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## **Little Lil's Big Adventure: How I Wrote a Children's Book on Adoption**

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University of Northern Colorado

Greeley, Colorado

LITTLE LIL'S BIG ADVENTURE: HOW I WROTE A  
CHILDREN'S BOOK ON ADOPTION

A Capstone

Submitted in Partial

Fulfillment for Graduation with Honors Distinction and  
the Degree of Bachelor of Arts

Lilia M. Moritz

May 2024

LITTLE LIL'S BIG ADVENTURE: HOW TO WRITE A  
CHILDREN'S BOOK ON ADOPTION

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### **Abstract**

Being adopted is a unique and complex experience; one of which can be expressed and learned about through children's literature. The research behind writing a book on adoption includes adoption statistics, actions taken by adoptive parents, cognitive development of adoptees, windows and mirrors in books, adoption documentation from adoptive parents, authors and their relation to adoption, and how biological and adoptive parents are portrayed within the books. My methods included observing and looking at other children's literature, creating my storyline, using pictures from my own story, and the publishing will be done after this project. Limitations involved include having a short amount of time to do research, looking at books on adoption, and not having time to do the illustrations. The scholarly contribution is sharing my experience, giving children another book about adoption, including tools readers can use for themselves, and being another author who adds to the importance of writing personal experiences for readers.

## Acknowledgments

I want to give thanks to the Honors Department for having this program and professors who are ready to help with every aspect of the capstone project. Thank you to Annie Epperson and Corinne Wieben for guiding me through the class and giving me resources. Thank you to Dr. Suzette Youngs, my project advisor, who was ready to help from the beginning and gave me valuable information for doing the entire project.

I want to acknowledge that none of this would have been done if I did not have the loving, caring, brave parents who adopted me when they knew I was in need. They saw me in all stages of my adoption and life since adoption. They have wrapped around me and supported me in everything I do. None of this project could have been done if I was not given a chance to thrive in life when all I could do is survive. They are my cheerleaders, and I am lucky to call them my parents. Same goes to my siblings and extended family who love me, no matter what family I was born into.

Finally, thank you to my friends and significant other who have been amazing support since the moments I have met them; they have been the people encouraging me, loving me, pouring into me, and helping me throughout every stage of this project.

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## Introduction

Being adopted is a very Growing up I always knew that I was adopted. This is because my adoptive parents made it their goal to share my story since the beginning. With knowing I was adopted since a young age, I was always looking for books that explained adoption, specifically female children who were adopted from Russia. This type of story would be the closest to mirroring my own experiences, so when I found one book that was similar, it immediately became my favorite and I read it often. I believe that having a book that mirrored some of my experiences helped me understand adoption and to feel included. There were other books I read that outlined other adoptees experiences, or the adoptive parents' experience, and they all helped better my understanding of adoption and family. If I did not have these children's books about adoption, I would have felt separated from society and I would not have understood what adoption meant for myself and other adoptees. This is when I realized how important it is to have children's literature that talks about adoption because these books greatly help adoptees with their unique experiences.

As I started this project, I had multiple questions I asked myself regarding adoption and children's literature. How important is children's adoption literature to those who are adopted? What information is useful for adoptees when reading these books and understanding their story? How beneficial was it for me to have books that mirrored my experiences and helped me learn about adoption? How important is it for other children to learn about adoption through books?

There is a lot of research that goes into a children's adoption literature book, such as the percentage of the population that is adopted, the roles of adoptive parents, the

cognitive development of adopted children, how adoption and children's literature tie together, the relation between authors and adoption, and parental portrayals within children's literature.

There are also lots of reviews of children's books while writing one. There are aspects of a book that needs to be noted. Such as the book size, how many pages, where the sentences sit on a page and the font, what color and where the illustrations are, and what concepts are mentioned for that age group.



## Literature Review

### Adoption Statistics

In the United States, it is common to hear about international adoption and adoption in general. There has been a shift in how and where families in the U.S. adopt. For example, in 1992, 77% of adoptions were private, independent kinship, and tribal, while intercountry adoptions were at 5%; in 2001 46% of adoptions were private, independent kinship, and tribal, while intercountry increased to 15% (Javier 2006). Although these two types of adoptions are common, the U.S. is now trying to incorporate adoption through foster care more, which is seen to have the best interests for the child and helps increase complete adoptions (Javier 2006). So, there is a mix of domestic adoption, adoption through foster care, and international adoption.

There has been an increase in international adoptions since around 2004; of the 125,000 total adoptions 40,000 were international adoptions (Javier, 2006). In 2004 there was an increase in international adoptions from China (being the top country the U.S. adopted from) because of the increase of orphaned females; Russia was the second most common country that the U.S. adopted from (Javier, 2006). In 2004, there were 5,862 adoptions from Russia (Adoption Statistics, 2024). Of all adoptions, 32% were international, and of the international adoptions 14.65% were adoptions from Russia. International adoptions took a significant percentage of overall adoptions in 2004, and adoptions from Russia took some percentage of the international adoptions. Overall, it is somewhat common for people to know of international adoptees and adoptees from Russia.

### **Adoptive Parental Actions Within the Stages of Adoption**

There are many actions that adoptive parents take on during the adoption process. Sun (2021) explains four different stages involved in adoption; the four stages include pre-adoption, adjustment and accommodation, post adoption, and rescue and salvation. Since adoption is more focused on the parents making the decision to adopt, there are many things that are done by the parents throughout the process. Sun (2021) and Fitzpatrick (2013) share four stages and aspects of adoption.

