

Editorial: Illuminating Economic Fragility through Children's Literature

Nicholas E. Husbye

One of the images from the early onset of the COVID-19 pandemic that has stayed with me is of a seemingly never-ending line of cars awaiting services at a local food bank. I cannot, for the life of me, assign a certain place to this image; rather, it felt as though it was everywhere. The pandemic has tested, stretched, and, in some cases, broken societal support systems, while also creating even starker contrasts about the economic realities facing large numbers of people. This was one of the many images that stuck in my head as I conceptualized the collection of books for this issue of *First Opinions, Second Reactions*, seeking to explore the question *How can we leverage children's books to help support children's understandings of economic fragility?*

When curating this collection, I sought titles that would provide multiple perspectives into the challenges faced by children as they navigated economic insecurity. Both Sturgis's *Still a Family* and Bunting's *Yard Sale* address housing, *Still a Family* exploring the ways in which a family experiences homelessness and the resources available to them while *Yard Sale* seeks to give voice to a child whose family is downsizing from a house to an apartment. Both Brandt's *Maddi's Fridge* and Ogle's *Free Lunch* think about nourishment and how children facing economic precariousness often do not have access to food or those pathways to access are mired in social stigma. Lastly, Williams' *The Can Man* explores the systemic nature of the economy; while Tim, the main character of this book, can be commended on one hand for taking initiative for collecting cans to save up for a new skateboard as he comes to recognize how his collecting of cans impacts Mr. Peters, the namesake of the book's title, who used to live in Tim's building and now is homeless, collecting cans to support himself.

While I've taken pains to ensure the collection provides a variety of insights into economic fragility, no book or book set is ever perfect and the reviewers in this issue have carefully considered each text, creating a robust and rich conversation about the books themselves and how they might be used within the classroom to help our students think more deeply about the ways economic fragility might manifest within their own lives.

Before signing off, a quick note on several of the contributors to this issue. Three of the contributors, Melissa Kepler, Glenna Fulitano, and Caven Belville started their pieces as part of my undergraduate course in Children's Literature at the University of Nebraska - Lincoln; their reviews showed thoughtful insights into both the texts and how they might be leveraged in the classroom. I am excited to see what good these young teacher-scholars do as they transition into classrooms of their own. On the other end of the emotional spectrum, it is with a heavy heart I recognize the passing of colleague and friend, Jennifer Conner, whose review of *Yard Sale* is rife with both the warmth and criticality she was so well known for.

The lived economic realities of students in our classrooms rarely match up with the upper-middle class lifestyles so prevalent in books and television. The books within this collection seek to provide alternative perspectives, counternarratives to other ways students might come to understand economic fragility.

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