



February 20, 2026

Children's Literature Assembly Online Research Conference

*Care, Advocacy, and Children's Literature:
Research in Theory and Practice*



PROGRAM

Conference Schedule

Time (ET)

9:30-9:45 am	Welcome
10:00-11:00 am	Concurrent Sessions 1
11:15 am -12:15 pm	Keynote Presentation, Jonda McNair
12:30-1:30 pm	Concurrent Sessions 2
1:45-2:45 pm	Children's Book Creators & Educational Researchers in Conversation
3:00-4:00 pm	Concurrent Sessions 3
4:15-5:00 pm	Journal Editor Sessions <ul style="list-style-type: none">🔄 Rotation 1: 4:15-4:35🔄 Rotation 2: 4:40-5:00
5:15-6:15 pm	Concurrent Sessions 4
6:15-6:30 pm	Closing



The Children's Literature Assembly of NCTE

A vibrant community of scholars, teachers, librarians, book creators, and other children's literature enthusiasts who advocate the centrality of literature in children's academic and personal lives.

Join CLA at ChildrensLiteratureAssembly.org



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Xenia Hadjioannou, Penn State University, Berks (Co-Chair)
Lauren Aimonette Liang, University of Utah
Miriam Martinez, University of Texas San Antonio
Liz Thackeray Nelson, Utah Valley University
Mary-Kate Sableski, University of Dayton
Katie Scieurba, University of Georgia
Jennifer Slagus, West Chester University of Pennsylvania
Melissa Stewart, Children's Book Author
Megan Van Deventer, Weber State University

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Ninjin Tumurbat
Megan Van Deventer
Elena Venegas
Jizelle Villegas
Vanessa Winn
Angela Wiseman
Narges Zandi

Concurrent Sessions 1 - 10:00-11:00 am ET

1A. Children's Literature & Curriculum

Chair: Mary-Kate Sableski, University of Dayton

Designing Activist Curricula in Language Arts: Indic-centric Multicultural Children's Literature

With the passage of time, minoritized cultural groups in the US are receiving greater respect and recognition within the greater community. Current research documents the dearth of representation of diverse groups in the curriculum. As with all social imperatives, teacher education and teaching is tasked with preparing young minds to confront the concerns of a changing society. A Euro/Ameri-centric perspective is no longer considered as the cynosure of society. There are competing cultural voices demanding recognition within the curriculum. Today, educators are revamping pedagogies as they decenter whiteness to embrace minoritized groups that are absent or misrepresented in the curriculum. As schools restructure their instructional delivery, they can embrace a broader range of diverse experiences and perspectives. Voices that would antagonize or victimize underserved communities can be reoriented and educated through authentic multicultural children's literature (MCCL).

Howard L. Smith, *The University of Texas at San Antonio*

Kalpana Mukunda Iyengar, *The University of Texas at San Antonio*

From Childhood Reading to Classroom Commitments: Auto-Bibliographies as Praxis in an Indonesian Children's Literature Course

This presentation examines how Auto-Bibliographies—narratives of teacher candidates' childhood reading experiences—can serve as praxis in Indonesian teacher education. Drawing on five cohorts of reflective essays, the study shows how personal memories of reading at home and in school shape future commitments to teaching, advocacy, and literacy. By linking individual stories to Indonesia's broader literacy challenges, the project highlights the transformative potential of reflective writing to prepare future teachers as critical, caring advocates for children and reading. The study draws on Freirean praxis—the interplay of reflection and action as transformation (Freire, 1970/2000)—and Pinar's currere framework

(1975), which conceptualizes curriculum as a process of autobiographical understanding across past, present, and future. These two perspectives frame the Auto-Bibliographies as acts of reflection that enable teacher candidates to analyze formative reading experiences and reimagine their future roles as literacy advocates.

Herdiana Hakim, Sampoerna University

Exploring the Use of Children’s Literature in Adult ESL and Literacy Education: A Pedagogical and Social Justice Perspective

This research explores the integration of children’s literature into adult ESL and literacy courses to promote care, empathy, and social justice. Guided by dialogic and critical pedagogy theories, the study examines how children’s texts foster emotional engagement, cultural understanding, and advocacy among adult learners. Through classroom observations and interviews, preliminary findings suggest that children’s literature enhances learner agency and social awareness. This project highlights innovative pedagogical strategies that align with the conference themes of care and advocacy, emphasizing the transformative potential of children’s literature in adult education for fostering inclusive and socially conscious learning environments.