In Sun's first stage, preadoption, there may be excitement and motivation to adopt, and the parents may be doing so because they want to help children (2021). Other parents may adopt because they cannot have biological children of their own, or do not want to. In this first stage, adoptive parents are deciding to adopt, finding people to help them adopt, doing the paperwork and appointments needed, and there is a multitude of financial costs for everything listed above. Often this takes months to over a year since there is such extensive paperwork and procedures needed to ensure the child's safety within these parents' homes. Within international adoption there may be parts of this first process that takes longer because of the communication between countries and traveling to the country. This stage also takes an extensive amount of time for domestic adoption since there are many actions that need to be taken by the parents and the workers involved in the adoption process.

In Sun's second stage, adjustment and accommodation, the parents have done most of the preparation and they are adjusting to the child they have adopted and brought into their home (2021). This includes the excitement of the adoption being approved, introducing the child to their new home, having the child bring happiness to the family,

as well as emotional struggles and new beginnings for everyone involved (Sun, 2021). However, this stage has previously been focused on the parental perspective, so Sun (2021) explains that there are emotional disturbances for everyone because there is a loss for the child and being adopted can be traumatic. It may be traumatic because the child has been pulled from the only life, circumstance, environment, etc., that they have known, and they do not have a choice in adoption and being moved. The adoptee is going along with the family that is choosing to adopt them, and it can be scary and traumatic for them to be in a new family, culture, and environment. The actions taken by the adoptive parents include adjusting their life, while understanding their child's life has changed greatly, learning how to live together and communicate as a newly formed family, and being educated and helping the adoptee (and themselves) within the process of living together and processing the situation. This stage is unique in its own experience; it can be stressful for adoptive parents to learn how to help their adopted child, and any other children in the house who are also experiencing this change.

In Sun's (2021) third stage, "post-adoption", Sun explains that the adoptee tends to explore their identity and understand that they may be different, which may lead to them questioning their role in their families. Even though this stage is more focused on the adoptee, it is important for the adoptive parents to be educated on how to handle questions and situations regarding what the adoptee may be thinking and feeling. It is also important for other members of the family to be educated in this stage and the adjustment and accommodation stage, so everyone can be prepared and find ways to help the adoptee and other members of the family during this stage. Along with the education,

everyone is constantly making changes in response to what is happening and trying to find a new “normal”.

In addition to these three stages, Sun mentions an important aspect about the adoptive parents, rescue and salvation (2021). The adoptive parent may see adoption as saving the child. It puts emphasis on the child needing to be saved, the parents being saviors, and this stage may not include parents acknowledging the irrevocable loss from the child’s previous life and home (Sun, 2021). Although adoptees need to be put into a safe home and a loving family, and the adoptive parents save them from certain previous circumstances, this pattern of thinking does not fully acknowledge the loss and trauma the child experiences. There needs to be a balance between the parents knowing they helped their adopted child and understanding that in order to have a new life a previous one has been lost.

Fitzpatrick (2013) also explains a conceptual model of family development generated by Pinderhughes in 1996. Sun (2021) calls the first stage “pre-adoption”, the second stage “adjustment and accommodation”, the third stage “post adoption”, and a fourth aspect being “rescue and salvation”, while Fitzpatrick (2013) calls the first stage the “anticipation” stage, the second stage “accommodation”, the third stage “resistance”, and the last stage “restabilitation.” The first two stages mentioned by both Sun and Fitzpatrick are similar, there is a difference however when it comes to the “accommodation” stage. Fitzpatrick (2013) mentions that Pinderhughes explains this stage as the family members’ weaknesses and problems becoming apparent with each other, which may cause some resistance and adjustments need to be made. This differs from Sun’s third stage “post-adoption” because it does not mention the family members

weaknesses, but it explains the accommodations and changes that are needed to be made (2021). Fitzpatrick (2013) mentions “restabilization” as the time frame when the family is adjusting and choosing to keep the commitment together, even through the struggles, as the family. This differs from Sun’s fourth aspect “rescue and salvation” because this stage is not an extension of the third stage (2021). The stages Sun mentions are not only related to the act of adopting and caring for the child, but the last addition gives more explanation in relation to why the adoptive parents may have chosen to adopt (2021).

There is not much mentioned by Sun (2021) and Fitzpatrick (2013) about adoptive parents getting education for their adoption. It is briefly mentioned within the pre-adoption stage that Sun (2021) explains and includes the adoptive parental preparations. Fitzpatrick (2013) mentions preparations regarding stress levels, planning parenthood, but does not mention anything about utilizing children’s literature as a resource for them and their adoptee. Neither explicitly mention how useful adoption education and how different sources, like children’s literature, can help them and their adoptee.

### **Cognitive Development in Adoptive Children**

Cognitive development is a base framework for every child as they grow throughout the years. Cognitive development tends to look different for those who are adopted in comparison to their counterparts who are not adopted. The cognitive development differences are based on each age group, but within each age group, each adoptee is going to learn and understand things at their own pace.

Within the ages of 3-5, cognitive development for adoptees may be more factual. Children who are adopted start labeling themselves as being adopted, they understand their biological parents and how they do not live with them, and some adoptees know the reasons behind them being adopted into a new family (Brodzinsky, 2011). Some children may be aware of their adoption due to the death of their biological parents, that their biological parents are sick, or the adoptees may not have an explanation regarding their adoption. Although this age range can acknowledge that they have a different story of family than other children, they may not feel very different regarding their placement.

