The right thing to read: Australian girl-readers in history and text, 1910-1960

Citations
Altmetric
Author
Lowe, Bronwyn
Date
2014
Affiliation
School of Historical and Philosophical Studies
Metadata
Show full item record
Document Type
PhD thesis
Access Status
Only available to University of Melbourne staff and students, login required
URI
http://hdl.handle.net/11343/54912
Description
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Abstract
This thesis explores Australian schoolgirls' reading habits from 1910 to 1960. Rather than documenting a list of all books read by girls, this study explores how girls accessed books, the messages authors and editors sought to impart in such books, how adults conceptualised girls' reading at the time, and how the act of reading was constructed subsequently. It charts shifts in girls' reading habits across the period, and looks at the influence of families, friends, education and government authorities, libraries and publishers on girls' access to reading material.

This thesis investigates the influence of Australia's publishing history and the importance of British publishers to Australian girl-readers. It considers the rise of Australian literary nationalism and the increasing prominence of Australian literature, using Australian works of children's literature published throughout the period as case studies.
Contemporary depictions of girlhood reading found in educational studies, newspapers and sociological reading surveys are used to address adults' worries about girls' reading, showing how such concerns articulated more broadly-held fears for children's Australian citizenship and indeed the nation's future. These are also used to discuss changing notions of Australian girlhood, exploring the ways that parents, teachers, educators, journalists and politicians attempted to mitigate concerns about girls' development through the promotion of 'healthy' literature.

Recollections of girlhood reading found in autobiographies and memoirs are used to discuss how women constructed their girlhood reading habits later, using them to illustrate individual intelligence and intellectual independence.

This study brings Australian girls to the fore, considering them not just as passive witnesses but as agents in the creation of their own identity, who engaged deeply with the events of their time. It brings fresh light to the history of Australian girlhood, making new and important connections between girls and broader histories of this period.

Keywords

girlhood; book history; history of reading; Australian girls; children's literature; education history; publishing history; library history

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'The Right Thing to Read': A History of Australian Girl-Readers, 1910-1960 explores the reading habits, identity, and construction of femininity of Australian girls aged between ten and fourteen from 1910 to 1960. It investigates changing notions of Australian girlhood across the period, and explores the ways that parents, teachers, educators, journalists and politicians attempted to mitigate concerns about girls' development through the promotion of 'healthy' literature. The book also addresses the influence of British publishers to Australian girl-readers and the growing importance of Austra...