

“One of the pleasures of my job is to see students from diverse backgrounds forming a relationship with children’s books that will serve them in their chosen careers. It is a privilege to show students that their love of a Shaun Tan illustration, a poem by Jackie Kay, or a novel by Marcus Sedgwick can be transformative and life-changing.”



Inspiring people no. 5

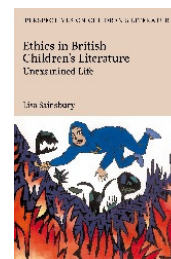
Lisa Sainsbury, Director, National Centre for Research in Children’s Literature

How would you describe your role as Director of NCRCL?



I work with colleagues at Roehampton University to inspire, facilitate and extend scholarship and creativity in the field of children’s literature. I’ve published on different aspects of the field, such as illustration and electronic narratives. I collaborate with external partners on various ventures and regularly organize conferences and events related to children’s literature. I teach children’s literature and creative writing for children at all levels of university provision, drawing variously on poetry, picture books, short stories, music and novels for children in my teaching, and supervise MA and PhD research projects.

In terms of my current research, I’ve long been interested in the extent to which children’s literature engages in and is open to philosophical debate. Not just the ways in which philosophical theories might be applied to children’s books – and this is part of it of course –but the ways in which children’s literature might be considered philosophical. My forthcoming book for Bloomsbury, *Ethics in British Children’s Literature*, explores ethical and philosophical spheres relevant to and arising from books for young people, such as naughtiness, family life, and environmental ethics, and demonstrates narrative strategies employed by authors such as John Agard, Anne Fine and Raymond Briggs to engage young readers as morally aware thinkers.



What were the influences that led you to specialise in this field?



It is true to say that I am passionate about children’s literature and this is not to trivialise the literary field in which I research and teach, for the source of my fascination is the childhood reading that has come to shape my career. As a child I read widely and at every opportunity, devouring everything from sea-side comic books to the works of BB (at least those held in my local library and ridiculously read over one weekend in a determined frenzy).

I can’t point to a favourite book from those early years, but Richard Adams’ *Watership Down* changed the momentum of my reading; it showed me that I could write about and reflect on books in a way that opened them up. My meeting with *Watership Down* was dynamic - it validated my burgeoning environmental concerns and persuaded me that literature has the potential to change the way we respond to and conceive of the world. I don’t suppose that I could have articulated this then, but my early conviction that children’s literature has a role to play in shaping young people as independent thinkers remains.