Within middle childhood, ages 6-12, adoptees may understand that there are options outside of adoption that their biological parent(s) could have taken. Such as the biological parent recovering from addictions they were struggling with, maybe leaving an abusive partner, learning how to parent in a healthy way, or even letting the child get adopted but have a connection after. Adoptees may also wonder if their biological parents wanted them, or if their parents could have made changes necessary to be seen as fit parents. They also know that they had to have left a different family to be in their current one (Brodzinsky, 2011), which comes with loss and grief. Children may have empathy for their biological parents (Brodzinsky, 2011), and understand that money, loss of jobs, and addiction can be hard when being a parent, therefore, adoptees may acknowledge that adoption may have been a preferable option. Adoptees may wonder about their authenticity within their adopted family (Brodzinsky, 2011). In this age range there is an expansion in the understanding of adoption about their biological family and their adoptive family. Children may begin to wonder why they left their biological family and why they were put in their adoptive family. This can include their position between the

two families, which can cause confusion in their identity as a person and who they are in the separate families.

In adolescence adoptees develop abstract thinking and understand implications, they relate their adoption to a societal perspective, such as biological parents struggling with addiction and how they are loved by their parents, but the parents did not have the means to take care of them. The adoptees may also see themselves as being a solution for their parents who may not have been able to have their own biological children or want their own biological children. In this age group, they see more of a loss in relation to being adopted because they were separated from their biological parents and don't have attachments with them; they may have trauma from being moved around and adopted, they may notice more differences between them and their adoptive family, and their self-esteem and identity may be impacted in this stage (Brodzinsky, 2011). In this age range, children ask more questions about the details involved with their adoption. Adolescent adoptees have more abstract thinking, so they can understand more reasoning behind actions, such as why their biological parents could not take care of them. This may also include their adoptive parents explaining differences between biological parents loving their child and being able to take care of the child. When adoptees learn more about their story, they have different views of their biological parents which can be intertwined with their views of themselves or their adoptive parents. Since they are getting more information and thinking more deeply about it, their view on adoption itself may change and they can curate and understand their own adoption story.

## **Windows and Mirrors Regarding Adoption and Children's Literature**

Windows and mirrors in adoption literature are shown in every book and impacts every reader. Whether it is a window or a mirror, the reader is being given more information and reflections of their experiences or reading and learning about other people's experiences. A mirror is when a reader personally relates to the storyline and characters, and they see it as a reflection for what they have experienced or what they are going through. A window is when the story does not personally reflect what the reader has or is currently experiencing, so the reader is seeing other people's experiences. Bishop (2015) says that readers often search for mirrors in books because it affirms their experiences, and in reading books that are not mirrors they see themselves as devalued from society because it does not express their group, community, or experiences. According to Tschida, "The reality for many readers, however, is that they do not see reflections of themselves in children's literature" (2014).

The windows and mirrors for adoptees is especially crucial because they have experienced something that not many others have; they are somewhat marginalized because of the experience of not living with their biological parents. When an adoptee reads a book about adoption, that feels like a mirror to them, they are seeing themselves in literature. It reflects their identity, culture, and experience, and they feel as though their lived experiences are validated (Tschida, 2014). When a child reads a book that is a window to them, they see views of the world that is not theirs, helping them to understand alternative worldviews, and it is a way of socializing children within the human experience (Tschida, 2014). Both windows and mirrors are important for children to experience when reading literature. When adoptees are learning about their story and



going through different stages of development, it is important for them to have outlets, and children's literature can be an asset that helps them process their adoption and give representation to their lives. A book that reflects their adoptive experience can make them feel seen, heard, and help them to process their circumstances and their story.

Although there have been more books on adoption published over the years, and since adoption is still a common occurrence, there is still a need to represent a wide range of adoption experiences that mirror more adoptees. A part of expanding the adoption literature includes authors who write books on adoption. Currently, books with children who are adopted are underrepresented and often present one aspect of adoption, this needs to be expanded upon. There needs to be more books from an adoptee's perspective, that represent more adoptees with diverse backgrounds, and these books will bring more representation for adoptees and those who want to learn about adoption through children's literature. Once more adoptees write about their own adoption experience, there will be a wider audience that is reached; therefore, more children will have books that mirror their experiences and give them a sense of belonging.

### **Parents Documenting Adoption in the Form of Books**

Some adoptive parents decide to document the adoption. For example, Fitzpatrick (2013) noted that 18/24 books written about adoption included parents/grandparents who wrote about adoption. The parents and grandparents who choose to write about adoption are taking on a role and making an action that is more than the adoption. They may believe it would be helpful for their child and other adoptees to have books that mirror their experiences and for other children to learn from. Within the 24 books that

Fitzpatrick analyzed, there were a wide variety of topics ranging from paperwork, traveling and experiences in other countries, siblings meeting the adoptee, struggles that the adoptee experiences, and more.

