

Thus the author offers a different solution: “radical teenage literature”. Adopting the term from Kimberly Reynolds, Kokkola explains that radical literature is “a literature that tries to get to the root phenomenon of desire and would situate that desire within the entirety of the society they [the readers] inhabit. It would be literature that endeavours to speak honestly and openly to its readers, which invites dialogues and refuses to either condescend or to pander to the youngster’s lack of experience and/or knowledge” (211). In the corpus, Kokkola has found three works that match these requirements, all of which are shockingly among the oldest novels included in this study: *Forever* by Judy Blume (1973), *It’s OK If You Don’t Love Me* by Norma Klein (1977) and *Breaktime* by Aidan Chambers (1978).

Although newer novels do show some tendency towards radical literature, there is no smooth movement towards this comprehensive new view of adolescence. On the contrary, in Kokkola’s opinion the majority of authors view adolescents as “sexy sinners and delinquent deviants” (214).

As has been said, this study scrutinises the depictions of teenage sexuality in literature intended for this audience and has come to some intriguing conclusions about our society in general, which makes this a social study as well as a literary one. In the author’s opinion, a crisis is taking place in the way adolescence is perceived and treated in Anglo-Saxon society, especially in terms of sexuality. However, some may argue that this crisis is not only taking place in the realm of childhood/adolescence, but throughout society in general. Some believe we are facing a moral crisis in which sexuality, among other aspects of the human being, is taken out of context and mistreated to serve political or financial ends, which is then consequently passed on to the next generation.

As society has not yet come up with the means to deal with the large-scale crisis, the easiest solution is to try and stop it from spreading, cautioning the young via literature not to go in that direction. Hypocritical or not, society’s intention, as Kokkola also admits, is not ill-intended, although we can easily agree it is obviously not the most effective one.

However, I am doubtful that the crisis in the way society perceives and treats adolescent sexuality can be solved without addressing the root issue of the way society perceives and treats a human being in all his or her integrity and complexity. This change will follow when large-scale social change takes place: a radical change that will bring people back to their roots and stimulate them to embrace the entirety of the human being. In this sense, the radical literature Kokkola proposes could be a welcome stepping stone towards a more pleasant society.

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## Happy Thinking!

**Thomas E. Wartenberg. 2013. *A Sneetch Is a Sneetch and Other Philosophical Discoveries: Finding Wisdom in Children’s Literature*. Illustrations by Joy Kinigstein. Chichester: John Wiley & Sons Inc. 176 pp. ISBN 978-0-470-65678-5**

Does the end always justify the means? Is temptation a prerequisite for will power? Is it important to be an individual, and if so why? These are just some of the numerous thought-

provoking questions raised in the new book by Thomas E. Wartenberg *A Sneetch Is a Sneetch and Other Philosophical Discoveries*. While the questions themselves, having been a staple of philosophy for hundreds of years, hardly seem innovative or revolutionary, what is truly innovative is Wartenberg's claim that the discussion of these and similar conundrums should be expanded to include children, who are "natural-born philosophers" (x). Not only do children naturally possess the inquisitiveness which is a *sine qua non* of philosophical thought, but child-friendly and engaging material ideally suited to initiate them into the field is already at our disposal in the form of illustrated children's books. The author claims that children's books – really "philosophical texts in the guise of simple children's stories" (143) – are a source of prompts that parents, teachers and other professionals working with children can use to initiate discussions about various philosophical concepts and questions. The *raison d'être* of Wartenberg's book is thus to provide the adult reader with the knowledge and tools necessary to fully utilise this philosophical potential. Rather than an introduction to philosophy *per se*, *A Sneetch Is a Sneetch* is an introduction to philosophical thought, inviting readers to "do" philosophy by questioning and reflecting on the various aspects of their daily existence, while encouraging their children to do the same.

