



Politeness Strategies in a Princess Tale: A Pragmatic Analysis of Barbie and the Diamond Castle

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Abstract

This study investigates the politeness strategies employed by characters in the animated film *Barbie and the Diamond Castle*, aiming to explore how these strategies function to maintain social harmony and manage interpersonal relationships. The research is grounded in Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory, which categorizes politeness strategies into four types: bald on-record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off-record. A total of 30 utterances containing politeness strategies were carefully extracted from the film's dialogues through repeated viewings and transcription. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, the analysis revealed that positive politeness was the most frequently employed strategy, occurring 12 times (40,00%), followed by bald on-record strategies with 10 occurrences (33,33%). Negative politeness and off-record strategies were observed less frequently, with 4 (13.33%) and 4 (13.33%) occurrences, respectively. These findings suggest that the characters predominantly use positive politeness to convey friendliness and foster solidarity, while bald on-record strategies mainly serve direct and urgent communicative functions. Despite their lower frequency, negative politeness and off-record strategies play crucial roles in mitigating face-threatening acts and enriching subtlety in interpersonal interaction. This study addresses a significant gap in pragmatic research concerning politeness in children's animated media, which remains underexplored compared to adult-oriented content. The results offer valuable implications for educators, linguists, and media producers aiming to enhance socially appropriate communication in children's programming.

Keywords: *Politeness Strategies, Animated Film, Barbie and the Diamond Castle*

Introduction

Politeness is a fundamental component of human communication, playing a crucial role not only in exchanging information but also in regulating social relationships to maintain harmony. From a pragmatic perspective, communication is regarded as a context-sensitive practice in which interlocutors consider social norms and one another's feelings to prevent miscommunication and promote smooth interaction (Rosari, 2016). The examination of politeness strategies thus concerns how language users consciously or unconsciously manage their utterances to navigate social expectations and relational dynamics. A central theoretical framework in this field is the politeness theory developed by Brown and Levinson (1987), which analyzes how speakers strategically manage 'face'—one's projected social self—in interaction.

The theory distinguishes two aspects of face: positive face, reflecting the desire to be appreciated and accepted, and negative face, representing the wish to retain autonomy and freedom from imposition. Communication inherently involves face-threatening acts (FTAs) that may impair these needs. To mitigate FTAs, speakers apply four core politeness strategies: bald on-record, where speech is direct without minimization of imposition; positive politeness, aiming to appeal to the listener's desire for approval through friendliness and solidarity; negative politeness, emphasizing respect for the listener's autonomy and desire to avoid imposition; and off-record, which relies on indirectness or ambiguity that permits multiple interpretations. The deployment of these strategies depends on social factors, including power relations, social distance, and the potential severity of the face threat. This theoretical model provides valuable insight when applied to various communicative settings, including media discourse where language use both reflects and constructs social relationships.

There are several research studies that discuss the same topic of politeness strategies in media, particularly in film dialogues. These studies provide important insights into how politeness functions within different cultural and narrative contexts. The first study by Hendar and Anshari (2021) aimed to identify refusal and politeness strategies in the movie *Home Alone* directed by John Hughes. The researchers collected data by selecting and transcribing movie dialogues, then classifying and analyzing them using Beebe et al.'s refusal strategy framework and Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory. Out of 35 refusal instances, 37.14% were direct refusals using non-performative verbs, while 62.86% were indirect refusals, including avoidance (22.86%), excuses or reasons (22.86%), promises of future acceptance (8.57%), conditional acceptance (2.86%), statements of principle (2.86%), and acceptance functioning as refusal (2.86%). For politeness strategies, bald-on record was most frequent (48.57%), followed by positive politeness (25.71%), negative politeness (14.29%), and off-record strategies (11.43%). In a related study, Nurilaila et al. (2020) examined the

preferences of politeness strategies among American and Japanese characters in *The Last Samurai*. Using a descriptive qualitative method, they found that American characters predominantly used bald on record (50%) and positive politeness (31.8%), while Japanese characters favored off-record strategies (60%) and negative politeness (20%), with no use of positive politeness observed. This study underscored the significant role of national culture in shaping politeness strategy preferences, illustrating the reciprocal relationship between language and culture in communication.

