



Earth, Myth and Magic: The Place of Children's Literature in Education for Sustainability

Date: 29 August 2013

Time: 14:00 – 15:00

Place: FGG 201 (Block B)

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Abstract

‘[I]n the forest,’ narrates the thirteen year-old protagonist of Nnedi Okorafor-Mbachu’s first novel for children, ‘I became Zahrah the Windseeker, a legend, growing bigger and more impossible each time my story was told’ (2005: 295). Her message is one of acceptance and respect: of oneself, of what makes one different, and of the environment in which one’s ‘legend’ – one’s own personal narrative – is nurtured. In this talk, I read Nnedi Okorafor-Mbachu’s US-Nigerian novel *Zahrah the Windseeker* and Jenny Robson’s South African novel *Savannah 2116 AD* through an ecocritical lens, paying particular attention to the complex ways in which both texts invite, and simultaneously problematise, an ecocritical reading. In doing so, I consider the place of children’s literature in education for sustainability and address, in particular, the paradox that ecocriticism invariably brings to the foreground, namely that a literary text can only ever be at one remove from the flesh or dirt of the natural environment. Okorafor-Mbachu’s and Robson’s novels provide an ideal entry point into the complexities of this topic, opening up an intercultural space for ethical inquiry in a manner that can promote long-lasting attitudinal change.

Biography

Alice Curry read English at Oxford University before completing a Master’s and Doctorate in Children’s Literature at Macquarie University in Sydney. Her doctoral thesis, *Environmental Crisis in Young Adult Fiction: A Poetics of Earth*, has been published in the ‘Critical Approaches to Children’s Literature’ series by Palgrave Macmillan. She is currently an Honorary Associate of Macquarie University and the Children’s Literature Advisor to the Commonwealth Education Trust. Her research interests lie in feminism, topography and the environment, with a particular focus on postcolonial literatures for children.