

Water's Contradictory Nature in Children's Literature

Approximately seventy percent of the world we live in is made up of water. It is apparent that this substance, so prevalent on the earth, is also prevalent within children's literature. It is a relatable, tangible, and concrete substance which children interact with daily and are very familiar with. Water is referenced often within children's literature from a beginning reader's first book about taking a bath to Hans Christian Andersen's *The Little Mermaid*, which is set entirely in the water. Children's literature sometimes reflects a literal experience with water, but it is also often used in a symbolic way. The nature of water to run, to flow, to sit, to babble, to fall, to crash, allows for it to be written of in this symbolic way. Water, like humanity, is prevalent on the earth. Water, like humanity, tends to contradict itself. Water runs, but it also sits. Water allows for some to travel, but acts as a roadblock to others. Water can be serene and calm, but it can also be violent and troubled. Water can be clear like glass, or it can be murky and indistinct. Water has the power to give life, and it has the power to take life away. Within the realm of children's literature, and fairy tales especially, water can be symbolically presented in conflicting ways without causing internal continuity problems. For instance, in *The Little Mermaid* water is the setting of the story, a way of travel for many, an obstruction to the titular little mermaid, a thing of beauty and wonder for many, but not for the little mermaid. Water is symbolically presented in fairy tales in these conflicting ways. Water often becomes both a healer and a killer, both a pathway and an obstacle, both serene and violent, both clear and murky, and both moving and still. This contradictory nature is visible across several works, but is often seen within the same work or set of works, such as *The Little Mermaid* by Hans Christian Andersen.