Musyafaah et al. (2022) conducted a study on the politeness strategies employed by the main characters in *Pride and Prejudice*. Using Brown and Levinson's politeness theory and a qualitative descriptive approach, they analyzed the movie's transcript and found that all four politeness strategies—bald-on record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off-record—were utilized. Positive politeness was the most frequent strategy, appearing 98 times out of 149 data points. These strategies were found across various sentence types, including declarative, interrogative, imperative, and exclamatory sentences.

The study also emphasized the importance of politeness strategies in maintaining harmonious conversations and their potential contribution to cross-cultural understanding in English language teaching. Similarly, Arisena and Idawati (2021) explored politeness strategies in the movie *Little Women* by applying the theory proposed by Brown and Levinson's (1978) framework. Their descriptive qualitative study revealed that all four politeness strategies were present among the characters, with positive politeness being the most dominant. The researchers highlighted politeness as a form of social behavior that respects the addressee's wishes and expressed hope that their study would enhance readers' understanding of politeness strategies in cinematic contexts.

Lastly, Hakim and Novitasari (2022) analyzed politeness strategies in the Disney Pixar film *Onward*, focusing on the main character Ian Lightfoot. Their descriptive qualitative research, grounded in Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory, found that Ian frequently used bald-on-record strategies. This preference was attributed to the film's emergency-driven scenes requiring quick commands for safety. The study also noted that frequent use of bald-on-record strategies did not necessarily reflect emotional closeness but was influenced by socio-cultural factors within the character's society.

While these studies have provided significant insights into politeness strategies in media narratives, most have predominantly focused on adult or formal communication settings. Consequently, there remains a discernible research gap concerning the examination of politeness in animated films targeted at children. Animated films for children represent a unique communicative domain wherein language serves pedagogical as well as entertainment functions, potentially influencing young audiences' socialization and pragmatic competence. Therefore, investigating politeness within this context is both timely and

necessary. Addressing this gap, the present research centers on *Barbie and the Diamond Castle*, a film uniquely designed for a young audience. This film's selection is justified by its widespread recognition among children and its rich narrative that offers ample opportunities to observe politeness strategies in a children's media context.

The central research question guiding this study is: What varieties of politeness strategies are utilized in the film *Barbie and the Diamond Castle*? To enhance the depth of analysis, two subsidiary questions are formulated, one of which examines the predominant politeness strategies featured within the movie. By investigating politeness in a children's animated film, this study aims to expand the pragmatic literature into underexplored media and audience segments, thereby enhancing understanding of how language and social interaction are presented and potentially internalized by child viewers. Findings here may also have implications for language education and media production aimed at children.

Method

This study adopts a qualitative descriptive approach to investigate the politeness strategies employed by characters in the animated film *Barbie and the Diamond Castle* (2008), directed by Gino Nichele and produced through a collaboration between Mattel Entertainment and Rainmaker Entertainment. The selection of this specific film, as opposed to other titles in the Barbie franchise or similar animated works, is based on its prominence within children's media, narrative richness, and the diversity of verbal interactions, making it especially suitable for a pragmatic analysis of politeness phenomena.

To ensure data completeness, all verbal exchanges throughout the film were systematically observed and transcribed. Multiple viewings were performed to attain data saturation; no new relevant examples of politeness strategies were identified after repeated screenings, affirming the comprehensiveness of data collection.

