

## **Against Forgetting: Traumatic Loss and Melancholic Attachment in 9/11 Picture Books**

Accounts of loss in children's literature help us understand the significance of traumatic events in traditional folk tales (Bettelheim, 1975) as well as contemporary narratives (Coates, 2004), insofar as these stories allow children to externalize losses related to their experiences. But accounts that emphasize working through loss are nonetheless pulled up short (e.g. Kidd, 2005, Connolly, 2008) when confronted with children's books that introduce trauma without offering any method of mourning. In this paper, we look at picture books that connect, both directly and obliquely, to the 9/11 attacks. These texts, which focus on the indomitable force of life moving forward despite suffering, also reinscribe the losses of 9/11 as unspeakable and therefore unmournable.

To address the problem posed by children's books that introduce historical trauma, we turn to Freud's various iterations of the distinction between mourning and melancholia, focusing specifically on Freud's (1957) connection between melancholia and character. Drawing on Britzman's (1998) and Tribunella's (2010) work on melancholia and children's literature, we consider the normative purposes built into 9/11 picture books. We argue that the melancholic attachments that are both partially represented by and largely fostered by picture books encourage readers to participate in a shared sense of indescribable loss around 9/11 that marks American culture.