Jennifer Betts, *University of Georgia*

1B. Cultural Literacies & Care

Chair: Jennifer Slagus, West Chester University

Daisies or Darkness? Using Terror Management Theory to Examine How Children’s Picturebooks Depict Death, Rituals, and Existential Anxiety in Global Contexts

This paper applies Terror Management Theory (TMT) to a content analysis of contemporary children’s picturebooks about death and dying. While prior research documents patterns in biological, emotional, and cultural representations of death, few studies ask how these books function as mortality-anxiety buffers. Analyzing 20 recent titles as a pilot study, I explore how picturebooks deploy worldview defenses, esteem bolsters, and mortality-salience regulation strategies. Findings highlight how stylistic choices, from nature cycles to personified Death, offer children symbolic resources for making sense of mortality, while also raising questions of cultural inclusion and whose deaths are portrayed as “grievable.”

Nicholas E. Husbye, *University of Nebraska - Lincoln*

Legacies of Remembering: Ancestral Presence and African Diasporic Communal Care in Children's Literature

What are the promises and possibilities of tracing an ancestral presence in children's literature by Black authors and about African Diasporic people? In this paper, I turn to the ancestor (Morrison, 1984) in folktales and contemporary children's book to remember and to invite readers into the act of remembering (Dillard & Neal, 2021). Authors and illustrators orient readers to historical legacies, to the ancestral, and to intergenerational remembering in these selected stories. Ultimately, this study finds that acknowledgment of the ancestor in gentle, noninvasive, and liberatory ways is communal care work in the research on children's literature.

Latoya M. Teague, *The University of Tulsa*

From Page to Practice: Indian Picturebooks as Pedagogical Tools for Cultural Literacy in Early Childhood Education of Care

This paper proposes a framework based on Material Engagement Theory to foster cultural literacy in early childhood education through Indian picturebooks. It argues that while Indian picturebooks lack the material enhancements of Western ones, they possess embedded materiality, manifested through illustrations, narratives, and design, that evoke sensory experience through imagination. By analysing Mukand and Riaz, the paper demonstrates how its embedded materiality enable embodied reading experiences that foster diverse cultural understanding. The framework, comprising four analytical considerations, allows one to understand the engagement process with picturebooks, in this case, through embedded materiality of Indian Picturebooks, which can contribute to the building of cultural literacy in children.

B. Sai Harshitha, *Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning, Anantapur Campus, India*
Sowmya Srinivasan, *Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning, Anantapur Campus, India*

1C. Visual Representations & Storytelling

Chair: Adam Crawley, University of Colorado Boulder

Stories That Embrace: Advocating for Body Diversity in Early Childhood Picturebooks

This paper explores how children's picturebooks for early childhood represent bodies and bodily differences, focusing on identity, diversity, and belonging during a formative developmental period. Through close visual and textual analysis of Arabic and international texts, it examines narrative and illustrative strategies that normalize difference and challenge stereotypes related to race, ability, and body type. Drawing on critical children's literature studies and psychological research, the study highlights the pedagogical potential of picturebooks to foster empathy, self-acceptance, and social inclusion. It argues that picturebooks are vital cultural tools advancing inclusive practices and equity in early childhood education.

Dalia Mostafa Abdulrahman, *Cairo University*

Visual and Textual Meaning-Making: How Refugee Youth Respond to Drawn Together in a Community-Based Organization

This study examines how refugee youth engage with the picturebook *After the Fall (How Humpty Dumpty Got Back Up Again)* by Dan Santat through multimodal/visual responses. The central research question is: How do refugee youth engage both visually and textually with *After the Fall* in their writing and art? This presentation explores the intersection of reader response theory, arts-based approaches, and trauma-informed pedagogy to understand how young refugees make meaning through picturebooks.

