

**Planetarianism NOW:
Children's Literature and Our Planet's Fight for Life**

The most fundamental fact of our time is that humanity is heading toward imminent ecocide. As scholars of children's literature, what can we do about it? How can we take a stand? The term ecocide, proposed by British lawyer Polly Higgins, refers to a range of human activities that contribute to the killing of the planet—from habitat and species extinction to pollution and climate change. More specifically, as this presentation will suggest, ecocide describes not so much human activities in general as the operations of global capitalism in particular: operations that *organize* the framework of global society and *structure* everyday human activities within the dominant, anthropocentric paradigm of profit economy and perpetual growth. A systemic, structural problem, ecocide is inextricably linked to the major social problems of our world that the existing political structures are incapable of confronting. Even more than climate change, ecocide has either been denied or concealed as “progress.” At the end of the day, though, not even ignorance can release us from responsibility to life. You either stand with the planet or not.

The battle for our planet's future is fought on many fronts. But it is first and foremost a battle of imagination, of whether we can imagine a hopeful future—for example, the end of capitalism rather than the end of the world. In this struggle, literature for young people—and scholarship based on that literature—can play a far greater role than they have so far. This presentation introduces the concept of planetarianism as an epistemological orientation of putting the planet first. It suggests how planetarianism may apply to the study and teaching of children's literature. The programmatic exposition is philosophical but engages with ideas and narrative strategies from such novels as Witi Ihimaera's *The Whale Rider* (1987), Carol Emshwiller's *The Mount* (2002), Padma Venkatraman's *Island's End* (2011), and Craig Russell's *Fragment* (2017). The intention is to illustrate the key points of the planetarian agenda without losing sight of the immense challenges it faces from the dominant ideology.