

## **The Cycle of Seasons - Activism in *The Legend of Korra* Animated Series**

How to make the next generation of kids better stewards of our society, both the natural and political, is of great interest to cultural scholars. Studies on the influence of politics on children's literature exist; however, the connections between ecocriticism and other media are sorely lacking. Popular media, such as film or television, can be an effective way for children (and adults) to learn about two of the biggest problems facing our society today - rising international political tension and ecological disasters.

Using theories from ecocriticism and postcolonial studies, I will examine the major themes of *The Legend of Korra*, a critically acclaimed animated cartoon by Nickelodeon, which successfully made the transition to digital only distribution. In this fictional universe some people have the ability to manipulate, or "bend", one of the four major elements (Earth, Fire, Air, or Water). One person in each generation, called "The Avatar", can control all four elements and is tasked with keeping the balance of their world. Korra, the title character of the show, is the next Avatar in the cycle- a brown-skinned girl from the Southern Water Tribe. The cycle of the Avatar describes the process by which this special duty is born into one person each generation following the pattern of Earth, Fire, Air, Water. The animation style is heavily influenced by Japanese anime. Not just through character or environment, but also through the medium itself, I argue that the show weaves together elements of both Western and Eastern culture to examine important political and ecological issues.

Unlike many forms of media with a young audience this show did not shy away from taking on tough topics. I believe these qualities led to its continued success with both children and adults, despite the difficult leap to an online only platform. *The Legend of Korra* proves that a commercially and critically successful animated series can be an effective means of allowing not just kids, but also adults, to process important sociopolitical and environmental issues facing our society today.