Angela M. Wiseman, *North Carolina State University*

Amber Moore, *North Carolina State University*

Majid Komasi, *North Carolina State University*

1D. Making Meaning with Nonfiction

Chair: Anežka Kuzmičová, Charles University

Making Meaning with Nonfiction: Theoretical and Children's Perspectives

This interdisciplinary symposium will showcase work from an ongoing EU-funded project on children and nonfiction. We combine social science and humanities approaches in exploring how primary-aged children experience facts and informational reading, how their experiences, questions and imaginings are reflected in contemporary nonfiction books, and how they relate to assumptions held by book creators, parents, and other adult stakeholders. The symposium papers will progress from a fully text-oriented to a fully child-centred approach. First, we will consider the concept of 'character' and its previously unexplored theoretical ramifications relative to nonfiction text for children. Next, we will present a comparative picturebook analysis inspired by qualitative data from children, offering a transferable methodology that applies children's perspectives 'by proxy.' Finally, we will present the results of a child-centred creative inquiry into the experiences prompted in informational reading, spanning a rich spectrum from 'fun' (or hedonic) to 'meaningful' (or eudaimonic) affects.

Sarah Caré, Charles University

Karolína Šimková, Charles University

Anežka Kuzmičová & Markéta Supa, Charles University

Keynote - 11:15 am -12:15 pm ET

“The Show is about to Begin” Title Pages in Caldecott Medal Winners

Introduction by **Adam Crawley, University of Colorado, Boulder**

Dr. Jonda C. McNair is the Charlotte S. Huck Endowed Professor of Children’s Literature at The Ohio State University. She specializes in literature intended for youth with an emphasis on books written by and about African Americans. She is a past chair of the Coretta Scott King Book Awards Committee and was a member of the 2019 Randolph Caldecott Award Selection Committee. Dr. McNair served as chair of the 2021 John Newbery Award Selection Committee and as 2023-2024 President of the Association for Library Service to Children.



She is a former coeditor of the *Journal of Children’s Literature and Language Arts*. Her work has appeared in journals such as *Review of Educational Research*, *The Reading Teacher*, *Language Arts*, *Young Children*, *The Journal of Negro Education*, and *Children’s Literature in Education*. Dr. McNair is a former elementary school teacher of students in grades K-2.

Concurrent Sessions 2 - 12:30-1:30 pm ET

2A. Avenues of Care

Chair: Melissa Stewart, author

Digital Children's Literature as Advocacy and Care for Ukrainian Children Displaced by War

This presentation examines how digital children's literature can serve as advocacy and care for families displaced by the war in Ukraine. We analyze how Stories with Clever Hedgehog, a free online platform that includes a digital library of multilingual texts, is used by parents, teachers, and librarians to sustain language and culture and to nurture resilience and joy in children's lives. Findings reveal that shared reading of digital texts may help with literacy learning and may provide comfort and happiness during displacement. Digital children's literature can be a tool for care and advocacy, supporting children's well-being in times of crisis.

Amy Santos, *University of Delaware*

In the Unenchanted World of the Hospital: Fiction as a Tool for Improving the Well-Being of Hospitalized Children

This study investigated whether fictional narratives and riddles can improve the well-being of hospitalized children. About 100 patients aged 6–10 at the Hospital das Clínicas of Unicamp participated in sessions of storytelling, cartoons, or riddles. Saliva samples and pain scales were collected before and after the activities. Laboratory tests using ELISA and statistical analyses in R (Wilcoxon, Kruskal–Wallis, and multivariate tests) showed that cortisol levels and pain perception decreased in all groups, while oxytocin showed no significant change. Stories involving fantasy and overcoming adversity, such as Pinocchio, were most effective in promoting comfort and emotional relief.

Victoria do Monte Rodrigues, *State University of Campinas*

To Cradle a Bleeding Paw: Animal Welfare Education & Advocacy in Women-Authoring Children's Literature, 1770–1900

From the genre's earliest days, women authors understood children's literature as an educational tool to cultivate empathy and incentivize moral agency in young readers. To illustrate this case, this paper explores how nineteenth-century British women authors used children's literature for animal welfare advocacy. Through the works of a hidden network of women educators and activists, it examines how animal suffering and cruelty were framed into politics of care to foster empathy and moral responsibility in children. By situating these narratives within the contexts of Victorian reform movements, the study reveals how early children's literature functioned as a site of socio-political engagement and intergenerational advocacy for the voiceless.

