Hair: from anguish to acceptance

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Hair is something all humans deal with at one time or another. It stands out, and is often one of the first things others notice about you. A bad hair day can be disastrous, and a good hair cut can do wonders for your self-esteem. Some people spend mere seconds a day with their hair (or lack of it), while others literally spend hours. It can be a source of pride, embarrassment and even envy.

This project is a paper designed to look at hair from several angles. Plot lines will be explored concerning each story’s climactic event. Characters from the different stories will be compared and examined in light of the motivation for their actions. Finally, the theme of individuality will be brought out in the stories.

The books used for this project are all picture books, and many have a humorous aspect. I love to read and tell stories, especially funny ones, to children, so this seemed like a natural place to begin. There is a multitude of books dealing in some way with hair, but these ten were chosen for specific purposes which will become evident as we journey through the web page. The books came from my personal collection, our elementary school library, and our nearby public library. One of the stories I used is Gertrude McFuzz from *Yertle the Turtle and other stories* by Dr. Seuss. Although Gertrude’s problem is tail feathers rather than hair, I felt that a little artistic license was in order. If Gertrude had hair rather than feathers, I’m sure she would have had a similar problem with hair envy and overnight growth tablets.
Story analysis

These stories will be analyzed in three ways: plot, character and theme.

Plot: The climactic event from each book will be described and compared to the others in the group.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title (or portion of long title)</th>
<th>Climactic event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Madame LaGrande</td>
<td>Madame LaGrande causes an uproar as her hairdo explodes in the Opera House.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Emily Blair</td>
<td>Emily discovers that her hair is perfect for braiding.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Franny B. Kranny</td>
<td>Franny’s hairstyle is a hit at the family reunion.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Erandi’s Braids</td>
<td>Erandi volunteers to have her hair cut to earn money.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Amanda’s Perfect Hair</td>
<td>Amanda decides to cut her hair and reclaim her identity.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Princess who lost her hair</td>
<td>The princess is discovered as she lovingly yet secretly tends and waters a plant. Her lost hair is restored.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stephanie’s Ponytail</td>
<td>Stephanie comes to school with a ponytail and finds that her classmates shaved their heads, thinking that was what she was going to do.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Moosetache</td>
<td>Moose meets a female moose, who teaches him to tame his moosetache with glue.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gertrude McFuzz</td>
<td>Gertrude has so many new tail feathers that she can’t fly and has to have them plucked out.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rapunzel</td>
<td>The sorceress discovers Rapunzel’s pregnancy, cuts her hair, casts her from the tower and later blinds the prince.</td>
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Many of these stories are humorous, as with Madame LaGrande, Franny, Stephanie and Gertrude. Erandi and the Princess both learn about giving and receiving.

With the exception of the Princess and Rapunzel, the climactic point for the characters involves resolving some aspect of their feelings about their hair.

All of the stories have a satisfying resolution – a happy ending. The main characters feel good about themselves, and have reached a point where hair is no longer the driving force in their lives.

Characters: The main characters will be examined in light of the motivation for their actions.

Madame LaGrande – Very vain, she wants to impress others with her fashion sense and the fact that she sports the latest clothes and hairstyles.
Emily Blair – Loves to play with hair, and wishes for hair that could be styled in lots of ways.
Franny B. Kranny – Resists other’s attempts to fit her into a mold.
Erandi – Wants to help provide for her family.
Amanda – Feels that people only like her or notice her because of her hair. She is determined to be seen for who she really is.
Princess – In the beginning, jealously guarded her hair as a possession, and felt superior to others. Later on, she learns humility, kindness and love, and freely shares what she has.
Stephanie – Wants to be unique and doesn’t care what the others say about her.
Moose – Is seriously hampered from enjoying life because of his unruly hair.
Gertrude McFuzz – Longs for tail feathers like Lolla-Lee-Lou (or better!)
Rapunzel – Lonely and sheltered, she is eager for company, then falls in love.

These characters are in the process of self-discovery and acceptance. They are each at very different places in that journey. Some, like Madame LaGrande, have a long way to go to find out that outward trappings and appearances aren’t really important. Stephanie, on the other hand, is very comfortable with herself and mildly amused at the insecurities of others. Princess is in the process of transformation as she moves from self-centeredness to putting others first.

**Theme:** Our hair is very much an expression of our individuality or uniqueness.
We show that in many different ways, as do the characters in these books.
Each story deals in some way with individuality.
When I face adversity, I show my true strength – what I’m really made of!! I am still learning about myself and discovering my gifts!

Erandi  |  Princess  |  Rapunzel

I’m trying to do the best with what I’ve got, and learn to deal with what I have! I’m happy with who I am and content!

Moose  |  Emily

Madame LaGrande pores through fashion and hair magazines devouring the latest styles. When she reads about a pompadour, she is determined to wear one to the opera that night. Marcel the hair stylist fixes a pompadour so huge that Madame can’t fit into her coach, so she walks to the Opera House. Along the way she picks up two pigeons, three cats, and four dogs in her hair unbeknownst to her. She assumes that all the stares from the townspeople are directed at her hair and preens along the way to the opera. When she arrives, the king becomes attached to her hair, her hair comes undone in a mini-explosion and wreaks havoc.


