

## Are we Pre-Postmodern or Post-Postmodern?: Dadaism, Metafiction, and the Pastiche in 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup>-Century Picture Books

With children's literature vying for a position at the proverbial table of canonized literary study it is no surprise that we see a trend towards connecting children's literature scholarship with popular culture. One such trend in picture book studies has sought to produce a comprehensive analysis of the postmodern in picture books. From Deborah Stevenson's groundbreaking, "'If You Read This Last Sentence, It Won't Tell You Anything': Postmodernism, Self-Referentiality, and *The Stinky Cheese Man*," to Lawrence Sipe and Sylvia Pantaleo's collection, *Postmodern Picturebooks: Play, Parody, and Self-Referentiality*, this trend has dominated picture book scholarship over the past three decades. This presentation exists to explore the errors and alternatives to the major claims of this trend: namely that late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> century picture books display a significant amount of postmodern material in form and content, and that this is an appropriate and desirable direction for the state of picture book studies and children's literature scholarship in general. As one would expect with any dominant trend of scholarship there have been voices of opposition that complicate the discussion, namely Philip Nel's, "The Fall and Rise of Children's Literature," and Karin Westman's, "Beyond Periodization: Children's Literature, Genre, and Remediating Literary History." Despite the presence of this opposition, scholarship has often featured a failure to investigate how historical picture books dating back over one-hundred years display similar elements of postmodernism, a general lack of connection between claimed elements of postmodernism, and a reductive formal portrayal of what postmodernism scholarship claims itself to be. This presentation will alternatively offer an investigation of the ways the picture book as a format naturally exhibits postmodern tendencies and has done so since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, rendering the question of whether picture books are inherently pre-postmodern. It will also question whether picture books have the institutional power to organize literary study conceptually rather than chronologically and complicate the dominant paradigm of periodization. In doing so, it ironically calls picture book studies to consider a post-postmodern scholarship.