



THE UNIVERSITY OF WINNIPEG MEDIA ADVISORY

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Performing Childhood: Children's Literature Association Annual Conference

WINNIPEG—**From June 9 - 12, 2005**, scholars from around the globe will converge in Winnipeg at the Children's Literature Association annual conference to share their research, discuss current issues in children's literature, and to celebrate the accomplishments of their peers. Over 200 delegates and speakers from more than 10 countries, including Australia, South Africa, Greece, and India will be in attendance.

This upcoming conference will showcase leaders in the field of children's texts and culture. One of the speakers at this year's conference will be the University of Winnipeg's own Sue Sorensen. Dr. Sorensen will be speaking about the film adaptations of Roald Dahl's novels in her presentation "Cue the Frightsome Trogglehumpers: Film Adaptations of Roald Dahl." She will focus on how some of the more "subversive" and difficult ideas of Dahl's fiction for children has been omitted from film versions of his work.

Sorensen argues that "Much of the best art -although not all of it - is subversive, because it encourages us to question the status quo, reject platitudes and easy answers, and so on." She argues that "it is generally easier to discuss complex and subversive ideas in literature rather than in film, because film has time constraints and so subtlety generally goes out the window. But it is not impossible for film to be subtle, subversive, and complex." She sees no reason to assume that children cannot enjoy from subversive films. Sorensen "[sees] no real reason, in terms of philosophical or ethical framework, why children's films should be regarded that much differently than adult films." She does feel that children do need to be protected more in terms of content than adults, however, she "also think[s] that adults should consume a lot less brutality, so [she does not] differentiate that much between the two categories of film."

In part, Sorenson feels that there have been so many adaptations of Dahl's films because his stories are popular. Dahl's stories are "outrageous, colorful, and centered on kids themselves-- they aren't stories that claim to be for children but really have an adult agenda attached. His books are hugely popular--until J. K. Rowling they were the British top sellers for children – and so the films have a built-in audience."

Sorenson argues that films like "Matilda" and "James and the Giant Peach" have captured Dahl's style well, but that directors of Dahl's films have "pulled their punches when it comes to death." Sorenson suggest that the reason for this is that Dahl does not deal with "meaningless deaths." However, she feels that the very fact that death is not meaningless in his work is why film makers "Should respect his intentions to help kids understand it."

Like many academics who study children's literature and culture, her interest in the field came about through raising children. Sorenson argues that her "interest in children's literature is not really academic, but arises from having children and reading with them almost constantly." Her presentation ought to be enjoyable to anyone who has an interest in film adaptations or in the fiction of Roald Dahl.