the -

Interviewer: - at the beach -

Aaron: - no, they looked in the shopping mall for cool clothes, trying to fit in with the cool kids, only for Carver. But the other three said “no”, they don't want to be with the cool kids, only Carver wants to be, because he's going on for days, like for these guys, for the cool kids.

Interviewer: And then – does he manage to become a cool kid?

Aaron: Yes but then he found it boring, because they just lean on walls, trees, fences and something else, I can't remember. And then, he found it boring after three times doing it and they went to a pizza or taco place and they came laughing and then having fun, and then the cool kids made fun of these people and said they are geeks. But I find the don't actually look like geeks because geeks have like really big glasses and spots everywhere and books and they don't go out. And they had to do homework but they forgot it.

Interviewer: Okay.

Aaron: Like me, I don't do my homework.

Interviewer: I see. So then does Carver stick with the cool kids?

Aaron: No, he goes back to his original friends.

Interviewer: Okay, so did you like the message?

Aaron: Yes, you don't have to fit in everywhere. That's, I think, the message, you just have friends, you belong there. Just take your time, then you'll fit there. I think, that's the message.

	Interviewer: Okay. And you agree with that? Aaron: Yes. Interviewer: Okay. Aaron: You don't have to be cool for everything. (...) Aaron: That's what I realised. And yeah, the parents always – I only saw the mum, we don't know – with Tino, there is no dad, or we don't see him or he's working or something like that. (...) Lily: Interviewer: So uhm, did you like it? Lily: Yeah, I thought it was funny. Lily: Uhm, I thought it was funny like he, like, thought about about the brain. Like, he said that this guy's brain who wants to be a cool kid is ... Interviewer: Right, that was really funny. That's cool. Who was your favourite character? Lily: I liked Lor. Lily: Cause she always like, she – like at the end, she put bunny ears on Tish and she was more of a – yeah, I like her. Interviewer: She is funny, I like her too. They're all really cool. Okay cool. So, can you just quickly summarise what the episode was about? Lily: So it was about that Carver wanted to become one of the cool kids. And then he bought shoes and a cool jacket and cool trousers and everything and he got accepted as a cool one. Cool dude. And then he got like really bored because all they do is just stand and lean on things. And then the two other cool ones said "Let's make fun of these three geeks over there", pointing on these three. And then Carver said "Those three geeks are my friends" and then they didn't want to anymore and on the class photo, he was with them. Interviewer: Okay, so what would you say was the message of the episode? Lily: Doesn't matter if you're cool or not, as long as your friends – like, you have your friends, that's cool. Interviewer: Okay, okay cool. Would you agree with that? Lily: Yeah. Interviewer: Is that whole problem of being cool and friends something that you've encountered in everyday life, or not so much? Lily: Yeah, sometimes I guess. Interviewer: What was your favourite moment of the episode?
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Lily: My favourite moment was when Tino like described his brain at the very beginning, where he says how when coolness is everything, everything else gets squashed. Just the cool – yeah.

Interviewer: That was funny. How did he do that again?

Lily: Well, he said like – he saw like a picture of the brain and like, ‘watching TV’ was really small, and ‘cool’ was like really big. And then usually, the small one is cool and everything else is ...

Anna:

Anna: ... And then his friends – Lor’s acting like – she’s not so cool but Lor’s acting like a boy. That’s sort of funny. And then Tish is into Shakespeare and I love Shakespeare too. And Carver, he wanted to try and be cool but he wasn’t. Cause he said that his friends were more important.

(...)

Interviewer: So what would you say was the message of the episode?

Anna: If you want to be a cool kid, but you think your friends are more important to you, stick with your friends, because it doesn’t matter if you’re the lowest or the highest, what matters is that you have a friend and someone to talk to.

Interviewer: Okay, cool. Do you agree with that message?

Anna: Yeah.

Interviewer: Is that something that you’ve come across in your life as well, with your friends or something.

Anna: (shakes head)

Interviewer: Okay.

Anna: Cause we don’t really have cool kids.

Interviewer: Okay, that’s good.

Anna: Except I think in secondary, there’s a bunch of boys that think they’re so cool.

Interviewer: Okay (laughs) But you don’t think they’re cool? No, okay. Okay, so what was your favourite moment of the episode?

Anna: When he was like, Those geeks are my friends, and he was like, he didn’t want to admit it, but then he admitted it.

Interviewer: That you liked?

Anna: That was nice.

Interviewer: Why did you like that moment best?

Anna: Because it shows that maybe you – they might make fun of you but you have to stick up for your friends, you have to stick up and say, you know, that you like them, no matter what.

Interviewer: Okay, that’s cool. So, you said that Lor was a bit boyish maybe. Did you like that, did you like Lor?

Anna: It was funny the way she acted, but yeah.

Interviewer: Uhm do you know girls like that?

