

Tales for Little Rebels: A Collection of Radical Children's Literature

From NYU Press

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Tales for Little Rebels: A Collection of Radical Children's Literature From NYU Press

In 1912, a revolutionary chick cries, “Strike down the wall!” and liberates itself from the “egg state.” In 1940, ostriches pull their heads out of the sand and unite to fight fascism. In 1972, Baby X grows up without a gender and is happy about it.

Rather than teaching children to obey authority, to conform, or to seek redemption through prayer, twentieth-century leftists encouraged children to question the authority of those in power. *Tales for Little Rebels* collects forty-three mostly out-of-print stories, poems, comic strips, primers, and other texts for children that embody this radical tradition. These pieces reflect the concerns of twentieth-century leftist movements, like peace, civil rights, gender equality, environmental responsibility, and the dignity of labor. They also address the means of achieving these ideals, including taking collective action, developing critical thinking skills, and harnessing the liberating power of the imagination.

Some of the authors and illustrators are familiar, including Lucille Clifton, Syd Hoff, Langston Hughes, Walt Kelly, Norma Klein, Munro Leaf, Julius Lester, Eve Merriam, Charlotte Pomerantz, Carl Sandburg, and Dr. Seuss. Others are relatively unknown today, but their work deserves to be remembered. (Each of the pieces includes an introduction and a biographical sketch of the author.) From the anti-advertising message of *Johnny Get Your Money’s Worth (and Jane Too)!* (1938) to the entertaining lessons in ecology provided by *The Day They Parachuted Cats on Borneo* (1971), and Sandburg’s mockery of war in *Rootabaga Pigeons* (1923), these pieces will thrill readers intrigued by politics and history—and anyone with a love of children’s literature, no matter what age.

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Editorial Review

Review

"*Tales for Little Rebels* anthologizes 75 years of radical children's literature. It's a rousing, relevant chronicle of teaching kids about social and environmental justice, civil rights, and their power to challenge the status quo."

-Julie Hanus,*The Utne Reader*

"A ribald, witty, sometimes fun, sometimes thoughtful examination of a wide swath of too little-known literature."

-*www.schoollibrary.com*

"Financial behemoths have been nationalized. There are even rumors of universal health care. Socialism is on the march! As we leave capitalism behind, the traditionalists among you may be wondering: *Will they come for our children?* Too late. As Mickenberg and Nel document in *Tales for Little Rebels*, Marxist principles have been dripping steadily into the minds of American youth for more than a century. . . . As America backs cautiously away from its laissez-faire disasters and reluctantly into an unfamiliar, communal style of politics, some of us may find ourselves wishing we had been scared with such rhymes in kindergarten instead of having had to live through them as adults."

-*The New York Times Book Review*

"*Tales for Little Rebels* is indeed a timely collection and one that serves as an excellent touchstone for future research into a 'usable past' for contemporary academics."

-*Children's Literature Association Quarterly*

"As an educator, I share the belief that all of the authors in this collection must also have held as truth: that children are indeed the future, and to bring about social change, one needs to begin by changing the hearts and minds of children... I believe lovers of social/political history and inquiring minds in general, [sic] would find this collection appealing."-*Style Substance Soul*

"This book reveals a unique, vibrant, imaginative, and energetic left-wing tradition of writing for young people. It is an invaluable resource for progressive educators and hopefully will inspire teachers to write and even publish their own children's books dealing with sensitive political and social issues."
-*Rethinking Schools Online*

"Children's literature with timeless philosophy for grown-ups."-Maria Popova ,*Brainpicking*

“Julia Mickenburg and Philip Nel have edited a collection of children’s literature that represents the left-wing-oriented, oppositional tradition in children’s literature in the United States. And a lovely collection it is!... Mickenburg and Nel have done all of us —parents, activists, writers—a service by providing examples of what has been done. The task remains to carry this forward.”-*Science & Society*

“Mickenberg and Nel have switched on the power of radical children’s literature to maximum wattage, revealing a rich, compelling tradition that deserves our attention. Creating an archive that will have authority and endurance, they have recovered stories encouraging children to engage with social, economic, and environment challenges and to become agents of change.”
-Maria Tatar,Harvard University, and author of *The Annotated Hans Christian Andersen*