Rina Teske, *University of Edinburgh*

2B. Cultural & Linguistic Advocacy

Chair: Shriya Kuchibhotla, University of Georgia

Caring Adaptations: How Children's Literature-on-Stage Affords Literacy, Identity, and Resistance for Bilingual Audiences

This research-in-progress examines how three children's literature texts staged by a U.S. children's theatre—Tomás and the Library Lady, Red Riding Hood, and A Charlie Brown Christmas—are adapted to support bilingual audiences. Using fieldnotes, scripts/prompt books, rehearsal reports, interviews with theatre artists, and public audience artifacts, the study traces how specific routines (embodied narration, bilingual transitions without forced translation, comic release, dream-as-metaphor, community introductions) afford multimodal, dialogic, and narrative literacies, identity recognition, and everyday resistance to monolingual norms. Framed by Bhabha, Boal, Clark, and Dawson, findings offer a portable vocabulary for caring, culturally sustaining adaptation in school-theatre partnerships.

Rosita Beidaghi, *UT San Antonio*

Exploring Cultural and Linguistic Advocacy in the Contemporary Bilingual Graphic Novel Series, Where's Halmoni?

This presentation explores how folkloric tropes act as dialogic networks, evidencing agentive cultural and linguistic representations of youth in Julie Kim's graphic novel series, *Where's Halmoni?* And *Where's Joon?* Informed by theories of dialogism and translanguaging we discuss how this series illuminates these dialogic folklore tropes as displays of transnational identity negotiations and linguistic dexterity. Ultimately, we champion this portrayal of Korean folklore and intentional multilingualism as a shift from overused devices of multicultural representations, emphasizing experiences of interaction, cultural affiliation and knowledge.

Shriya Kuchibhotla, *University of Georgia*
Jennifer Graff, *University of Georgia*

Translanguaging in Korean American Children's and Adolescent Literature for Multicultural Education

In recent years, Korean American children's and adolescent literature has increasingly integrated Korean language elements, reflecting both the growing presence of Korean American authors and the global rise of Korean culture. While the inclusion of Korean words in these texts serves cultural and narrative functions, their specific roles and implications for readers—particularly non-Korean, U.S.-based youth—remain underexplored. This study investigates how Korean language is used for cultural knowledge and education within four contemporary realistic fiction Korean American novels. Using critical content analysis and linguistic content analysis, the research examines the literary, cultural, and ideological purposes of Korean language use.

Prisca Kim, *University of New Mexico*

2C. Graphic Narratives

Chair: Jennifer Slagus, West Chester University

One Piece: Navigating the Tides of Freedom (Through an Ideational Lens)

This study investigates how Eiichiro Oda's manga "One Piece" constructs societal themes of military and piracy. Utilizing Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), the research analyzes and compares the ideational content of the original Japanese text with its VIZ English translation. The study explores how linguistic and visual elements communicate complex notions of authority, rebellion, and freedom. It primarily seeks to understand how the translation process alters the reception of these themes, highlighting the implications for cross-cultural perception and language education.

Michael Gray, *University of Georgia*

Illuminating a Path for (LGBTQ+) Readers: The Humanizing Work of Mike Curato's *Flamer*

Mike Curato's *Flamer* is one of the most banned books in America, yet is also praised for its potential to "save lives." For this presentation, we will engage in a critical content analysis of *Flamer* to explore how its graphic novel format invites readers to empathize with a gay teenager whose marginalization pushes him to question the value of his own life. Rather than silence voices like Curato's, we advocate for a critical engagement with the world in which young people live - a world that includes teens for whom the fictional Aiden Navarro will provide refuge and hope.

Katie Scieurba, *University of Georgia*

Morgan Fetsko, *University of Georgia*

Learning Immigrant Experiences Through Asian American Graphic Novels

The purpose of this study is to explore the representations of Asian American immigrant experiences in graphic novels. I will use three award-winning Asian American graphic novels: *Messy Roots* (Gao, 2022), *Family Style* (Phan, 2023), and *In Limbo* (Lee, 2023). The theoretical framework will be drawn from transactional theory (Rosenblatt, 1938) and critical multicultural analysis (Botelho & Rudman, 2009). Several themes will be developed after analyzing key representations. This study will also provide practical suggestions for teachers for teachers on using graphic novels to promote Asian American immigration stories and diversity.

