

Rage Against the Regime:  
Educating Children About “President” Trump

“Post-truth is pre-fascism.”

— Timothy Snyder, *On Tyranny* (2017)

Like all successful autocrats, Donald Trump and the Republican Party build their regime on hostility to the very notion of facts: they understand that, when repeated often enough, lies become powerful enough to warp reality. Because the restoration of American democracy depends upon an educated public, children’s books about Mr. Trump must tell the truth. In this paper, I define what that means, propose some guidelines and then apply them to what has been published to date.

First, these books must violate juvenile political biographies’ unwritten rule of nonpartisanship. Or, to put this another way, a “both sides” approach fails when one side is separating asylum-seekers from their children, denying climate change, promoting a perjuring rapist to the Supreme Court, disenfranchising voters, backing White supremacist candidates, calling the press “the enemy,” and dismantling democratic institutions. The existence of two sides does not make them morally equivalent — which Joanne Mattern’s *President Donald Trump* (Scholastic, 2017) fails to understand. Second, the book must be grounded in history. Trump is not the United States’ first un-democratically “elected” leader: though U.S. public education alleges otherwise, for most of its history the United States was not a democracy, but a White supremacist police state (of which the Electoral College is a legacy). Trump promises a return to that period of American “greatness.” Historicizing American injustice, Maya Gonzalez’s *When a Bully Is President: Truth and Creativity for Oppressive Times* (published February 2017) prepares young readers to endure and — if they can — fight back. Third, honest children’s books about our current leader require a journey into areas often considered inappropriate for children: sexual assault, racist violence, and other crimes against humanity.

Though it is not out at the time of this writing, Martha Brockenbrough's *Unpresidented* (forthcoming Nov. 2018) looks like it may meet these criteria. (I will evaluate it in my paper.)

Lying to children does not help them understand the world in which they live. Nor does it equip them to survive that world. However, if they tell the truth about America's sociopathic demagogue and his quislings, children's books can teach readers how fascism ransacks democracies, and better prepare them to restore — and improve — U.S. democracy.