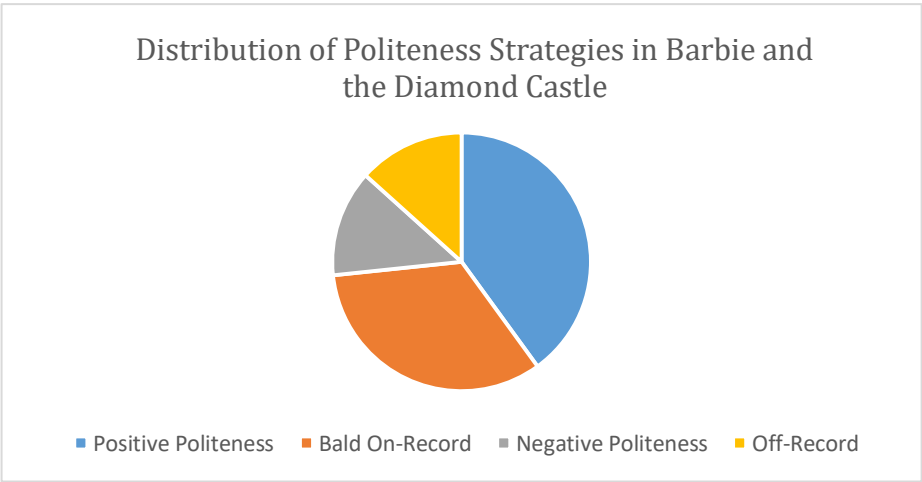
In line with Brown and Levinson's (1987) theoretical framework, data analysis proceeded through a qualitative content analysis. Each utterance was carefully reviewed and categorized into one of four strategy types: bald on-record, positive politeness, negative politeness, or off-record. Coding criteria were directly informed by the established definitions in Brown and Levinson's model, paying particular attention to contextual variables such as the relationship between interlocutors and the nature of the face-threatening act. The procedure emphasized both linguistic form and pragmatic function to enable a detailed and context-sensitive categorization. To enhance the dependability of the findings, the coding was carried out collaboratively by the main researcher and a second analyst.

Both independently reviewed the transcripts, then cross-examined their categorizations, and resolved any discrepancies through discussion until mutual agreement was achieved. This approach to dual-coder validation increases the reliability of the analysis, minimizes subjective bias, and aligns with accepted standards for qualitative content analysis. Findings are presented first by displaying the distribution and frequency of each politeness strategy, arranged from the most to the least frequent. This is complemented by detailed qualitative explanations that illustrate how specific strategies are realized within the film’s dialogue and character interactions.

Results

The analysis of politeness strategies in *Barbie and the Diamond Castle* demonstrated a distinct pattern in the frequency and distribution of each type. Positive politeness emerged as the predominant strategy, representing 40,00% of the observed instances. This suggests that characters frequently employed language to build solidarity, express friendliness, and strengthen social bonds aligning with the film’s overarching emphasis on cooperation and friendship. Bald on-record strategies were the next most common, accounting for 33.3% of the total. These direct approaches often used for giving clear instructions or commands were typically associated with situations requiring unambiguous communication.

In contrast, both negative politeness and off-record strategies appeared with equal but lower frequency, each contributing 13.3%. These latter forms often reflected more nuanced social relations, such as indirectness or deference to autonomy, yet were less prominent, likely due to the need for straightforward dialogue in media aimed at young audiences.



These findings indicate that positive politeness is the dominant strategy within the film, reflecting the narrative’s emphasis on camaraderie and inclusivity among characters. The relatively high proportion of bald on-record strategies appears to be influenced by the need for clarity in urgent or action-oriented scenes.

The rarer use of negative politeness and off-record strategies likely reflects both the target audience and the straightforward nature of the dialogue, where excessive indirectness could hinder comprehension for children.

Discussion

Positive Politeness Strategies

Data 1

Old Woman : **A nice present for a nice girl.**

Liana : Thank you.



Figure 1. Barbie and the Diamond Castle (09:30)

In data 1, the Old Woman's direct compliment paired with a gift function as a positive politeness strategy to make Liana feel appreciated and to reduce any imposition, reinforcing a warm relationship fitting the film's friendship theme and child audience. This aligns with Brown and Levinson's theory, which associates positive politeness with interactions characterized by low power differentials and social closeness. Similar findings were reported by Arisena and Idawati (2021) in their study of *Little Women*, where positive politeness was predominant in fostering respectful and supportive dialogues. The Old Woman's nurturing role encourages open expressions of kindness typical of Western fairy tale culture, which helps model polite social behavior for young viewers.

Data 2

Melody : Sing the chorus again, please?

Liana : **Oh sure. And you have a beautiful voice.**



Figure 2. Barbie and the Diamond Castle (11:48)

In data 2, Liana's courteous compliance combined with a compliment exemplifies positive politeness intended to strengthen social bonds through friendliness and mutual appreciation. This mirrors the results of Arisena and Idawati (2021), whose research similarly found positive politeness as the dominant strategy in children's cinematic language due to its role in reducing social distance and affirming interlocutor's face needs. The mutual reinforcement of goodwill supports the fairy tale genre's emphasis on accessible, emotionally positive interactions, which are culturally consistent with Western values of kindness and respect, offering young audiences a didactic example of cooperation and empathy.