Xuejiao Li, *Washington State University*

2D. Teacher Autonomy & Text Selection

Chair: Mary-Kate Sableski, University of Dayton

Advocating for Students through Thoughtful Book Selection across the Content Areas: Teacher Autonomy in an Era of Scripted Curricula and Instructional Mandates

This symposium examines how book selection functions as an act of care, advocacy, and autonomy in contemporary classrooms. In the context of scripted curricula and diminishing teacher agency, intentionally choosing literature becomes a means for educators to affirm student identities and foster inclusive learning. The three papers highlight diverse entry points for this work. Profiles of Moral Courage analyzes 25 biographical picturebooks of activist leaders through White's (2015) framework, identifying how portrayals of human rights activism provide children with models of justice-oriented citizenship. Diverse Representation in STEM Focused Literature investigates award-winning STEM books, revealing limited representation of diversity and underscoring the need for culturally relevant texts that advocate for students' futures in STEM fields. American Culture and Social Responsibility details a cross-curricular high school course that cultivates civic literacy, empathy, and student activism through diverse texts. Together, these studies illustrate the transformative potential of literature to inspire moral reasoning, equity, and social change.

Mary-Kate Sableski, *University of Dayton*
Jackie Marshall Arnold, *University of Dayton*
Treavor Bogard, *University of Dayton*
Vanessa Winn, *University of Dayton*
Ben Swick, *Archbishop Carroll High School*
Tara Knopp, *Archbishop Carroll High School*
Martha Saurine, *Archbishop Carroll High School*
Erik Ramsey, *Archbishop Carroll High School*

Children's Book Creators & Educational Researchers in Conversation - 1:45-2:45 pm ET



Nancy Johnson

In this session facilitated by Nancy Johnson, creators of nonfiction for youth and educational researchers will discuss future approaches to research and ways in which authors, illustrators, and researchers might collaborate. Participants include nonfiction creators of both picturebooks and long-form nonfiction as well as literacy educators who conduct content analyses of nonfiction and/or classroom-centered research around nonfiction.



Lesa Cline-Ransome



Candace Fleming



Juana Martinez-Neal



Melissa Stewart



Mary Ann Cappiello



Grace Enriquez



Courtney Shimek

Concurrent Sessions 3 - 3:00-4:00 pm ET

3A. Exploring Metacognition & Affect

Chair: Xenia Hadjoannou

Thinking About Thinking: Using Linda Sue Park's Third-Person Narratives to Develop Metacognitive Skills in Middle School ELAR

This presentation explores how the sophisticated third-person narrative techniques in Linda Sue Park's novels *A Single Shard* and *The Prairie Lotus* can serve as powerful tools for developing metacognitive awareness in middle school students aged 11-14. Through close examination of Park's narrative voice, which provides access to characters' internal thought processes and decision-making, teachers can implement "think-aloud" instructional strategies that mirror Piaget's formal operational stage characteristics.

Kyung Lee, *University of Texas Rio Grande Valley*

Waking Up to Themselves: Metacognitive moments in the classroom as precursors of advocacy and self-determination

This paper is part of an ongoing study examining how metacognition fosters self-determination in elementary students within postcolonial classrooms shaped by colonial curricula of compliance and silence. Drawing on classroom observations in Ghana and literary analysis of "Understood Betsy" the study highlights moments when learners awaken to themselves as thinkers and advocates. It argues that metacognitive literacies, nurtured through stories, can counter colonial pedagogies by cultivating inquiry, agency, and critical awareness. The paper explores pedagogical implications for using children's literature as a tool of care, resistance, and advocacy in global educational contexts.

Phoebe Quaynor, *Pennsylvania State University*

Demonstrations of Care: An Examination of Mongolian Children's Literature and Ideal Affect

In a content analysis of children's picturebooks from Mongolia, we learn how authors represent protagonists engaged in self-focused and other-focused care during times of emotional challenge. These texts seem to offer representations of ideal affect (Tsai, Louie, Chen, & Uchida, 2007) that are meaningfully different from how many U.S.-based children's picturebooks represent similar emotional situations, opening up possibilities for conversations with children about emotional regulation, community-focused problem-solving, and caring for self and others.

