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CHILDREN'S LITERATURE ASSOCIATION'S ANNUAL CONFERENCE
ADDRESSES CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES

WINNIPEG—From June 9 - 12, 2005, the Children's Literature Association will hold its annual conference in which academics from around the world will meet to discuss their work, current issues surrounding children's literature and culture, and to celebrate the successes of their colleagues. Over 200 delegates and speakers from more than 10 countries, including Australia, South Africa, Greece, and India will be in attendance at the Forks, where the conference is being held.

Four concurrent sessions of three papers will be active simultaneously throughout the conference. One such session that runs from 9:00-10:30 on Thursday, June 9 is entitled "Queering the Norm: Identity and Sexuality in Contemporary Children's Literature" and features the work of Dr. Don Latham (Florida State University), Dr. Michelle Martin (Clemson University), and Dr. Laura Robinson (Nipissing University).

Latham began studying children's literature after taking a few courses in children's literature while working on a library science degree and "fell in love with the subject area." Martin encountered children's literature as an academic field when working on her Masters Degree and became "hooked." Robinson first encountered children's literature as a teaching assistant when she was asked to lecture on *Little Women* and decided to pursue it because of her excitement about being able to study books like this one and based on the class's enthusiastic response. From there, Robinson "knew that [she] would have to study girls' books in more depth."

When asked what the impact of the study of children's literature has pragmatically, Martin replies "Oh, lots!" and says that the work that is being done by academics on children's literature "is relevant to anybody who has or comes in contact with children." Robinson says that studying children's literature is "of paramount importance" because it "is the literature that helps to shape the minds of our young people." Latham points out that studying children's literature "helps us as a society to understand our own values... as well as the values we wish to instill in our children and youth." Martin suggests that if we do not critically analyze and teach children to critically analyze both literature and other forms of media, such as television and movies, we "may see results [in children] that [we] don't like or don't understand." Robinson agrees with Martin and claims that
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we need to become critical readers of these texts to determine "what they are saying to their readers, [and] what ideologies they present."

Martin acknowledges that sexuality is not often addressed in children's literature, but, she claims, "all children deal with sexuality." Robinson also recognizes the hesitation to discuss sexuality in children's literature and culture and points out how important the study of all aspects of children's literature is because it "arguably teaches children (and adults) about ways of being in the world." Robinson, whose work focuses on gender and

sexuality in girls' books, believes that it is important to interrogate the dominant assumption of heterosexuality. Robinson suggests that analyzing sexuality in classic and contemporary children's literature and looking at the legal and moral issues around censorship "can potentially bring us closer to social justice in this society."

This session will be of interest to many people, especially considering the amount of media attention that sexuality and gay marriage are getting recently.

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