

Abstract for ChLA Conference: Activism and Empathy (Indianapolis, June 13-15)

Paper Title

*These Colours are Bananas*, and Other Ways of Unmaking Racialized Mindsets: Picturebook Color, Colorized Feelings, and Radical Concepts

In recent years, my scholarship has been working to create a multilayered conversation between the contemporary picturebook's theories of color and a range of other, long-standing, multidisciplinary discussions of color. In my essay in *Children's Literature* (vol 46 [2018]), I created a conversation between the multicultural American picturebook's use of color and Critical Race Theory, and Stuart Hall's notion of race as a floating signifier, and Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen's postsemiotic theories of visual communication in order to identify, analyze, and critique color patterns within visually-oriented children's diversity literature. In a conference paper presented at Maria Nikolajeva's picturebook symposium, "Synergy and Contradiction," in Cambridge, England (September 2018), I worked with theories from cognitivist literary studies, affect studies, and (again) Kress and van Leeuwen's theories of color to show how picturebooks—especially of the concept book variety—train their readers to give emotion color and to give color emotion. A key finding in both of these pieces was that the picturebook format's broadly accepted practice of giving color regularized meaning in any form (emotional meaning or meaning of other sorts) participates in and perpetuates historically structured and subsequently habituated racist patterns of Western thinking.

More promisingly and perhaps even more importantly, however, this work has also found places where the picturebook format pushes back against its own color habits. The color concept book, *These Colours Are Bananas* by Jason Fulford and Tamara Shopsin (Phaidon, 2018), is one such "place." In my ChLA conference presentation, I will put *These Colours are Bananas* (and other picturebooks that are "pushing back" against the format's regularized color usage and problematic meaning-making practices) in the spotlight. The presentation will make a case for how radical concept books are actively and consciously trying to unmake longstanding racist and racializing patterns of meaning-endowed color-usage, and instead are proposing other less destructive and hierarchical ways of thinking about and using color in the picturebook format.