Jeane Copenhaver-Johnson, *Ithaca College*
Ninjin Tumurbat, *Ithaca College*

3B. Content & Rhetorical Analysis

Chair: Mary Ann Cappiello

Policing Bodies, Sharing Noodles: A Burkean Rhetorical Analysis of Care and Resistance in *Noodlephant*

Jacob Kramer's *Noodlephant* (2019), illustrated by K-Fai Steele, is a playful allegory about justice, care, and resistance. Using Kenneth Burke's concept of terministic screens, this paper analyzes how language and narrative shape children's understanding of advocacy and communal responsibility. The kangaroos' use of law such as "illegal," "rules," "misbehavior" frames difference as deviance, while *Noodlephant*'s language of food and friendship such as "noodles," "party," "sharing" reimagines care as collective action. This reading highlights the book's engagement with disability and body politics, showing how picturebooks can teach young readers that justice and empowerment are achieved through community, solidarity, and shared agency.

Jainab Tabassum Banu, *North Dakota State University*

What Counts as Quality? Analyzing Over Two Decades of Award-Winning Children's Nonfiction

Multiple literacy standards, assessments, and position statements emphasize the importance of exposing young people to high-quality nonfiction. To better understand these award-winning nonfiction books, we conducted an in-depth analysis of 40 books that won or

received honors from 2001 to 2024 in at least two of three prestigious awards: the NCTE Orbis Pictus Award, the Boston Globe-Horn Book Award, and the ALSC Robert F. Sibert

Informational Book Medal. Our goal was to gain insight into the characteristics of these award-winning books, including patterns within and across the texts. The results showed positive trends, as well as committee members' biases.

Lynne Watanabe Kganetso, *Brigham Young University*

Paul Ricks, *Brigham Young University*

Terrell A. Young, *Brigham Young University*

Reading the World: A Content Analysis of International Children's and YA Literature

The key findings will be shared from the first annual report of the trends and statistics for the publication of international literature in the U.S. during 2024. A content analysis of over 500 books was conducted around genre and format, themes, country of origin, geographic setting, locations and cultural heritage of authors and illustrators, cultural identity of main characters, cultural match of authors and characters, original language, translation, and age level. We will highlight the most interesting findings and consider the implications for the field.

Kathy G. Short, *University of Arizona*

Narges Zandi, *University of Arizona*

Sybill Durand, *University of Arizona*

3C. Affirming Cultural Identities

Chair: Nancy Heiss, *University of Georgia*

Abuelitas as Caretakers and Cultural Advocates: Examining Visual Representations in Picturebooks

The content analysis examined abuelitas (Latina grandmothers) as main characters in eight contemporary picturebooks. The theoretical framework, composed of LatCrit and Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy, examines the illustrations and visual depictions of abuelitas in picturebooks published between 2015-2024. The study aids in filling the gap in examining

Latinx representation in picturebooks. Findings revealed heterogeneous Latinx depictions of abuelitas, who were portrayed as caretakers and cultural advocates. In addition, the bilingual text embedded in the illustrations was found to enhance the stories. The findings guide educators, librarians, and curriculum designers in selecting authentic texts that reflect Latinx diversity.

Jessica Cooper, *The University of Texas at San Antonio*

Rica Ramirez, *The University of Texas at San Antonio*

Maria G. Leija, *The University of Texas at San Antonio*

Food, Picture Books, and Cultural Identity: Creative and Family Reading Practices on the Immigration Journey

This project explores how food-centered picture books can function as both creative practice and pedagogical tools for fostering children's cultural identity in immigrant contexts. Drawing on my own published books and family reading experiences, I employ arts-based research and reader-response theory to examine how illustrations, narratives, and shared reading practices support young readers in connecting with their heritage. The study contributes to scholarship on children's literature, intercultural pedagogy, and arts-based methods.

Yawen Zhou, *NSCAD University*

Caged Doves and Olive Branches: Peace and Resistance in Palestinian/Diaspora Literature

An increase of Muslims in picturebooks since the mid-2010s has helped to deconstruct Muslims as a monolith, paving the way for this study on Palestinian picturebooks. Using a framework of orientalism (Said, 1994/1978) and spectrality (Derrida, 1994), this content analysis focuses on four Palestinian picturebooks that center historical or contemporary conflicts in Palestine to identify how books can help (re)humanize Palestinians in American classrooms. Findings indicate that these Palestinian authors share a longing for peace and homeland.

