

Out of this World: Why Literature Matters to Girls

Review by Lynda L. Hinkle

In *Out of this World: Why Literature Matters to Girls*, Dr. Holly Blackford, a professor at Rutgers in Camden, New Jersey, challenges our assumptions about how girls interact with text. Her research, consisting primarily of interviews with a cross section of girls, concludes (among other things) that girls don't necessarily identify with female characters in literature. This contrasts with the intuition of gender sensitive curriculum developers that have tried to add strong female characters to book rotations in public school English departments in order to encourage girls.

Blackford's book opened my eyes, as a teacher, to some considerations of how genre and convention expectations may affect my students. For instance, in discussing *The Scarlet Letter*, Blackford points out that interviewees expected the book to follow the twists and turns of the mystery or Gothic genres. When, instead, Hawthorne solves the mystery of Hester Prynne's lover early on, modern readers may feel confusion about why well-known genre conventions are shed. A class discussion of genre expectation may be a useful tool in overcoming many students' objections to the classic novel.

Out of this World: Why Literature Matters to Girls is a well written, intriguing and thought-provoking collection of ideas and research that will prove of great interest to teachers, curriculum specialists, parents of girls, or anyone involved in the development of reading practices in youth. Blackford's unique voice and willingness to explore beyond the expectations of the field of children's literature will undoubtedly make her someone we will be hearing a lot about in the future.