

Space, Place, and Children's Reading Development: Mapping the Connections.
Margaret Mackey. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2022. 214 pages.

This volume in Bloomsbury's *Perspectives on Children's Literature* series is an extended report of a rigorous empirical study of young adults rebuilding their childhood reading recollections prompted by maps and conversations with Margaret Mackey. Building on Mackey's earlier investigations of narrative form in *Narrative Pleasures* (2011), as well as her auto-bibliography, *One Child Reading* (2016), Mackey presents a fascinating study of both the impact of lived experience on literary engagement and, in reverse, the impact of childhood reading on everyday life. This qualitative account makes use of maps as a stimulus for interviews with twelve participants from decidedly diverse backgrounds. Together with Mackey, they try to connect their memories of childhood narratives – predominantly reading experiences, but also cartoons, films, and dramatic play – to the locations that mattered to them when they encountered these narratives.

Mackey's starting point is that 'reading is not a finite event that concludes in a definitive way when the book is shut for the last time. Traces of our textual encounters may linger on in lifelong ways' (4). One of the ways in which books linger on is that they become the 'beforehand' of the next book. Unlike critics who examine textual affordances, or how stories are structured to promote or occlude specific ideologies, Mackey endeavours to open up the connections between real readers' encounters with books in childhood, their lives, and their values. More specifically, she is interested in understanding which aspects of reading appear to be common, shared experiences and which are personal and individualised. Mackey pays attention to how changes in childhood spaces (e.g. moving home, especially moving to another country) and reading interact in identity development. Another consistent theme throughout the study is Mackey's desire to move beyond immediate responses to fiction to understand the long-term impact of stories.

The students produced maps of their childhood spaces, which they could connect with their literary and storying activities as children. They worked individually and independently (although they could receive technical support from the research team to produce their maps). They then met with Mackey and a graduate student for an in-depth interview that built from the map or maps they had produced. Mackey's questioning techniques can be seen in the many transcripts cited throughout the text: they reveal a passionately interested, engaged researcher. Her questions provide helpful models for novices wanting to learn how to promote book talk.

The monograph is arranged in six sections of uneven lengths. Mackey begins with an overview of the choice of mapping as a technique for stimulating memory, an introduction to the twelve participants, a discussion of her key terms, and an overview of how she responded to the transcripts. This is followed by 'Geographical Spaces' (primarily focused on the sense of 'home'); 'Textual Spaces' (primarily focused on the participants' shared sense of 'forest' and Harry Potter); 'Psychological Spaces' (which delves into the diversity of mental imagery during reading); 'Literary Spaces' (on the diversity of reading experiences over a lifetime); and concludes with 'Life Spaces and Reading Spaces'. Throughout the volume, the voices,

images, and experiences of the twelve subjects open up fascinating insights into the impact of stories on children's lives. These range from noting the significance of the seemingly mundane (e.g. playing with dolls) to the impact of adult gatekeeping practices in determining which stories are valued and the global familiarity of the Harry Potter stories for children who have never lived in the UK. As this brief overview attests, this is a broad-ranging study, but each step is filled with detailed accounts from the transcripts. The result is absorbing.

I am frequently in awe of Mackey's methodological techniques, and this study is her best to date. Her seemingly simple starting points – a reader, a story, a map – open up into rich multimodal evidence that captures the experience and impact of reading in its immediate context and in the long- term. Having dealt with transcript data myself, I can only applaud Mackey's capacity to identify how contrasts and similarities in the discussions can provide new knowledge concerning real readers' experiences of literature in childhood. Mackey interweaves her discussions of her transcripts with theory drawn from literary studies, philosophy, and the reading sciences, including empirical techniques such as brain scanning and eye-tracking technology. One of the delights of this process is to show how very varied techniques lead to very similar conclusions, and how each discipline and its associated research techniques has much to offer our overall understanding of the reading process. Her fully grounded argument demonstrates why empirical evidence gained from simply asking readers what they think still has much to offer.

I particularly valued her discussion of diversity in the section on psychological spaces. 'Diversity' is so often treated as though it were a synonym for intersectionality, but in this chapter Mackey reveals hidden layers of diversity that are unconnected to life-chances, albeit not to traditions of value. Her discussion of mental-image generation is entirely absent in the scholarship, where the assumption that good readers generate mental images is rarely challenged. Mackey connects the visualisation of interior worlds among her participants with matters such as cultural normativity, neurodiversity, and the adaptation of books into film (and vice versa). By allowing her participants' experiences to dominate, Mackey generates insight into aspects of the reading experience that are poorly identified, not to mention under-researched.

Mackey has produced an important piece of scholarship that responds admirably to many urgent questions in the field of children's literature. She provides empirical evidence that supports many of the claims made by cognitive narratologists. At the same time, she sharpens arguments against generalising about how readers will respond to the affordances of a text. Above all, this work is a celebration of children and their books.

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