	Anna: Yeah, sort of. There's a friend of mine but she doesn't act like a boy, sometimes she sort of just wants to be with the boys or she likes to sort of wear boy things, and yeah. But just for fun, you know. Interviewer: Okay. So does that bother you or is that okay with you? Anna: It's okay with me. If I had a friend like that, which I sort of do, I would be fine with it.
BLOCK 4 Comparison Of The Narratives: Preferences and Effects	Jason: Interviewer: In comparison, which one did you like better, the episode or the book pages? Jason: Episodes. Interviewer: Well okay. I guess I didn't show you the whole book, so maybe you would have liked the whole book. How come you liked the episode better? Jason: Because it's something to watch, I like watching more than reading. And uhm, it made more sense. Interviewer: Yeah I guess. Did the two have anything in common? Jason: No, no, I don't think so. Interviewer: Well, I think they both had very strong narrators. Because - Jason: Yeah Interviewer: - there you have the "I" person and here you have Tino. Would you agree with that? Jason: Yeah but it's in the book, "I" every time, and then it's about publishers. And they're different because, that's like an episode. Interviewer: Okay – but then Tino said "I" as well, right? He was like "Come with me" and stuff. Jason: Yeah, that's true. But he didn't say "the producers do this", like, "the animator does this". Interviewer: Okay, right, so that person just kept saying, "Oh the publishers, oh the page, oh the whatever". But here, he just talked to the audience. Jason: Yes. Aaron: Interviewer: Right. So what else did you like about the show in comparison to the book? Aaron: For me, I hate reading. Interviewer: Well that makes sense then. Do you think the pages that I gave you and the episode had anything in common? Aaron: No. Interviewer: No. Not at all? Aaron: Because they're not orphans and their house is not burning and there are no evil people there.

	Aaron: That's what I realised. And yeah, the parents always – I only saw the mum, we don't know – with Tino, there is no dad, or we don't see him or he's working or something like that. (...) Interviewer: Okay, so you don't think they have a lot in common? Aaron: No. Interviewer: Okay. Well, I think that they both had very strong narrators. Aaron: Yeah. Interviewer: Because there, there was Tino, and there, there was the "I" person, Lemony Snicket, right? So, even though they're really, really different they had- Aaron: the same narrator. Interviewer: - strong narrators, right? Did you like that? Aaron: Yes. Interviewer: Okay, but which one did you like better? Aaron: Tino because for me, the other one is like, a bit adult-ish, and Tino is like a kid and trying to be funny and cute and stuff like that. But the other one is trying to be rough, strong, manly but yeah. Interviewer: Okay, but you liked Tino better than the other one? Aaron: Yeah. Lily: Interviewer: How come you enjoy – like for example, in comparison when Tino in "Weekenders" explained stuff that way, you thought it was unnecessary. But here you liked it. Why did you like it here? Lily: Cause I think in the show he was like telling more what happened before. So like, what's going down, pretty much. Like he really wanted to be a cool kid and he tried really long. And here, it is like "I think that if you don't want to read this book then you should turn around", and yeah, something like that. So he like put his feelings into and here he just said, like, what's going to happen. (...) Interviewer: So how about we compare the two? Which one did you like better? Lily: Which one – Lemony Snickers and the- Interviewer: Yeah, Lemony Snicket and the show. Lily: Lemony Snickers. Interviewer: Cool. How come? Lily: Well, I read a lot and I usually read things like Lemony Snickers or I read lots of stories on the second World War. So I like watching films more about cartoons but I like reading more about real things or like based on real things or something. Interviewer: Okay, I see. (...)
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Interviewer: ... So would you say the two had anything in common?

Lily: Which?

Interviewer: The book and the show?

Lily: Uhm, well, I think – I don't know – I don't know because this, the show teaches you something at the end, but the book doesn't really. I mean, it's not like he's talking about the man putting the house on fire, he's not telling you not to do it. It's about, it's like "Erlebniserzählung" and that is more like a fable, like at the end it's more like a fable, you always find out -

Interviewer: Right, so here you always have a message at the end whereas here you're talking about something that happened.

Lily: Yeah.

Anna:

Interviewer: So which one did you like better, the book or the episode?

Anna: Phew. I – I really liked the episode, but I think the book might be, it gives more, like, that you really wanna read it and you really wanna – cause I just – from seeing these pages, I just want to go home and read it. So-

Interviewer: Oh, I see. Okay, of course I just showed you snippets and that was a whole episode, but okay, I see. So you liked both, in a way?

Anna: Yeah.

Interviewer: Okay, uhm did you think the two had anything in common?

Anna: With these two? No.

(...)

Interviewer: Okay, so both had strong narrators. Where did you like that better? That they were talking to the audience or the readers?

Anna: There.

Interviewer: In "Weekenders"?