Throughout the entire adoption process, parents may document their roles and actions throughout adoption. Many of which are “behind the scenes” before the adoption, and many of which include parenting their new child during and after adoption. If adoptive parents document their journey and make a children’s book about adoption, it can be beneficial for many adoptees. All the parent's actions taken during adoption provide just a glimpse because it is a never-ending process of parenting an adoptee. There may be stages in life where an adoptee is not worried about their past and feels like a “normal child”, and there are other moments where the adoptee may be struggling with their story and identity. All of these include special parental roles that vary from the situation, how the adoptee needs help, other factors involved in their life at the time, etc. Nonetheless, the parental roles of an adoptive parent are never ending and last their whole lives. The above captures a hint of the amazing work and roles that adoptive parents choose to take on, knowing that the children they have adopted needed a forever family to belong in. The acts taken by adoptive parents are complex when taking care of a child in need.

Since there are lots needed to be done from the adoptive parents, as briefly mentioned above, writing a children’s book is an extension of those previous actions. Also, as noted above, if family members or adoptive parents choose to write a book about adoption, it is because they believe it can help their adoptee as well as other adoptees, or other children who can learn about this experience. Since adoptive parents are a majority

of authors who write about adoption, they have been able to share their multitude of experiences with the world.

### **Authors and Adoption**

Authors who write about adoption tend to be parents who have adopted, while other authors may be people who have seen adoption within their community or people who study adoption and work in the field. Of Fitzpatrick's book analysis, there were 24 authors of 24 books, 18 of which were written by parents or grandparents who had experienced adoption firsthand within the family, and the remaining 6 authors did not mention any previous adoption experiences (2013). Within Sun's book analysis on 40 authors, 2 of which were adoptees and 26 were adoptive parents (2021). In these two author analyses, most books written on adoption were from family members and not adoptees themselves.

Within this analysis, it is unsure what type of book each author wrote, (ex: adoptive mother writing from the perspective of her adoptive daughter). From observing the types of authors in these analyses, it can be inferred that there are authors (adoptive parents, adoptive family, and people in the work field) that have written books from an adoptee's perspective. This outside perspective, and from not being an adoptee, offers knowledge from watching an adoptee and understanding where they are coming from. It may also include research and experience within the field if the author wrote from interest and being involved in adoption. There are adoptive parents who sometimes write from their own perspective as an adoptive parent. This type of author can be parallel to an adoptee who decides to write about their adoption. An author who writes from their own

lived experiences of adopting can create a character from with authenticity because it is parallel to their experiences. An adoptive parent may have a different view on adoption and how the adoption went compared to the adoptee. Just like how an adoptee may not be able to understand the full perspective of an adoptive parent, because it is not the role they experienced. All authors have validity in writing books on adoption, there should, however, be more authors who are adoptees and share their personal experiences with adoption. There is a need for more adoption books from the perspective of an adoptee, this adds an extra layer of authenticity from personal experiences they may not be fully understood by others.

### **Parental Portrayals in Children's Adoption Literature**

Some common themes involved in children's literature about adoption include biological parents, adoptive parents, sometimes siblings and extended family, and people within the community. Each character plays a special role in telling the story and can be viewed differently for each reader. If the child reading a book that happens to be a mirror, they may use these books as a frame of reference to their own story or connect with the characters for specific aspects. Depending on how the book portrays the characters, it can be encouraging and educating for the adoptee, or it can harm how they perceive people who were involved in their adoption. One of these concerns of harm include how biological parents are portrayed; the child reading the book may personalize or begin to believe things about their biological parents based on their interpretation of biological parents in the story. Although parts of the story may be accurate regarding the readers

biological parent situation, it is something that should be taken with caution when writing about biological parents.

The biological parents may be a character, or in the background, in a book about adoption. There may or may not be details explaining the situation and why the child was available for adoption. The biological parents may be viewed positively, negatively, or not mentioned much or at all. This tends to vary between many books on adoption, just how it varies within people's stories and how they perceive both sets of parents. If the biological parent(s) are mentioned, there is a common storyline; the child was taken away from the biological parents or they gave their child to people who can take care of them and adopt them (Jerome, 2014). Some of these books in Jerome's analysis included reasons behind adoption, like the biological parents' inability to care, living in poverty, having passed away, and few mentioned the biological parents choosing to give their child to someone else (2014). The biological parents may have some appearance within the story, but the reasoning behind each adoption may not explicitly be explained or it is vaguely noted. Some previously written books explained reasons behind adoption and biological parents being courageous in giving their child to someone else, but no books in Jerome's analysis showed books with the perspectives of biological mothers or biological parents (2014). Not many books seem to be written from the perspective of biological parents, but Sun (2021) found one of thirty-six books that were written from a birth mother's perspective. It is unknown whether the author of this book was a biological mother. This shows that biological parents play a role in the adoption, but not many authors add details regarding the biological parents. Since it is not common, the biological parental views have not been shared through many children's literature books.

Adoptive parent portrayals in children's books are commonly seen as loving parents who are helping children in need and may also be seen as the saviors of the story. Although adoptive parents are taking adoptees into a loving environment, as noted above, the savior mentality may not take in account the loss the adoptee has and it may only focus on the good, even when the change can be traumatic (Sun, 2021). Parents who adopt may line up with the stereotypical middle-class parents with a "white picket fence", and they may be portrayed as having the inability, or not wanting, to fall pregnant (Jerome, 2024). This readiness to adopt, while the biological parents have had struggles with parenting, create the combination that has allowed children to be in the families who want to adopt (Jerome, 2014) and have the resources and finances to do so. The common theme of adoptive parents, in some stories, may include them adopting because it is their second option for having kids. Although this may be accurate for many adoptive parents, having this portrayed in a children's literature book may do more harm than intended. The adoptee may view themselves as a backup option, or that they were not the first option for adoptive parents to have kids.

