

## **Emotional Ebb and Flow and Easy Reader Texts: Emigration Can't Be Sad When Young Readers Are Alone**

As a ChLA panelist the past four years, I have placed narratological, structuralist, and Lacanian theories in conversation with theories of literacy development to theorize both fiction and nonfiction Easy Readers. The last two years in particular, following the groundbreaking publication of editors Jennifer Miskec and Annette Wannamaker's *The Early Reader in Children's Literature and Culture*, the first academic book produced within the field of children's literature to take up the study of Early Readers, I have called on the children's literature community to consider the theoretical work left to be done with regard to Easy Readers. The completion of this scholarly work requires self-reflection and a recognition of the assumptions that we, as scholars and gatekeepers, make about the child readers of Easy Reader texts.

In light of the 2018 conference's water theme, which evokes notions of immigration, emigration, travel, and flow—including young readers' movement, sometimes linear but often not, from Picturebooks to Easy Readers and on to Beginning Chapter Books—I would now like to consider what content we, as critics and gatekeepers, do and do not consider appropriate for inclusion in each of these three text types. Contrasting the treatment of immigration, emigration, and international travel tales in recently published Picturebooks and Beginning Chapter Books with the treatment of the same topics in Easy Readers suggests that there are limitations to the degree of emotional conflict with which we allow children to grapple at the Easy Reader stage, their first foray (as Karen Coats points out) into reading without an adult intermediary. We do not see these same emotional restrictions in Picturebooks or Beginning Chapter Books.

Recently published Picturebooks, including photo essays like Rosemary McCarney's *Where Will I Live?* and fictional narratives like Robert Munsch and Saoussan Askar's newly reissued *From Far Away*, often emphasize a sense of wistfulness associated with emigration. Beginning Chapter Books such as Juana Medina's *Juana and Lucas* feature innate urges to resist an outside culture's encroachment. Yet recently published Easy Readers, be they multicultural narratives like Gwendolyn Hooks's *Block Party* or informational texts like Elizabeth Carney's *Ellis Island*, continue to feature protagonists eager to relocate and assimilate and offer emotionally simplistic narratives. The temporary backward movement to less emotionally complex narratives just as child readers move forward to readerly independence merits examination. Does this trend grow out of adult gatekeepers' desire to control the flow of emotional information, even as we urge children toward literary freedom?