Nancy Heiss, *University of Georgia*

3D. Native-Authored Narratives

Chair: Sally Brown, Georgia Southern University

Living Stories, Lasting Change: Advocacy Through Native Voices in Children's Literature

This symposium advocates for the use of Native-authored picturebooks in early childhood classrooms as a vital practice for disrupting stereotypes, resisting erasure, and affirming Indigenous sovereignty and identity. Indigenous-authored texts represent only 2.8% of children's books (CCBC, 2025), underscoring the urgent need for advocacy. Presenters will address (1) the history and importance of Indigenous children's literature, (2) findings from a study of first- and second-graders engaged in multimodal responses to Native-authored read-alouds, and (3) the impact of representation on students' identities. Framed through pluriversal literacies and identity theory, the panel provides both research insights and practical resources for educators and librarians.

Sally Brown, *Georgia Southern University*

Stacy Wells, *Native Author and Native Youth Librarian - Southlake Public Library*

Joy Bridwell, *Native Librarian - Stone Child College/Rocky Boy Public Library*

Jessica Polk, *Georgia Southern University*

Journal Editor Sessions - 4:15-5:00 pm ET

Rotation 1: 4:15-4:35 pm / Rotation 2: 4:40-5:00

Session Chair: Lauren Liang

Editor Group 1

Chair: Xenia Hadjioannou, Penn State University, Berks

Journal of Children's Literature

Jennifer Graff
Xenia Hadjioannou
Katie Scurba

Dragon Lode

Liz Thackeray Nelson
Margaret Osgood Opatz

Editor Group 2

Chair: Dana Raine

Children's Literature in Education

Rhonda Brock-Servais

Bookbird

Chrysogonus Siddha Malilang

Research on Diversity in Youth Literature

Sonia Alejandra Rodríguez
Sarah Park Dahlen

Editor Group 3

Chair: Alicia Delgado

The Reading Teacher

Allison Briceño
Roberta Price Gardner

Journal of Language and Literacy Education

Aila do Carmo Sant'Anna
Shriya Kuchibhotla

Concurrent Sessions 4 - 5:15-6:15 pm ET

4A. Representation & Curated Collections

Chair: Janine Schall, University of Texas Rio Grande Valley

The Right to Learn: Examining Picturebooks about the Legal Battles for Education Rights in the U.S.

All children in the United States have a right to an education, but the fight for equitable educational access for minoritized children has been lengthy, with multiple tiny steps forward. In this work-in-progress, we use critical multicultural analysis as a theoretical frame and critical content analysis as a methodological tool to examine nine children's picturebooks that depict the legal fight for educational rights for minoritized groups.

Janine M. Schall, *University of Texas Rio Grande Valley*
Elena Venegas, *University of Texas Rio Grande Valley*

Enhancing the Disability Representation in Children's and Young Adult (YA) Books

Through a small academic library grant our research team is building a children's book collection centering stories about people with disabilities. These books are used by students in a wide range of teacher preparation programs (e.g., Education, Speech, and English). We identified three thematic areas: book collection analysis; diversity within the disability community; and possible areas of connection between new books and classroom curriculum. This research presents how stories depict the unique ways disabled people experience, interact with, and interpret the world.

Melissa L. García, *Lehman College, CUNY*
Lingyu Li, *Lehman College, CUNY*
Alison Lehner-Quam, *Lehman College, CUNY*

Curating Representation: How Children's Choice Book Awards Plan for Diversity

This presentation explores how state-level children's choice book awards in the United States plan for and represent diversity within their nominee lists. Using content analysis of selection criteria and award documentation, the study examines how adult committees define diversity

when curating titles for young readers. Framed by theories of racial identity development and representation in children's literature, this work highlights the librarian's role as a curator shaping which voices and stories are made visible.

Amanda Harrison, *University of Central Missouri*
Kim Krutka, *Old Dominion University*

4B. Narrative Power

Chair: Katie Sciorba

Wordless Advocacy: An Analysis of the Wordless Picturebooks in IBBY's Silent Book Collection

This presentation shares work in progress from a study of the International Board on Books for Young People's (IBBY) Silent Books Collection, a set of wordless picturebooks designed to transcend linguistic and cultural boundaries. Using thematic content analysis, the researchers examine how these books foster intercultural understanding, empathy, and advocacy for children navigating displacement and migration. Highlighting the power of visual storytelling, the session connects wordless picturebooks to broader conversations about care, equity, and inclusivity in children's literature and suggests ways educators and researchers can utilize the accessibility of visual language to engage young readers of all backgrounds.

