



The Hidden Adult: Defining Children's Literature

Perry Nodelman

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What exactly is a children's book? How is children's literature defined as a genre? A leading scholar presents close readings of six classic stories to answer these questions and offer a clear definition of children's writing as a distinct literary form.

Perry Nodelman begins by considering the plots, themes, and structures of six works: "The Purple Jar," *Alice in Wonderland*, *Dr. Doolittle*, *Henry Huggins*, *The Snowy Day*, and *Plain City*?all written for young people of varying ages in different times and places?to identify shared characteristics. He points out markers in each work that allow the adult reader to understand it as a children's story, shedding light on ingrained adult assumptions and revealing the ways in which adult knowledge and experience remain hidden in apparently simple and innocent texts.

Nodelman then engages a wide range of views of children's literature from authors, literary critics, cultural theorists, and specialists in education and information sciences. Through this informed dialogue, Nodelman develops a comprehensive theory of children's literature, exploring its commonalities and shared themes.

The Hidden Adult is a focused and sophisticated analysis of children's literature and a major contribution to the theory and criticism of the genre.



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