“Readers looking for the animals, sprites, and other characters common to children’s literature will find them, with a twist.”
-*The Chronicle Review*

“A rarely discussed aspect of children’s literature—the politics behind, or part, of a book’s creation—has been thoroughly explored in this intelligent, enlightening, and fascinating account. Even those who have spent a lifetime studying children’s books will find incredible surprises, such as Walter Crane’s ‘Happy Valley’ or information about Lynd Ward’s political activism. But the book is not merely a history; it is a very timely exploration of the appropriate inclusion of political/social content in children’s books, and it provides examples of titles that succeed as literature and those in which politics overwhelm the story. Every academic and public library should own a copy; every children’s literature professor needs to read it; all children’s book enthusiasts will want to share it with their colleagues.”
-Anita Silvey,author of *100 Best Books for Children*

“Mickenberg and Nel fill a gap in scholarship on children’s literature.”
-*Choice*

“By introducing kids (and their parents) to a wide range of forgotten and overlooked texts addressing progressive themes, and by provoking a closer look at what the books we already own imply, Mickenberg and Nel have done parents and kids alike a truly important service.”
-*The Texas Observer*

"The collection focuses on a fascinating combination of ideology and creativity introducing its readers to a

multiplicity of ways didactic messages were presented to a children's audience. This anthology is important for scholars of Russian literature because it shows the inherent elements of children's literature that permits its use (and abuse) for ideological purposes."-*Working Group for Study of Russian Children's Literature and Culture* blog

"Sure, this is an important work. But it ain't stuffy. Mickenberg and Nel have created a book that fascinates and entertains. A must for any student of history or children's books."
-Lane Smith,author of *John, Paul, George & Ben* and illustrator of *The Stinky Cheese Man*

"A remarkable book. . . . The prose excerpts are fascinating; the illustrations are perfectly fabulous and, very often, really funny. . . . There is so much here, and something unique for everyone except sourpuss defenders of the status quo."
-Paul Buhle , *Monthly Review*

"I have a soft spot for beautiful and thoughtful children's books, especially children's literature with timeless philosophy for grown-ups...*Tales for Little Rebels* made me think of the subtle ideological messages in some of my favorite recent children's books."
-Maria Popova,*The Atlantic*

"For those who want to understand a time when radicals could think of themselves as having a central place in U.S. culture, right down to science instruction; for those who cherish beautiful, playful, wistful and stark illustrations; for those who can use reminders, after horrors and defeats, of the bedrock ethical bases of socialism, for those who want to know where a Dr. Seuss came from, and what he was part of, and for those who still think the world could use more little and grown-up rebels, this is the book."
-David Roediger,University of Illinois, and author of *How Race Survived U.S. History*

"While is clearly intended as a textbook for a college course on this subject, the variety within this anthology should suggest it is well worth extended investigation. We may even begin questioning the degree of propaganda that surrounds our daily life as adults and realize such story-telling is no longer limited only to the realm of childhood." -*American Communist History*

"Mickenberg and Nel have done a real service in reclaiming these selections of children's literature, some by such well known children's book authors as Julius Lester and Dr. Seuss but many from writers whose reputations were made and works published on the barricades of the Left."
-*The Horn Book Inc.*

"Consistently fascinating. . . . Boast[s] authors as skilled as Carl Sandburg, Munro (Ferdinand the Bull) Leaf, Dr. Seuss, Eve Merriam and Langston Hughes."

-Toronto Globe and Mail

About the Author

Julia L. Mickenberg is Associate Professor of American Studies, University of Texas at Austin. She is the author of *Learning from the Left: Children's Literature, the Cold War, and Radical Politics in the United States*.

Philip Nel is Professor of English and Director of Kansas State University's Program in Children's Literature. His most recent books are *Tales for Little Rebels* (NYU Press, 2008, co-edited with Julia Mickenberg), *The Annotated Cat* (2007), and *Dr. Seuss: American Icon* (2004).

Users Review

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