Throughout these books on adoption, the most common characters tend to be white, female, and English speaking, with their primary setting in their home, classrooms, and neighborhood, and the most common family system had a mother and father who were married and the whole family living in one house (Buchanan, 2019). Buchanan also noted some stories that included a single mother, single father, blended families, or the child living with non-parent family members; but there was no note of foster families in this analysis (2019). Having an absence of the foster care system as a theme is an important consideration when it comes to children's literature. There should be a

representation of foster care within children's literature since it is becoming more common in the United States. This is also necessary because more youth are being adopted through foster care, so it is relevant to note these experiences within children's literature so foster youth can have books that mirror their experiences along with adoptees who have adoption books.

### **Summary of Literature Review**

When writing a book on adoption, it is essential to do research about adoption, what adoptees experience, and how it is related to children's literature. It is important to understand the number of adoptees who can relate to the book, such as the 5,826 adoptees from Russia in 2004 ("Adoption Statistics", 2024) or the percentage of adoptees who were adopted from another country. The many roles that adoptive parents partake in relates to how the adoptees come into their new home and how the adoptees learn and get support. A parental role may include documenting and writing about adoption. Fitzpatrick's analysis showed that most of the authors of adoption books were written by adoptive parents/grandparents – 18 of the 24 book authors (2013). Brodzinsky noted the different developmental stages for adoptees depending on their age; ranging from knowing they are adopted to then having abstract thinking in relation to their biological parents not being able to take care of them (2011). These experiences of adoption are underrepresented within children's literature. Sun (2021) found that two of the forty authors were adoptees themselves, the majority were adoptive parents. It can be major for an adoptee to write about their story, not only for themselves, but for other adoptees to understand what it felt for that author when they experienced adoption; it draws on the

concept of having a mirror to look into when reading the book. The more adoptees write about their stories, the more others can understand their insight of their experience. Some adoptees may have a different relationship with their biological parents than other adoptees, and the more adoptees who write about their unique experiences, the more readers can understand different relationships with biological parents and adoptive parents. There needs to be an expansion on the different types of books and adoptee representation in the field of children's literature.



## **Methods**

### **How Research Helped Me Write My Book**

My book “Little Lil’s Big Adventure” (Appendix A) has a significant amount of research done behind it. There were many aspects within my literature review that impacted how I wrote my book. It was important to know and acknowledge how many people are adopted and internationally adopted. It is also important for me to have the refresher of how adoptive parents make adoption happen and the actions that are taken; I took this into account when I was thinking of my storyline. The cognitive development in children was important to learn about; I used this information for what sentence structure I used and understanding how adoptees feel within the different stages of adoption. Learning about the windows and mirrors helped me understand children’s literature more and influenced how many details I wrote in storyline, because I wanted to make it generalized enough for more readers to relate to. Researching about authors and adoption helped me understand what gaps there are within children’s literature when it comes to adoptees writing about their story. When focusing on parental portrayals within adoption books it helped me understand the most common themes in which biological and adoptive parents are mentioned. All of the research has given me questions to think about, ideas for my book, and how I would write another adoption book after publishing this one.

### **Book Analysis**

One of the first things I did when I started thinking of my book was looking at other children’s literature. When looking at children’s literature, I tried to look at books

that are about adoption, but in addition there were books I looked at, no matter the storyline, to observe illustrations and the content. When looking at books, I found six that talked about adoption: *A Mother for Choco* (Kasza, 2008); *I Color Myself Different* (Kaepernick, 2022); *When I Met You* (Bashista, 2005); *Just Right Family* (Lopez, 2018); *Just because I was Adopted* (Shiroma, 2021); *All About Adoption* (Nemiroff, 2004). Most were books I had read when I was younger, and a couple were books I came across when looking in the library. The additional books I came across in the library I studied in regards of illustrations, colors, the storyline and vocabulary, page formats, and page lengths. Over the time I analyzed these books, I saved more than ten books to keep for studying as I started my storyline. I studied some because of the illustrations and colors, and I noted that these books included all the primary colors. I studied the others for the storyline, and the rest I studied for content and mentions of emotions. I realized when I was reading that some books never mentioned emotions and others mentioned some emotions, I decided that I wanted my book to mention emotions. I also took in account how many pages on average a children's book is. Fitzpatrick (2013a) mentions that the average page length is 24.5 pages. "How to..." (2021) and Combs (2023) both said that the average page length is 32 pages. When I was studying my books, they were mostly around the range of twenty-five to thirty-five pages, and my book has ended with twenty-six pages.

When reading books, I also considered the age range of my audience. When a child is in 1st grade, in early childhood, they know 14,000 words and it is shown that stories help them learn more words (Hauser-Cram, 2019). At this age, they know words and categories, they have also learned adjectives and expanded their sentence structure

(Hauser-Cram, 2019). I took this in account when writing the storyline; I kept the information straightforward and included words that younger readers understand. I saw in my analysis that books refer to the name of the character often, so the reader does not get confused with what character is being talked about. I also saw that these books had commonly used words for readers to easily understand, no matter the age. I wrote similarly because I want my book to be read to grade school children, and even toddlers, because I believe an adoptee is never too young to read about stories involving adoption.