Each of the 16 chapters that comprise this book uses a different children's text to present and discuss various philosophical problems, tackling issues such as the relationship between imagination and reality (Crockett Johnson, *Harold and the Purple Crayon*), features of language (William Steig, *Shrek!*), means and (im)possibilities of communication (Mo Willems, *Knuffle Bunny*), the relativity of knowledge (James Thurber, *Many Moons*), (a)theism (William Steig, *Yellow and Pink*), artistic standards (Peter Catalanotto, *Emily's Art*), deceit (Harry Allard, *Miss Nelson is Missing!*), environmental ethics (Shel Silverstein, *The Giving Tree*), willpower (Arnold Lobel, *Cookies*), discrimination (Dr. Seuss, *The Sneetches*), feminism (Robert Munsch, *The Paper Bag Princess*), (non-)conformity (Daniel Manus Pinkwater, *The Big Orange Splot*), etc.

Each chapter is framed by an introductory overview of the plot of the book in focus and a final list of suggestions for discussions with children. In line with the book's educational agenda, the names of prominent philosophers and key terms are written in bold font, while the notions and schools of thought central to each chapter are explained in a separate text box, intended for those "interested in learning about philosophy in a bit more depth" (5). Despite the author's invitation to do so, the reader is advised not to read the (semi-independent) chapters out of order: seeing that they are heavily cross-referenced, the non-linear reader might find him/herself having to peruse the rest of the book to find explanations for relevant terms and concepts.

The chapters are followed by an afterword and several appendices: a list of "thumbnail biographies" of relevant philosophers, a glossary of key philosophical terms and two reading lists intended for those who wish to read more "philosophical picture books" and those interested in expanding their knowledge of philosophy. Unfortunately, the reading list on philosophy is disappointingly brief and consists mostly of general introductions and informative websites, rather than actual philosophical writings.

Wartenberg's reader-friendly text is filled to the brim with examples, clear and careful explanations of abstract concepts and guided questions which help the reader follow the

author on the road to philosophical thinking. The simple, straightforward language and conversational tone help make the book a most interesting and engaging read. The only thing that occasionally interrupts the otherwise flowing style is the author's self-conscious attempts at humour. Not that the word games the author seems quite fond of are not amusing or witty in themselves, it is just that the he insists on following up on the jokes by stating that he has in fact made a joke. Consider this example from the chapter on *Harold and the Purple Crayon*: “[Harold’s] final act is to *draw up* the covers of his bed – notice the pun on ‘drawing’ here” (13). Finally, this reviewer has spotted some factual mistakes, such as calling Viola Swamp (a character in H. Allard’s *Miss Nelson is Missing!*) Viola Sharp (82, 88).

By demonstrating both the ‘seriousness’ of philosophy hidden in children’s books and the childlike wonder found in the very foundations of philosophy, Wartenberg’s book posits itself on the intersection between children’s literature and philosophy. However, it is certainly much more (if not exclusively) about philosophy and less about children’s literature, which is primarily treated as a platform for teaching and discussing all things philosophical. Scholars of children’s literature might thus be disappointed to find that the texts themselves are not discussed for their literary merit, but are more or less reduced to entertaining teaching tools. While this might be expected in a study intended as an introduction to philosophical thought, the insistence that children’s book should be taken ‘seriously’ (just) because they teach ‘serious’ lessons is not without its problems.

Another thing that might surprise the children’s literature specialist is Wartenberg’s treatment of the fact that children’s books have ‘deeper meaning’ as something of a revelation. Admittedly, the idea that philosophy and children’s literature go hand in hand may be a relatively novel one, but the idea that children’s books are not ‘just for fun’ (or ‘just for children’, for that matter) is not. Though each of the books Wartenberg discusses has been carefully selected to illustrate a specific philosophical concept, this one-concept-per-book approach might have profited from at least a hint of alternative possibilities of interpretation. The suggestions section at the end of each chapter might be a good place to draw the reader’s attention to the fact that the books under discussion do not have one definitive meaning, but can in fact be read from different perspectives and with other issues in mind.

Wartenberg’s comprehensible and engrossing book is likely to appeal to both the seasoned philosopher and the uninitiated. The one-sidedness and lack of focus on the books themselves might result in a somewhat limited appeal for the scholar of children’s literature, but the author’s enthusiasm and novel approach should certainly be commended. Wartenberg effectively argues for liberating philosophy from academia’s ivory tower and presenting young minds with intellectual challenges. Despite some flaws in its execution, his mission to teach children philosophy and his battle against false assumptions regarding both philosophy and children(’s literature) is a most welcome one.

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