Data 3

Liana : And dreams that come true?

Alexa : **Always dreams that come true.**



Figure 3. Barbie and the Diamond Castle (04:13)

In data 3, illustrates Alexa's use of positive politeness through a warm, encouraging reply that fosters optimism and emotional closeness. This reflects a sensitive management of face needs, in line with Brown and Levinson's predictions for contexts where maintaining solidarity and respecting autonomy are crucial. The gentle reassurance corresponds with the nurturing atmosphere common in children's fairy tales—an environment also highlighted by Arisena and Idawati's (2021) findings as supporting frequent positive politeness. In this way, the film

provides social lessons by modeling language that promotes care and optimism, reinforcing prosocial norms appropriate for its young viewers.

Bald On-Record Strategies

Data 1

Melody : **Please, don't argue. You've done enough.**

Alexa : See, even Melody thinks so.



Figure 4. Barbie and the Diamond Castle (44:54)

In data 1, Melody issues a clear, direct command softened mildly by “please,” exemplifying a bald on-record politeness strategy where urgency and authority take precedence over mitigating language. Alexa’s endorsement of Melody’s statement reinforces this directness without any attempt to reduce its impact. According to Brown and Levinson’s framework, such strategies are common in situations where immediate compliance is necessary and social power or urgency diminishes the need for indirectness. This is consistent with Hakim and Novitasari (2022) findings in Onward, where characters frequently relied on bald on-record strategies during critical moments, reflecting how situational demands and cultural factors override politeness aimed at emotional closeness.

Data 2

Liana : Alexa, look.

Alexa : What?

Liana : **Oh, watch out for that slippery spot.**



Figure 5. Barbie and the Diamond Castle (04:47)

In data 2, presents a straightforward warning by Liana, demonstrating a bald on-record politeness strategy characterized by its unambiguous and direct form. The absence of hedging or softening language signals the importance of clear and quick communication, which Brown and Levinson's theory, is typical in contexts demanding immediate attention for safety or urgency. This approach aligns with research such as Hakim and Novitasari (2022), illustrating that directness in speech often reflects situational priorities rather than interpersonal closeness, especially within narratives targeting younger audiences where clarity is paramount.

Data 3

Slyder : I think I got it.

Lydia : **Oh, just take me to her. Now!**

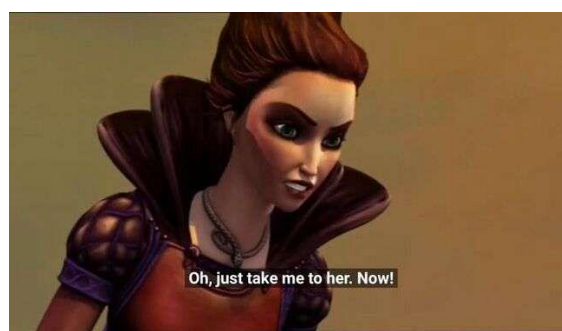


Figure 6. *Barbie and the Diamond Castle* (28:52)

In data 3, Lydia issues a swift and unmediated command indicative of a bald on-record strategy, emphasizing efficiency and command authority. The absence of polite mitigators underscores her urgency and elevated social power within this context. Brown and Levinson's model predicts that speakers may forsake indirectness in favor of clear, face-threatening acts when situations require decisive action. Similar patterns were reported by Hakim and Novitasari (2022), who noted that characters in urgent or authoritative roles often adopt bald on-record strategies in cinematic storytelling, reflecting sociocultural influences on speech choices that prioritize functional communication over affective politeness.

Negative Politeness Strategies

Data 1

Liana : **Please, may I share this with you?**

Old Woman : But it's your lunch.



Figure 7. *Barbie and the Diamond Castle* (08:53)

In data 1, Liana's request, "Please, may I share this with you?" to the Old Woman demonstrates a clear use of negative politeness. She chooses careful, formal wording to show respect and minimize any sense of imposition, reflecting sensitivity to social distance and the other's autonomy. This strategy fits both the film's theme of friendship and the genre's expectation for tactful, respectful interactions. According to Brown and Levinson, such language is likely in contexts where the speaker wants to avoid coercion or conflict, especially with elders. This is also consistent with Nurilaila et al. (2020), who found that cultures valuing harmony, like in Japan, frequently employ negative politeness, contrasting with the more direct styles common among American characters¹.

