

## **Once Upon a Place: Natural Landscapes as Magical Places in the *Henry Hikes to Fitchburg Series***

In Irish mythology and folklore, *Tír na nÓg* (Land of the Young) is a name for the Otherworld, a place of fairies, magic, and imagination. Fittingly, the Children's Laureate of Ireland, or the *Laureate na nÓg*, is an honor bestowed upon authors and/or illustrators who are internationally recognized for their high quality children's writing or illustration and for their positive impact on readers as well as other writers and illustrators.

Recently, Eoin Colfer served as the Laureate na nÓg from 2014-2016. During his term, Colfer inaugurated a nationwide storytelling tour across Ireland called *Once upon a Place*, which "focused on the link between story and place. He also edited an anthology, of the same title, of short stories and poetry on the theme of magical places in Ireland" (<http://childrenslaureate.ie/eoincolfer>).

Using Colfer's *Once Upon a Place* as inspiration, in this paper, I examine a collection of picturebooks by D.B. Johnson to explore his portrayal of nature and natural landscapes (including ponds, rivers, and streams) as magical places. D.B Johnson wrote and illustrated four books about Henry David Thoreau and his experiences living by Walden Pond. Looking specifically at the *Henry* series, and using a lens of ecocriticism (Buell; Glotfelty; Garrard), I explore Johnson's semiotic and aesthetic treatment of scientific and ethical messages of conservation and sustainability as exemplified in the life of Thoreau.

### Works Cited

Lawrence Buell. *"The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture"* (1995).

Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm. *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, (1996).

Greg Garrard. *Ecocriticism*, 2004