Jared S. Crossley, *The Ohio State University - Marion*
Linda T. Parsons, *The Ohio State University - Marion*
Lisa Pinkerton, *The Ohio State University - Columbus*

Papa is There: Exploring Fatherhood in West African Picturebooks with West African Fathers

In this research in progress presentation, we will explore the representations of fatherhood in 10 West African picturebooks through the lens of Black Joy and the sovereignty of quiet. Then, we will take this a step further by discussing how phase 2 of the research is underway as we seek to explore how West African fathers perceive depictions of fatherhood in these same texts. At the end, we welcome ideas for engaging West African fathers in this research.

Jocelyn Amevuvor, *Hampton University*
Phoebe Quaynor, *Penn State University*

Mapping Community Care: How Multimodal Spatial Literacy in Diverse Picturebooks Develops Students' Understanding of Advocacy and Belonging

This study examines pre-service teachers' developing spatial literacy through neighborhood mapping activities with diverse picturebooks. Using books like "Thank You, Omu!" (Oge Mora), "The Name Jar," (Yang Sook Choi) and "Hey, Wall, A Story of Art and Community" (Susan Verde) they created visual maps analyzing care and kindness flowing through illustrated communities. Their responses revealed that multimodal elements such as visual pathways, spatial connections, and textual cues support readers' understanding of community advocacy and belonging. The research demonstrates that spatial literacy activities with inclusive literature builds future educators' capacity to recognize and create caring communities through literature-based pedagogy.

Suriati Abas, *State University of New York (SUNY) Oneonta*

4C. Blackness & Identity

Chair: Christian Hines

We Are Young: Investigating the Outsiders Perspective of Black Adolescence via Graphic Novels and Young Adult Literature

This session will explore the varied representations of awkwardness, weirdness, and otherness in several graphic novels and young adult literature that feature Black youth. This study illuminates how the importance of understanding these experiences of otherness and weirdness are pivotal to the adolescent journey of self-definition and the search for community. By highlighting the visual representation of Black youth, we can reimagine, reshape, and re-story the colonizing literature we read and teach in schooling spaces and beyond.

Christian Hines, *Texas State University*

Critical Race Theory in Children's Literature: A Content Analysis and Counternarrative of Banning *Something Happened in Our Town*

Students should be exposed to and grapple with difficult topics through picturebooks. This study, designed at the crux of critical theories and analysis, reviews *Something Happened in Our Town* (SHOT), which made the ALA's banned list in 2020 due to issues of race and 'divisive topics'. Preliminary findings suggest that the book SHOT provides a counternarrative against some of the 'fake news' exacerbated in the media and serves as a way to prompt conversations with children around tough topics. This study offers a nuanced

perspective of Black students, social realities, truth and representation in children's literature.

Reka C. Barton, *University of Maryland, College Park*
Shawdae Thorpe, *University of Maryland, College Park*
Charity Owusu Ansah, *University of Maryland, College Park*

4D. Neurodivergent Narratives

Chair: Jennifer Slagus, *West Chester University*

Reciprocal Worlds: Neurodivergent Care and Belonging in Children's and YA Fiction

This panel examines how children's and YA literature reimagines neurodivergent care through interdependence, reciprocity, and community. Presenters analyze picturebooks, middle grade novels, and YA fantasy to challenge ableist norms and highlight alternative models of caring. Through close readings of picturebooks *Looking after Louis* and *Brilliant Bea*, middle grade novels *A Kind of Spark* and *The Fire, the Water, and Maudie McGuinn*, and the YA *Six of Crows* duology, the panel explores how neurodivergent characters experience care not as one-sided support but as mutual exchange. Drawing on disability justice, critical autism, and critical neurodiversity studies, the panel emphasizes how these texts celebrate neurodivergent agency and belonging across relationships, classrooms, and imagined futures.

Brandi Estey-Burtt, *St. Thomas University*
Jennifer Slagus, *West Chester University of Pennsylvania*
Elizabeth Leach-Leung, *University of Cambridge*



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