Data 2

Liana : **Would you teach it to us?**

Alexa : Please we love sing with you.

Melody : I... I shouldn't.



Figure 8. *Barbie and the Diamond Castle* (14:41)

In data 2, Liana speaks to Melody, who is inside the mirror, and asks, "Would you teach it to us?" employing indirect language that gives Melody the freedom to decline. Melody's hesitant response, "I... I shouldn't," further exemplifies negative politeness, as she avoids direct refusal while maintaining the listener's positive face. These choices align with the Western fairy tale genre's focus on kindness and options, offering children models for making requests and handling rejection

gently. Brown and Levinson's framework predicts such strategies in situations involving modest power dynamics and a wish to preserve harmony; this is mirrored in Japanese settings in Nurilaila et al. (2020), but is less prominent among American characters who often favor more direct or positive politeness moves.

Data 3

Butler : What may we serve you?

Liana : **Could you spare some bread and water?**

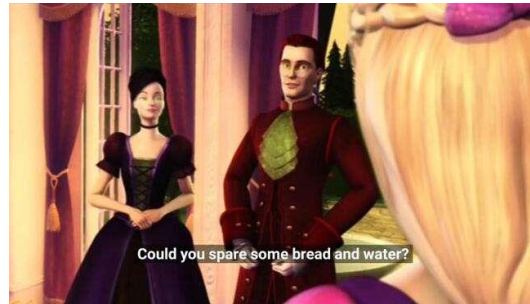


Figure 9. Barbie and the Diamond Castle (42:40)

In data 3, Liana's formal request to the Butler, "Could you spare some bread and water?" represents another case of negative politeness. Her phrasing is indirect and considerate, maintaining appropriate social distance while allowing the Butler to refuse without loss of face. This is particularly relevant in servant-master relationships within Western narratives, confirming Brown and Levinson's insight that power asymmetry and unfamiliarity often prompt speakers to mitigate their requests. Nurilaila et al.'s (2020) findings similarly highlight how cultural and hierarchical factors influence the selection of negative politeness in different societies.

Data 4

Old Woman : Please take one of my treasures.

Liana : **I couldn't**



Figure 10. Barbie and the Diamond Castle (09:13)

In data 4, When the Old Woman invites Liana, “Please take one of my treasures,” and Liana replies, “I couldn’t,” Liana’s soft refusal is a nuanced form of negative politeness. She opts for an indirect, deferential turn-down, prioritizing respect over blunt honesty. This exchange illustrates how negative politeness helps manage delicate offers and refusals in close but asymmetrical relationships, reinforcing Brown and Levinson’s prediction that such strategies maintain social bonds by relieving pressure. Echoing the results in Nurilaila et al. (2020), this scene showcases the way indirect refusals are both a cultural and narrative tool for preserving harmony, and offer children effective examples for polite disagreement.

Off-Record Strategies

Data 1

Alexa : **Do we have a little water?**

Liana : We ran out.



Figure 11. *Barbie and the Diamond Castle* (41: 31)

In data 1, Alexa’s question, “Do we have a little water?” exemplifies an off-record politeness strategy, where she subtly hints at her need without issuing a direct request. The phrase “a little water” and her interrogative form allow Liana the autonomy to interpret and respond as she chooses, reducing any sense of pressure. This indirectness is closely aligned with the film’s emphasis on empathy and friendship—values integral to its narrative and suitable for its young target audience. According to Brown and Levinson, such strategies aim to minimize imposition in social interactions. This approach resonates with Musyafaah et al. (2022), whose analysis of *Pride and Prejudice* revealed that, although a range of politeness strategies appear, positive politeness was predominant; however, off-record strategies were still used to maintain harmony and provide space for indirect expression, especially in sensitive contexts.

Data 2

Alexa : **I can’t do it anymore, Liana. We’ve been walking for hours.**

Liana : Are you okay?



