

“The End is really the middle of the story.” Lemony Snicket’s A Series of Unfortunate Events and the Development of Resilience

Critic Elizabeth Bullen has argued that Lemony Snicket’s *A Series of Unfortunate Events* subverts conventions of children’s fiction to prepare young readers for future instability by “rehearsing resilience”. While I endorse this argument, her focus is on *all* children and not children who are actually living through adversity, a distinction that overlooks how the series treats resilience in remarkable ways. I argue that the series’ ordinary protagonists, humor, and ambiguous endings present an integral depiction of resilience, even as these depictions defy the accepted norms of how we tell stories about “bad things”. I utilize child development scholar Anne Masten’s theory of resilience as “ordinary magic” to examine how the Baudelaire’s resilience is an achievable model for children experiencing adversity. Secondly, I examine the usage of intertextual references in the series, arguing that these “literary breadcrumbs,” both fictional and real, are lifelines for both the Baudelaire orphans and the “unfortunate reader”. Lastly, I turn towards the notably ambiguous ending of the series. While some have criticized the inconclusive ending, I argue that its open-endedness is a crucial component in the depiction of resilience narratives. I use Sara Ahmed’s boat metaphor, which describes how open-endings allow for possibility and a form of “revolutionary happiness,” to analyze the ending of *A Series of Unfortunate Events*, in which the orphans build and board a boat, departing into unknown waters. Ultimately, I argue that Snicket’s series lacks a happy ending to illustrate that trauma is not the climax of one’s life, or even the end of someone’s story.