### **Process of Creating My Book**

The first step I took when writing my storyline was gathering information from my research, book analysis, and sources from my parents. The information gathered from my research greatly impacted how I wrote my book. For example, the age group of my audience, four to eight years old, understands more factual information about adoption within that stage of development. So, in my book I wrote my story and events as facts, while mentioning some emotions. In parts of my book, I mentioned primary emotions I felt when I was being adopted and explained the reasoning behind it. In my research about windows and mirrors, not only did I find that mirrors are essential for marginalized groups, but I found that if I generalized my story, it may be a mirror for more readers. When learning about the gaps in authors who write about adoption, it reinforced my idea for writing about my own story. Seeing the research behind how biological parents are commonly portrayed in children's adoption literature, I decided to mention my biological mother and say she is sick. I did not mention many details because I think talking about biological parents within storylines can be complicating with how to portray the parents.

Seeing the research behind how adoptive parents are commonly portrayed, I did similarly what was found, I mentioned how my adoptive parents were looking for another child and how they were happy when they found me.

I also used my book analysis when writing my own book. From these books I analyzed, I decided to use a variety of primary colors, incorporate emotions with my story, use pictures that can be turned into illustrations, and have different layouts and creativity between the words on the page and the illustrations. When I was studying these books, there was a variety of how I could write my own, and I chose to keep mine on a simplistic side and have my pictures. I also noted that books for a younger audience also included lots of facts and shorter sentences, so I kept my sentences clear and concise. I also saw emotions mentioned here and there, so I added some of the emotions I felt when I was adopted. I saw that some of the books I read were more generalized, which helped it feel like a mirror, so I generalized my story without cutting out too many details that are necessary to tell the story. Within the books I read, I only found two authors who were adopted themselves, so it reinforced my need to write about my own story and expand adoptees as authors. When I was reading these books, some mentioned biological parents and others did not, I decided to mention my biological mother and not add much detail. I also noted in these books that the adoptive parents always were portrayed as loving and wanting to adopt, which is how my parents were portrayed in my book as well. I found that my book seemed to be similar to the books I analyzed within the common storyline themes of the child needing a home, having some emotions like sadness and happiness, and feeling happy when adopted into a loving family.

Finally, I used the three sources from my parents that explained my adoption. I read all the details, compiled the storyline, and then put it into an application called “Canva” where you can format a book. When I was making the storyline, I cut out some details, partly because there were lots of details that could possibly confuse the reader, it would have extended the book length, and it would not have been as straightforward. When writing my first draft in a document, I did not think about the narration and in my first draft I naturally wrote in third person. After, I considered changing it, but I thought having it in third person would remove myself, make it more generalized, and have more flexibility within details of my story. Once I was comfortable with the draft of my storyline, I put it into “Canva”, and I chose the 11x8.5in landscape sizing. The font I chose was “Canva Sans” and I made the font size 24 so it is big on the page and easy to read.

Once my draft was in this application, I edited it again to keep the book at a reasonable page length, with a sustainable number of words on each page. The process of editing and shortening my storyline was easier than I thought it was going to be. I started writing about my adoption and then I went into my childhood. So, when I cut out pages, I cut out the pages about my childhood. This is because I wanted to keep this book about my adoption. Once I had the storyline to just my adoption story, I re-read it to make sure all the necessary details were included. I added simple information about Russia and the cold winters. I also added information about my biological family to show the reader that I had a family I lived with when I was younger. I talked about the caregivers because it felt like a key concept; that I was being cared by people who were not my parents and that I got close to these caregivers. I talked about my biological sister in the story a few

times because we were adopted together. I added this because it is a part of our stories, and it also adds the idea that I was not alone in adoption, and it hints that I was not the only individual who was adopted. This gives the idea that there are others who are adopted and others who know what adoptees go through. I switched to my adoptive parents in part of the storyline because it added dynamic, and it explains their side from the beginning of their adoption process. I made sure to add information about what my parents did to adopt, even if it was a small list of what they really did, because it shows that adoptive parents take lots of actions to make adoption happen. I talked about my parents being in Russia visiting us because is common in all international adoptions and it was a significant moment when we were all together getting to know each other before the adoption was finalized. I mentioned the plane ride home and how it was scary and exciting at the same time because I had never been on a plane, I was moving with these new parents, and then into a whole new country, culture, and environment. When I closed the storyline, I added me meeting my new family and me learning and experiencing new things in my new home. The last page of the storyline says “Now Little Lil’s Big Adventure continues” because I may write another book later. Once the storyline was fully edited, I was finally ready to add my pictures.

The first idea I had for illustrations was to use my adoption pictures from my parents. I chose this because the story is about myself, and I think adding context to my experience adds a layer of authenticity. I chose pictures of my parents’ trips to Russia as well as my referral picture they got, which was the first picture they ever saw of me. In the beginning of the story, I added pictures of Russia to give the readers a sense of where I am from and what some parts of Russia look like. Then I added pictures of when I was

in the hospital because I wanted to keep it realistic and have the pictures show the different emotions I had during different events. I showed pictures of my biological sister and me because we were adopted together, and it is an essential part of the story. I added the pictures of us sitting together and playing together because that is what we did a lot of the time when we were together. I chose to add in a picture of my adoptive parents before they adopted us because it shows how their family has changed from two kids, and then at the end of the book, four kids. When I added the pictures of Regina alone on one page, that was because those were the first two pictures my parents saw of her. I added pictures of me meeting my parents and all four of us together because that is when my parents first visited Russia. I added the to do list because between their first visit and their visit where they took us home, they had lots to complete. I added more pictures of their visit with us to show that we had more time bonding before the adoption. Then the picture in front the courthouse was the best picture that showed the adoption happened. When I talked about us flying home, I added pictures of us on the plane, so the setting matched the storyline. I chose pictures where I was happy and observant to show two different circumstances and emotions I felt during the trip, because I was happy and laughing while observing and looking around the new setting. I added pictures of the whole family once the storyline said we got home; this showed the new beginning of our lives after being adopted and the family we were brought into. I showed pictures of me bonding with my siblings, my parents together, and me doing new things to show the new life I got because I was adopted.

