

Spaces of Community and Activism in Periodicals for (and by) Young People
Panel Proposal for the 2019 Children's Literature Association Conference
Organizer: Elissa Myers, CUNY Graduate Center
Respondent: Paige Gray

The papers in this panel all explore how periodicals can function as spaces of both activism and community. We will consider how periodicals function formally and content-wise to enable activist ventures that could not have been enabled in any other way, in addition to the challenges of doing activism through periodicals. While periodicals allow a plethora of voices to speak, for instance, enabling them to create seemingly democratic discussion of difficult issues, their seeming representativeness also makes them capable of excluding voices without acknowledging that they do so. We will also consider how periodicals create community, and the relationship between activism, community, and empathy in periodicals. While some of the communities we will discuss rely on empathy for others outside the community to cement their communal identity, such as the British Church of England magazines Kristine Moruzi examines, other periodical communities such as those Elissa Myers examines, create empathy for their own activist members, whose work is a labor of love for each other. Additionally, how did children take the activist forms and genres they saw at work in literature and periodicals marketed to them in order to create periodicals of their own with activist agendas? Finally, we will consider how we as scholars interact with activist periodicals of the past today. How can periodicals serve as a source for documenting and understanding activism? How can they serve to illuminate other ideological spaces of the past, as in Chloe Flower's exploration of dolls' houses and tenements in *Household Words* and the *Ragged School Union*?

Elissa Myers: In my paper, I will examine activist communities instantiated by nineteenth century British and American girls in their printed and manuscript papers. From about 1870 to 1900, young people from the ages of approximately 8 to 25 created magazines and newspapers in several different ways—by printing papers on miniature presses that they circulated via the mail, and by handmaking manuscript papers at home and at school. In all of these periodicals, children created communities, but I will explore in my paper the important differences between the types of communities created by printed and manuscript periodicals. While print afforded publicity that was important for papers with an activist bent, manuscript papers afforded intimacy and likeness, making it challenging to reach larger publics. Because these forms functioned so differently, they brought challenges that needed to be mitigated in different ways. First, I will examine an amateur paper called the *Violet*, which advocated for gender and racial equity between young amateur journalists. In addition to reaching outward, however, the young female activists of this publication also created a smaller chosen community in the pages of their paper in order to mitigate the feeling of male surveillance and criticism. I will then compare the *Violet* to several manuscript papers I have analyzed at the American Antiquarian Society that, while they had difficulty reaching the publics they might have liked, still effectively developed activist stances amongst their members that prompted those members to reach outside their small periodical community to engage in larger social issues.

Kristine Moruzi: This paper situates activism and empathy within the context of late nineteenth-century Britain, a period in which children were actively encouraged to support philanthropic enterprises both at home and abroad. The question of children's ethical responsibility to help

others in need is central to this discussion. Many critics of children's literature concede that 'at least one function of a children's book is to shape the evolving moral character of its readers' (Mills 2014, p. 5). Yet just how that moral character was defined and enacted in nineteenth-century British children's periodicals is based on specific understandings of the extent to which children could be expected to engage with key social problems of the era and how the engagement should manifest. By examining the Church of England children's magazine *Brothers and Sisters* (1890-1914) and Barnardo's *Young Helper's League Magazine* (1892-1914), this paper will examine how empathy was encouraged in the form of financial contributions and community fundraising while also interrogating whether children were prompted to agitate for change.

Chloe Flower:

This paper recovers a history of child labor in the Ragged Schools of Victorian Britain, and in doing so reveals the unexpected relationship between two very different types of domestic space: doll's house and tenement. I will examine *Household Words*, the *Ragged School Union*, and other periodicals in order to document housing reformer Octavia Hill's early career as a teacher in London's Ragged Schools; specifically, how she taught a group of female workers aged eight to seventeen to produce doll's house furniture for "ready customers among the juvenile aristocracy and gentry," to quote *Chambers's Edinburgh Journal*. In examining the relationship between Hill's experiences as a teacher in the Ragged Schools and as manager of a housing estate in London, I argue that the self-contained model of self instantiated in the doll's house was later used by Hill as a compensatory pedagogical object for children whose homes in urban slums bore little resemblance to these miniature domestic havens. To grow up in a one-room home was to grow up unaware of the careful segmentation of time occurring in a house with many rooms, and this spatial deprivation was conceived of as a kind of temporal, and consequently developmental, irregularity. In the periodicals I examine, we can see Octavia Hill's instantiation of a particular kind of domesticity in her activism with working-class children that aimed to teach them to identify with bourgeois models of space and time.