

As the demand for fantasy literature continues to rise, it is important to examine the concepts behind these stories and the way in which their narratives impact the reader— especially when the intended audience is our children. Fantasy ecofiction, in particular, serves not only to connect young audiences to the natural world, but to establish a foundation from which future environmentalism can grow. Using the works of scholars in the fields of ecocriticism, philosophy, and children’s literature studies, and inspired by Rachel Carson’s theory that the emotions awakened in childhood lead to the wisdom of adulthood, my paper will examine the role of fantasy ecofiction in fostering environmental empathy and activism in the reader.

Fantasy ecofiction has the ability to impart a sense of awe that environmental education may not. This type of literature delves into the lives of the flora, fauna, and natural landscapes of the story, using them not only as setting material, but as archetypes and main characters. Doing so grants the reader a shared experience with the natural world, allowing them to relate to nature on a personal level. As fantasy ecofiction grants non-human nature sentience and therefore eligibility for reader empathy, this genre possesses the potential to establish an enduring connection between children and the world around them. In this way, fantasy ecofiction could not only make a difference for the children who experience it, but for the natural world which could eventually benefit from readers’ elevated feelings of connectivity and, therefore, responsibility.