Once I had some pictures picked out, I made an illustration for the cover picture, and as time went on, I did not have enough time to do the illustrations. So, I took the

pictures from my three sources and added them into my book. After I added some of the pictures, I rearranged them a few times to make the pictures align with the story. I wanted to add pictures of Russia because the book is special regarding being adopted from Russia. As I was putting the pictures in, I found that I had so many options that it was a tad hard to choose from. Narrowing down my selection of photos took some time, and even after I found the final photos, I needed to ask my mom for specific photos that matched the storyline.

When I finally had a first draft of the whole book, I reviewed and edited it some more. Although it is my draft for the project, I will be finishing and publishing it later. The plan for publishing is not set in stone, I have not researched how to publish a book since it was not my goal by the end of this project. If I enjoy finishing and publishing this book, then I will consider writing more books about my childhood and about other people's adoptions, but this official draft of "Little Lil's Big Adventure" is ready to share because this project is about the process and not the final product.



### **Statement of Limitations**

Something to note is the limitations of this research and project. The biggest, and most overarching limitation is time. This project was done within the spring semester, a total of seventeen weeks; this includes me coming up with the idea, do the research and literature review, and creating the book. As a result of this limitation, I did not have enough time to do as much research as I would have liked to relate more psychology with children's literature. I also used this time to find a selection of books on adoption that I read, and I would have liked to have more adoption books to had read and analyzed.

## Discussion

This creative project not only had research involved but it furthered children's literature. The research, such as developmental stages, windows and mirrors, and character portrayals, greatly influenced how I wrote by book. Knowledge about the developmental stages help authors understand their audience, and having it specified to staged adoptees go through change how adoption books are written. Authors of adoption books should always understand the psychology behind adoption so they can best curate their book towards this audience. The knowledge about adoptees and the lack of books that mirror their experiences impact how an author writes adoption stories. An author should also be aware of how the characters are commonly portrayed in children's adoption literature to understand how adoptees may see the storylines and if that can also relate to the reader. Understanding how the character portrayals impact the reader should get the author to consider how they are writing about different families in adoption books.

When an author is aware of the research that may be involved when writing a book, then the author can know how best to help the readers of their book on adoption. Along with this, there needs to be expansion in the topic of adoption within children's literature. First, there needs to be more adoptees who share their story of adoption through children's literature because this adds another layer of authenticity. It will also create a larger platform for children to read about adoption, learn about it, and possibly have more books that mirror them. Second, within the expansion of adoptees writing on adoption there needs to be more variety in the characters. The more adoptees write, the more people will understand different types of adoption. Such as international adoption from

different countries, domestic adoption, interracial adoption, and even children who were adopted at an older age, adopted from foster care, and more.

The process of creating my book was very impactful for me because I processed my story more, understood more of the details, and understood what I was going through throughout the process of being adopted. This book is not only going to be impactful for me, or even the people who know me, but it will be impactful for the readers and other authors. The contribution is giving children more books on adoption, adoptees another book for a mirror, having adoptive parents learn about another adoptee's perspective of their adoption, as well as sharing and educating every reader that comes across this book. Even though this book is not published yet, there is importance in the contribution and work done for future readers.

## Appendix A

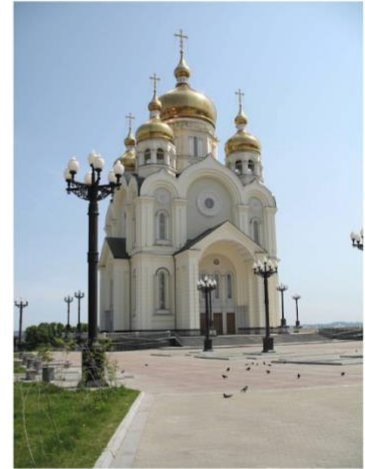


Little Lil's  
Big Adventure!



Meet Little Lil! This is all about her big adventure!

Little Lil is a little girl who was born in Russia. In Russia she has her mom and dad, two brothers, and a sister.



When Little Lil was a baby, her family lived in a village called Bogorodskoye.

The houses that Little Lil's family lived in did not have electricity, so the winter was very cold.



When Little Lil lived in these different houses, she got sick. One time she was taken to a hospital far from home... in a helicopter!



When Little Lil lived in the hospital she was 1 ½ years old.  
She was very sick, she was sad, and needed lots of help  
from the caring doctors.



Little Lil also got help from ladies who were her caregivers, they were like moms to Little Lil. She felt loved by these caregivers.



Around this time, Little Lil's sister, Regina, went to an orphanage. There were caregivers and lots of other boys and girls for Regina to play with.



Since Little Lil was in a hospital and Regina was in an orphanage, they were separated.



Even though they did not see each other for a while, they still knew they were sisters.

While Regina was being cared for in an orphanage, Little Lil was getting healthy in the hospital.



At the time, Little Lil did not know what it was like to feel happy and healthy. When she felt better it was a new experience.

