

Playing in Astrid Lindgren's World: Developing Empathy through Dramatic Play

As Ulla Lundqvist points out her article about Astrid Lindgren's Pippi Longstocking series, Pippi "plays all day; for her, work is play and play work" (100). Pippi's propensity to play reflects the high premium that Lindgren placed on children's play. Play, especially dramatic play, figures prominently in all of Lindgren's stories for children. For Lindgren, one of the great benefits associated with dramatic play is that it contributes to the development of empathy among children. Just as Pippi learns about the lives of other people by pretending to be somebody other than herself, Lindgren believed that pretend play helps all children learn to see the world from various points of view.

Given the importance of play in Lindgren's books, it seems especially fitting that there is now a unique literary playground called Astrid Lindgren's World in Vimmerby, the town in Sweden where Lindgren lived during her childhood. Sometimes described as a theater park, this attraction opened in 1981. The park features replicas of the settings from Lindgren's children's books. For example, the park includes a recreation of Pippi's house, Villa Villekulla, where children can explore the house and pretend to be Pippi or her friends. Most of the buildings in the park are miniaturized, but they all are big enough for children to enter the structures and in the process enter the stories associated with these structures. The park is designed to provide children with an interactive play environment in which they can immerse themselves in Lindgren's stories, play in settings based on her stories, and pretend to be characters in these stories. By fostering this type of story-based dramatic play, Astrid Lindgren World also promotes the development of empathy.

