**HOWARD — Sea Stacks**

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**Sea Stacks: Contemporary Atlantic Canadian Books for Children and Youth**

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Research over the past two decades has amply demonstrated the importance of literature   
to the formation of both regional and national cultural identity, particularly in the face of mass-market globalization of children’s book publishing in the late 20th and early 21st centuries, as well as the predominance of non-Canadian content from television, movies, books, magazines, and Internet media (Egoff and Saltman, 1990; Diakiw, 1997; Nodelman, 1997; Pantaleo, 2000; Baird, 2002; Nodelman, 2008; Reimer, 2008; Edwards and Saltman, 2010). John Sorfleet notes, ‘It is this independent local perspective—what one can term a sense of one’s own place or home ground—which is most important to any understanding of the raison d’être of children’s literature in Canada and other relatively young nations’ (Sorfleet, 2003, 220). In *Picturing Canada: A History of Canadian Children’s Illustrated Books and Publishing*, Gail Edwards and Judith Saltman note that some of the pastoral trends in representations of home spaces found in many Atlantic Canadian picturebooks perpetuate ‘a deeply embedded Romantic view of childhood’ (Edwards and Saltman, 2010, 195) and raise important questions about publishing trends and educational mandates in relation to regional representation for young audiences.

Despite the richness of literary traditions in Atlantic Canada, local children and youth are not consistently exposed to their own regional literature in classrooms or school libraries. A 2009 survey of public school teachers and school library staff in K–12 classrooms in the Atlantic Provinces conducted by the researcher revealed that while 94.6% of respondents indicated that they felt it was theoretically important to include regional authors and illustrators in their classrooms, only 48.2% reported that they had actually done so in the previous year, and only 19.6% stated that they felt well informed about Atlantic Canadian books for youth. One respondent commented, ‘It is important for children to see that there are many people in their own geographical area that write, illustrate and publish literature. I find this encourages young writers and lets them see that this is a viable profession to pursue’. Another respondent noted that ‘children need to see the connections of where they live to the rest of the world. Sometimes children know more about other places than where they live’. When asked about their knowledge of Atlantic Canadian children’s books, respondents expressed the need for a web-based resource listing regional authors, illustrators, titles, and themes as well as information about curriculum links. One teacher stated, ‘I would love to have a list of local authors on a reference website I could go to to search for books related to what I am teaching at any given time. [At the moment] I don’t know who the authors/illustrators are and what their books are called. I would have to have time to do research to find out, and I don’t have that time’. This study clearly demonstrated that, although information on some well-known regional authors is available on the Internet, this information is scattered, inconsistently organized, and erratic in currency, completeness, quality, and authority. Furthermore, teachers and school library staff do not have the time to search out information on a variety of widely dispersed sites and strongly expressed the need to have it collected and organized in a single, easy-to-use, comprehensive, and authoritative online resource.

The Sea Stacks website (www.seastacks.lib.unb.ca), an inter-university collaborative research project, directly addresses the currently under-exposed and under-valued state of contemporary Atlantic Canadian literature for children and young adults by creating an authoritative web-delivered resource devoted to this literature. On the basis of research that emphasizes the significance of regional books in the establishment of cultural identity, this project will ultimately provide a current, complete, and authoritative information resource devoted to regional literature, the framework for which is already in place along with 25 profiles funded by a one-year SSHRC standard research grant. The Sea Stacks site documents the current state of this literature through profiles containing biographical information, bibliographies of primary texts and secondary sources, textual analysis, and video interviews with selected authors and illustrators, specifically exploring ‘regional’ themes in their work. Most importantly, the site encourages researchers to analyze and theorize issues in contemporary English-language Atlantic Canadian literature for children and youth: its searchable database allows users (scholars, teachers, librarians, parents, youth) to gather thematically related books together in ways they may not have done before. The Sea Stacks website has been the catalyst for the upcoming (July 2015) Thomas Raddall Symposium at Acadia University in Wolfville, Nova Scotia, which will be devoted to an analysis of ‘Child, Youth, and Place in Atlantic Canadian Literature’ (http://english.acadiau.ca/tl\_files/sites/english/resources/RaddallCFP%20extension-10.pdf). Thus, this proposed poster describes the role of the Sea Stacks site in exploring traditional research questions and in opening up new research questions and avenues of inquiry.

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