Figure 12. Barbie and the Diamond Castle (41:23-41:25)

In data 2, Alexa statement “I can’t do it anymore, Liana. We’ve been walking for hours reflects another off-record strategy. By expressing her fatigue without overtly requesting a break, Alexa invites Liana to infer her needs, thus facilitating a supportive response without direct confrontation. This mirrors the communicative patterns recommended for children’s media, where nurturing relationships are modeled and explicit demands are softened to promote cooperative problem-solving. Brown and Levinson note that speakers employ off-record strategies to leave room for interpretation, which is particularly suitable when maintaining group cohesion. In comparison, Musyafaah et al. (2022) showed that, despite positive politeness dominating their data, off-record moves were strategically chosen for situations where characters navigated vulnerability or needed to avoid imposing on others.

Data 3

Liana : **Far be it from us to spoil a happy reunion.**

Ian : No, no my apologies. That was ancient history.



Figure 13. *Barbie and the Diamond Castle* (30:56)

In data 3, Liana's polite remark, "Far be it from us to spoil a happy reunion," is a tactful example of off-record politeness. Rather than directly stating the desire to leave, Liana allows the listener to infer her intention. This usage supports the genre's stress on non-confrontational, considerate communication—a typical trait of Western fairy-tale narratives. Such strategies, according to Brown and Levinson, are employed when the speaker wishes to be non-imposing and maintain social harmony. Musyafaah et al. (2022) similarly observed that off-record and positive politeness strategies both serve to sustain agreeable interactions, with positive politeness particularly fostering solidarity, yet off-record allowing subtle negotiation of social dynamics in delicate circumstances.

Data 4

- Liana : Alexa, Alexa!
- Lydia : She told me where to find you.
- Lydia : **Friends are highly overrated, don't you think?**



Figure 14. *Barbie and the Diamond Castle* (49:32)

Lydia's remark, "Friends are highly overrated, don't you think?" reflects off-record politeness through implied criticism rather than overt disagreement. This indirectness allows the conversation to remain civil and open, avoiding direct confrontation even during conflict. The approach aligns with Western preferences for maintaining social equilibrium and is especially applicable within the fairy-tale

genre's instructive tone, where gentle handling of disagreement is highlighted. Brown and Levinson describe this as a way to address potentially face-threatening acts without escalation. Musyafaah et al. (2022) reinforces this observation, noting that while positive politeness is most common, off-record strategies are important for managing disagreement diplomatically and maintaining harmonious dialogue.

Limitations

Several limitations must be acknowledged. The scope of the analysis was restricted to a single animated film—Barbie and the Diamond Castle—which limits the extent to which these results can be generalized across diverse media forms or genres. Furthermore, the study did not incorporate audience reception data, thereby constraining the ability to assess how viewers, especially children, interpret and emotionally engage with the politeness strategies depicted. These limitations highlight the need for caution when extrapolating findings beyond the immediate context of this film.

Implications

This study offers valuable insights into the pragmatic use of politeness strategies within children's animated media, particularly highlighting the predominance of positive politeness as a means to reinforce social harmony and promote friendship values. Such findings have implications for media producers, educators, and researchers by emphasizing the role of linguistic politeness in shaping social understanding among young audiences. Moreover, the evidence of bald on-record strategies utilized in specific contexts suggests that straightforward communication also holds an essential place in children's interactions, a nuance that may inform both content creation and pedagogical approaches.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study revealed that positive politeness strategies were most frequently employed by characters, followed sequentially by bald on-record, negative politeness, and off-record strategies. This pattern suggests an emphasis on maintaining social solidarity consistent with the thematic focus on friendship and cooperation in the film. Nonetheless, the role of direct, clear communication through bald on-record strategies affirms the importance of context in politeness strategy selection. Anchored in Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory, the results illustrate how social factors — including power dynamics, social distance, and potential face-threatening acts — influence pragmatic choices in children's media discourse.

For future research, comparative studies involving various animated films are recommended to extend the generalizability and depth of analysis. Longitudinal approaches would provide valuable insights into the evolution of

politeness norms over time in children's media. Additionally, cross-cultural investigations could explore how cultural backgrounds shape politeness expression and reception. Incorporating audience reception methods, such as surveys or interviews, is also advised to better understand how children perceive and respond to politeness strategies in media. Such approaches would collectively contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of pragmatic language use and media literacy development in young audiences.

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