

DISPLACED CHILDREN: Stories of Leaving Home

Students Chinweoke Ezeokoli, Kraig Sims Sponsor Elizabeth Goodenough

ABSTRACT
 Our research focuses on key moments in narratives by, for, and about the child. What impels young people to endure the horrors of—armed combat, food scarcity, and homelessness—to forge their own ethical reasoning and identity? Just as the Phoenix Award honors juvenile literature previously overlooked, our study brings from obscurity the plight of orphans, including tales compelling to US presidents. Sometimes boys and girls punished by violence and climate change withstand hardship, find purpose, and serve others. Sometimes family reading and life lessons spur resilience. But abandonment, incarceration, and trauma can also leave the dislocated young with decreased hope and strength to go on. Goodenough's Winter 2019 Displaced Children in an Uncertain World and her upcoming collection, co-edited with Marilyn Olson, What the Presidents Read: Stories that Inspired Our Nation's Leaders analyze point of view, narrative voice, and audience in sagas of losing home. In the mini-course global experts present diverse perspectives—from lawyers who specialize in immigration policy to photojournalists and filmmakers who document foster care and deportation. Surveying such representations indicates that family separations can dominate the media—but do so only briefly. Biographies, memoirs, archival letters, and fiction offer other insights about literacy, reception theory, and storytelling as a survival skill.

OBJECTIVES
 What are stories worth reading and telling in early life? This project studies the influence of narratives on youth. What books for young readers become more relevant a generation later? How does knowing the early reading of presidents bring to light their formative years? Literature essential to White House families includes Tennyson's poetry, *The American Speaker* (1836) essential to Andrew Johnson's oratorical skills, and *That Printer of Udell's* by Harold Bell Wright (1908) that offered Ronald Reagan an uplifting account of a boy rising from a broken home. The Kindergarten Child for FDR and *The Vicar of Wakefield* by Oliver Goldsmith (1766) for Andrew Jackson, a story about a riches to rags family with romantic themes illustrate how tales have a profound impact on the formative years of presidents and in turn help evolve American Dream.

METHODS

1. Found and read presidential biographies
2. Surveyed presidential archives
3. Contacted presidential homesteads
4. Visited presidential and graduate research libraries
5. Interviewed graduate students and children's literature scholars
6. Photographed an exhibition on a deported family
7. Viewed films depicting child soldiers

"I am like old man and she's like a small girl because I am fighting in war and she's not even knowing what war is..."
 --Agu (Beasts of No Nation, 2015)

RESULTS
 *Two Ugandan graduate students in anthropology spoke in the mini-course about ethnographies of child soldiers and siblings, destabilizing categories of childhood.
 *A system for updating the list of presidents, their lifespans, wives, children, terms of office, and key manuscripts organized development of a co-edited manuscript.
 *Early reading influences life outcomes, including oratory, policies, and ideals of First Families. For example, his Intelligence Insulted, Trump baffling a 280-word limit evokes Andrew Jackson, but with Twitter, not dueling pistols.
 *White House children created stories for the next generation: Caroline Kennedy acted as Coordinate Producer for a Sesame Street special.

CONCLUSION
 *Early reading can develop practical skill, political wisdom, and moral imagination.
 *Adult attitudes toward juvenile literature changed from 1730s to the present. Andrew Johnson's *American Speaker* (1837) by John Frost, read as a tailor's apprentice and Mayne Reid's *The Cast Up by the Sea* (1869) by Samuel White Baker, FDR's favorite when his father taught him to sail, reflect the evolution of popular boy genres.
 *Presidents before the 19th century enjoyed tracts for personal improvement, e.g. George Washington's *Rules of Civility and Decency* (1696) by French Jesuits or manuals for specific tasks and skills. Later presidents favored fantasy: Theodore Roosevelt's *Uncle Remus: His Songs and Sayings* (1880) by Joel Chandler Harris and John F. Kennedy's beloved Billy Whiskers series (1902-30) by Francis Montgomery.
 *Beverly Naidoo's YA novel, *The Other Side Of Truth*, tells the story of 12 year old Sade, a political refugee from Nigeria fleeing to London with her younger brother to escape the violence that killed their mother. Like children separated from their parents at the border, Sade and her brother are bounced around foster homes while their father attempts to reunite with them. When he is arrested, Sade, who learned to keep the truth inside, stops her father's death by speaking out.
 *Adolescents imprisoned for resisting apartheid in Pamela Reynolds' *War in Worcester: Youth and the Apartheid State* (2013) see themselves as warriors, not victims. As political agents, they shed contemporary notions of childhood to reinvent themselves as fighters against a racist regime. At 13, Andrew Jackson was a prisoner of war after joining to fight the British.



Elizabeth Goodenough, "The Other Side of Truth" by Beverly Naidoo, "Displaced Children in an Uncertain World" by Elizabeth Goodenough, "Young Andrew Jackson in the Carolinas" by Jennifer Hunsicker, "The Immigration Handbook" by Caroline Smith, and "Poems by Caroline Smith" by Eastman Johnson. All images are used under Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike license. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without the prior written permission of the publisher. All other trademarks and copyrights are the property of their respective owners.