Anna: Yeah, because this was a little boring, because "don't go in the lake" and blah blah.

Interviewer: Okay. So, here it was advice, and here it was Tino telling us what happened.

Anna: Yeah.

Interviewer: And, you preferred Tino here?

Anna: (nods)

ABSTRACT

The aim of this thesis is to shed light onto the vastly unexplored subject of meta-texts aimed at children, as well as their effects. Children's meta-narratives have been mostly ignored in literary and cultural studies, and even more so in effects research. However, considering the narratological potential of self-referential texts, especially when aimed at children, it only seems reasonable to examine them more thoroughly to gain more insights into the narratological structure of such texts as well as their possible effects on young readers.

Specifically, this discussion has a closer look at two unusual examples even more children's meta-narratives, namely the television series Doug Langdale's *The Weekenders* and Lemony Snicket's *A Series of Unfortunate Events*. Both texts do not just aim to make aware of their own constructedness but seem to go a step further and use reader involvement so as to give readers the impression their texts might be real. In order to prove this, this thesis uses method mix to help take into consideration two side of the discussion, namely that of literary as well as cultural studies, but also social studies in the form of effects research. On the one hand, text analysis of the two texts have been carried out with the help of narratological concepts by Nikolajeva (2005) and cross-media models by Withalm (2007) and Ryan (2009) to show both texts' unique characteristics. On the other hand, an empirical study has been conducted in the form of qualitative focus interviews with four preteenagers, to find evidence for possible effects created by these two texts. Indeed, the study suggests that the children who had more experience with meta-texts before the interview, also seemed to identify and enjoy meta-elements more quickly and were more likely to believe in parts of the reality illusion set up by the works. In addition, it has also become evident that there might be a correlation between children's enjoyment of meta-narratives and their ability to be more critical of societal norms presented to them. Further quantitative research is necessary to make representative claims regarding the effects of meta-texts, specifically immersive ones, on children. Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that the narratological vastness of children's meta-narratives as well as their effects on readers certainly deserve more attention from academia.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Diese Arbeit beschäftigt sich mit Metatexten für Kinder und ihren möglichen Wirkungen auf junge Leser und Leserinnen. Dieses Gebiet ist bisher größtenteils unerforscht, sowohl in Literatur- und Kulturwissenschaften als auch in der Wirkungsforschung. Bei Inbetrachtung der narratologischen Einzigartigkeit selbstreferentieller Texte, vor allem jene für Kinder, scheint es jedoch wichtig, sich mit den verschiedenen narratologischen Eigenschaften dieser Textgattung und ihrem Einfluss auf Kinder auseinanderzusetzen.

Diese besonderen Merkmale wollen in dieser Diskussion anhand von zwei Beispielen analysiert werden, nämlich Doug Langdales *The Weekenders* und Lemony Snickets *A Series of Unfortunate Events*. Nicht nur sind beide Texte gute Beispiele für Meta-Texte für Kinder, sondern sie scheinen in ihrer Selbstreferentialität einen Schritt weiterzugehen als viele ähnliche Angebote. Außer auf ihre eigene Konstruiertheit hinzuweisen, wollen sie durch Leser- und Leserinneneinbindung gleichzeitig den Eindruck erwecken, real zu sein. Um dies zu veranschaulichen, verwendet diese Arbeit einen Methodenmix, durch den das Problem sowohl aus Sicht der Literatur- und Kulturwissenschaften, als auch der Sozialwissenschaften in Form der Wirkungsforschung erörtert wird. Zum einen werden daher Textanalysen mithilfe von narratologischen Konzepten von Nikolajeva (2005) und medienübergreifenden Modellen von Withalm (2007) und Ryan (2009) durchgeführt, um die Einzigartigkeiten dieser Texte aufzuzeigen. Zum anderen wird durch eine qualitative Studie in Fokusinterviews mit jungen Teenagern und Teenagerinnen aufgezeigt, welche Effekte die Texte bei den Teilnehmern und Teilnehmerinnen aufweisen. Die Studie macht klar, dass Kinder, die bereits vor dem Interview Kontakt mit Metatexten hatten, auch während des Interviews schnell Metaelemente identifizieren konnten und sie besonders genossen. Außerdem weist die Studie auch eine Korrelation zwischen dem Genuss von Metanarrativen und der Wahrscheinlichkeit, soziale Normen kritisch zu hinterfragen, auf. Weitere quantitative Forschung wird notwendig sein, um repräsentative Aussagen zu selbstreferentiellen, immersiven Texten und ihren Effekten zu machen. Dennoch ist nicht zu bestreiten, dass Metatexte für Kinder für ihre narratologische Außergewöhnlichkeiten und ihre mögliche Wirkungen auf junge Leser und Leserinnen mehr Aufmerksamkeit in Geistes- und Sozialwissenschaften verdienen.