

## **Water as Mirror: *Mister Rogers Neighborhood* and Environmental Activism**

*Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*, was one of the very first children's television shows, and a pioneer in many social justice issues of its day, helping children learn about doctors' visits, divorce, and death. Rogers' insistence on prioritizing the emotional and social health of his television viewers is matched by his sustained engagement with citizenship, a kind of neighborliness. Focusing on the weeklong series "Caring for the Environment: Reduce, Reuse, Recycle" (1990), Rogers uses water and fish to showcase connectivity, dramatize interdependence, and inspire environmental activism. In episode four, "Snorkeling with Sylvia Earle," Rogers proposes that children are not unlike fish. Rogers' song, "Everybody's Fancy," in this episode sets up the mirroring between the myriad yet unique angelfish that cycle through the episode and the special, individuated child viewer. Rogers' reflective engagement compares pictures of fish, his pet fish, and fish in the ocean he visits on a snorkeling trip during the episode. His use of what Brigitte Fielder calls "animal humanism," which models sympathy based on difference, proposes that the pet fish and the wild fish are analogous to the friend and the stranger. Extending the argument into the ecosystem, Rogers mirrors the watery world and the child's domestic environment. For the child and the fish to be healthy, they must be cared for. This care is both emotional and physical. Rogers values interdependence, a touchstone of ecocriticism, which provides grounding for caring for the self, the other, the neighborhood, and the planet. Rogers' work participates in what Ashton Nichols calls "urbanatural roosting," a perspective that recognizes the connectivity if not entrenchment of the natural world in the urban environment. As Rogers' explores how to care for our coral reef, he simultaneously proposes why we do so, providing the family with the motivation and inspiration to see the creatures in the ocean as an extension of their own families and the ocean ecosystem as a part of their local neighborhood.