Soon she started to feel better and felt happy! She was playing, smiling, and enjoyed being with the caregivers and doctors.



Little Lil stayed in the hospital until she was adopted. Sadly Little Lil's mom was too sick to take care of her or Regina.

After a few months, Little Lil got used to living in a hospital. She missed being with her family.



Little Lil didn't know at the time, but she had another family who was looking for her!

The parents in this family lived in a state called Minnesota, which was all the way in the United States!



When they heard about Little Lil they got so excited!

These 2 parents took the picture of Little Lil everywhere they went!



They showed family, friends, their doctors, and anyone who wanted to see!



These parents got a call from someone helping with the adoption... and...



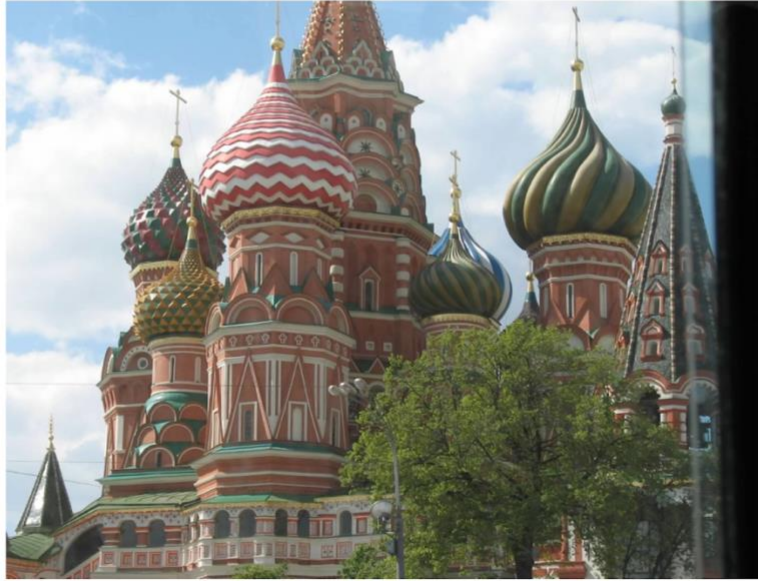
Little Lil had her sister Regina who could be adopted too!  
Two little daughters from Russia! It would be an  
adventure for the parents, so they said they would adopt  
both little girls!

They got so excited to meet Little Lil and Regina in Russia.  
So when they started flying to Russia they could hardly  
wait!



When they met Little Lil for the first time they loved her  
with all of their hearts. The parents had waited a long  
time to see her.

While the parents were in Russia they explored the country. They saw lots of fancy buildings and ate new food.





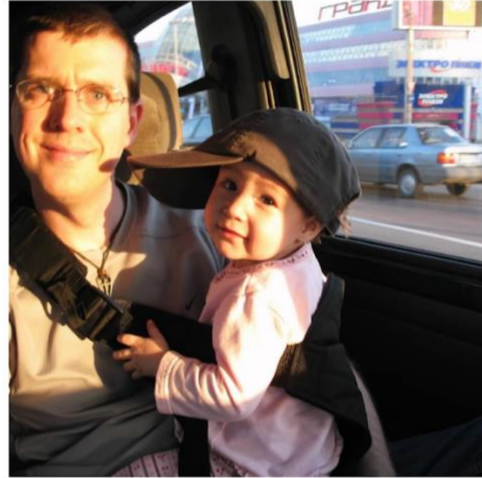
Sadly, the parents had to fly back home to the U.S., and they had to wait a long time before they could see Little Lil and Regina again.

The parents had to do lots of things to make the adoption happen! They had doctors appointments, they had meetings, and they worked with someone called a social worker.

To do:

- doctors appointment
- meeting with case worker
- buy plane tickets
- pack for Russia
- go to Russia!!!

Everything the parents did meant they were one step closer to having Little Lil as their daughter!



So they kept working hard... and when the time came, they flew back to Russia!

They got to spend more time with Little Lil. The parents fed her, held her, played with her, comforted her when she was sad, and made her laugh!



Little Lil also got to see Regina for the first time in a long time and they played together!

Then the day came... adoption day!



Little Lil and the parents went to the court house, and the judge said Little Lil and Regina were the daughters of their new parents!



Once Little Lil and Regina became a part of their family, they flew back to the U.S. and went to their new home.



Little Lil had never been on a plane before, and it was a long trip! The plane ride was a little scary and Little Lil cried, but once they got to the U.S. it was exciting!

Little Lil got to meet her new family! Her and Regina met their siblings and grandparents! It was very exciting. It also made Little Lil nervous.



Little Lil did not know English, so she did not understand what her new family was saying to her. It felt like she was surrounded by strangers.

Over time she got used to being in her new family! Little Lil also learned English, played toys with her new siblings, and ate new foods! The parents were happy!

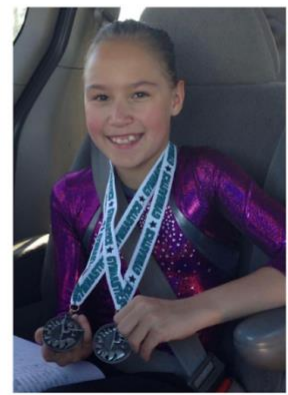


Little Lil has a new life after adoption. A life where she is healthy, loved, can go on adventures, and explore the world!



This is all because two parents chose to bring her into a safe and loving home.

Now Little Lil's Big Adventure continues!



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