

## “But What Shall We Do?”: Problematic Representations of Mothers and Families in Children’s Literature

Dr. Seuss’s *The Cat in the Hat* (1957) and Mark Browne’s *Piggybook* (1986) portray gender, motherhood, and family in a problematic manner, despite their significant contribution to children’s literature. *The Cat in the Hat* illustrates a traditional family and a faceless, nameless mother. *Piggybook* contains a mother that, although appearing to function as a feminist icon, perpetuates the idea that unhealthy family dynamics and harmful gender roles can be solved with a simple role reversal. Drawing upon Lisa Fraustino and Karen Coats, these mothers are completely erased, or undergo a transformation that carries harmful connotations, especially when read at a young age. First, I argue that *The Cat in the Hat* and *Piggybook*, although problematic, can serve to further progressive pedagogy, as teachers can use these texts for political purposes. However, this puts a large amount of responsibility on the teachers, who cannot always be present to scaffold the students’ reading. I assert that we must look to new scholarship, like *Big Cat, Little Cat* by Elisha Cooper to begin to address these misrepresentations of mothers and family in children’s literature. *Big Cat, Little Cat* portrays a biologically accurate family structure instead of an anthropomorphized one and lacks harmful representations of mothers and families. In a time where Philip Nel has called attention to the fact that we need diverse books, I suggest that we also consider the way mothers and families are represented in children’s literature.