Emily Blair has always had thin straight hair. She has always wanted curly thick hair, but has to be content with arranging her friend Pamela’s wonderful hair. But one day she tries to braid Pamela’s hair and it is a disaster. When Pamela braids Emily’s, it looks fabulous, and Emily has a whole new world opened to her. She is able to do lots of things with braids of all kinds, and becomes happy with her hair.


Franny loves her long frizzy hair and resists all attempts to tame it. Her mother takes her to the beauty parlor in preparation for an upcoming family reunion. At first she hates her new “do”, but when a bird lands in her hair and stays she loves it. She is careful when sleeping and bathing not to disturb the bird. Her hairdo is a hit at the reunion and even lands her on the television news. After the reunion she decides to get a haircut and shares her hair with the birds to become part of their nests.

Erandi and her mother have very little money. Their fishing net has big holes and has already been repaired too many times. To get money for a new net, Erandi’s mother tries to sell her hair, but it is too short. Erandi bravely volunteers to cut off her own hair to sell, although she is very proud of it. They get enough money for a net and a doll for Erandi. Erandi is sad her hair is short, but glad that it will grow back and that she could contribute to her family’s well-being.


Amanda’s hair is long, thick and curly. Everyone thinks it is perfect. Her mom says everyone envies her hair. Her friends love to play with it. In fact, everyone else loves it so much that Amanda feels that no one notices her anymore. They just notice her hair. Amanda decides to take drastic action. She believes that if she changes her hairstyle, she can reclaim her identity.


The princess is proud of her beautiful hair. When a bird asks her for hair to line its nest, she refuses angrily. The bird is magical and causes a drought to come over the land and the princess to lose her hair until she has learned humility. Muoma, a hungry beggar boy has wonderful dreams concerning the land and the princess’ hair. He sets off on a journey, meets the magical bird, and gets special seeds to plant in the king’s garden. The princess sees the plant growing in the midst of drought, and shows kindness to it by watering it. The plant is actually a magic tree which restores her hair. The princess happily shares her hair with the birds to line their nests, and the land is restored.


Stephanie wears her hair to school differently each day – in a ponytail in back, on the side, on the top of her head, in front. Each day her classmates make fun of her new ponytail, but then the next day they copy what she’s done. Stephanie gets fed up with their copying, and tells them that the next day she will come to school bald. When her classmates get to school the following morning they find out she has tricked them, because she still has a ponytail and they are all bald.
Palatini, Margie (1997). Illustrated by Henry Cole. *Moose*tache. New York: Hyperion. Moose has a huge problem with his moosetache. It is everywhere and very prickly! It gets in the way and hampers his active lifestyle. He tries curling it, and putting it up or back, but nothing works. He meets a female moose who shows him just what to do. Glue!! They fall in love and live happily ever after, never running out of glue for both their hairdos.


Gertrude has only one small tail feather, while her friend Lolla-Lee-Lou has two. Gertrude is so jealous that she decides to eat special pill-berries to grow more tail feathers. But she doesn’t stop with just one or two. She grows so many tail feathers that she can’t even fly or move. Gertrude’s friends have to pull out her new feathers until she is left with the tiny little tail feather she originally had. However, her experience teaches her that she should be happy with what she’s got.


This is a beautiful retelling of the classic fairy tale. A sorceress takes Rapunzel from her parents at birth because they stole some herbs from the sorceress’ garden. Rapunzel grows up happy and protected, but as a young teenager the sorceress puts her in a high tower with only a window at the very top. Rapunzel is to let the sorceress in by letting down her thick flowing hair. A prince hears her singing to the birds and falls in love with her. He is determined to meet her and discovers how Rapunzel lets the sorceress in the tower. Soon he is visiting her each night. The couple marries, and when the sorceress discovers Rapunzel is pregnant, cuts her hair and banishes her to the desert wilderness. The sorceress tricks the prince and blinds him. The prince stumbles through the wilderness until he is finally reunited with his wife and children. They go to his kingdom and live happily ever after.
Summary

At times everyone can relate to each of the main characters in these stories. We all have times of vanity, humility, rebellion, self-sacrifice. We all have had, at least once, a day when every hair was in place – and plenty of days when not one was! Hair and hairstyles are not just mere vanity. They are an important reflection of who we are, or want to be. Our hair says something about us and links us to the rest of humankind. It can be considered a barometer of our mood, and an indication of how we feel about ourselves.

This project was entitled “Hair: from anguish to acceptance” because of the importance in becoming comfortable with who you are. This is true in all aspects of life, but appearance in particular is an area that many people struggle with. Accepting yourself with all of your limitations and moving forward is crucial to having a happy life. Your happiness isn’t dependent on good hair days, or fashionable clothes, but on your true self.

In reflecting on this project, there were many areas that weren’t able to be touched on – several excellent books on African-American hair would have been good to include. I became fascinated at the aspect of how pride is tied up in our appearance, and how in some books characters got their lives back when their hair finally came under control. Although the ten books used in the project are children’s picture books, they reflect a universality of experience between all cultures, sexes (everyone has had a bad hair day!), ages (children and adults can both relate!), and wealth. In looking back, I would have liked to explore some writings for adults on these ideas.

I was intending to do this project as a Web page, but as I was completing it, I became nervous about that the links would not transfer. It worked as I designed it on my computer, but I wasn’t sure how it would end up as it downloaded. I would like to learn more about creating Web pages and sending them online.