

**Panel Presenters: Kate McDowell and Debra Mitts-Smith**

**Panel Title: Science in Print Culture for Youth, 19<sup>th</sup> Century and Today**

**Presenter 1:**

Kate McDowell, Assistant Professor

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**Title: Evolution for Children: 1882-1914**

In the late nineteenth century, when Charles Darwin's ideas of evolution were receiving extensive treatment in the popular press, some authors of books for children began to incorporate evolutionary concepts into their nonfiction works. At this time, there was consensus among professional librarians that children should be guided to read “true” books, and that the best topic of nonfiction for children was science. These adults recommended that children read science books in part because of Victorian beliefs that nature reflected God’s order, and so nature study brought children closer to the divine order of the universe. Some interpretations of evolutionary concepts constituted a threat to that divine order, and this tension is reflected in the books that were written for and recommended to children. Some authors included an introductory explanation of the theory of evolution in their books on animals and nature; other authors described the wonders of nature without including the theory of evolution. This paper examines the science books recommended for children in nationally distributed lists created by librarians Caroline M. Hewins, John F. Sargent, and other librarians from 1882 to 1897, lists that were highly influential in determining public libraries’ holdings for children, to see how children’s print culture reflected scientific and popular conceptions of evolution. Although this paper examines those texts created in the last decades of the nineteenth century, the question of how children should or should not be presented with the theory of evolution in their education remains a hotly contested issue. Examining whether and how the idea of evolution was presented to children when it was a newly popular concept may shed new light on the continuation of these debates today.

**Equipment:** Laptop projector

**Presenter 2:**

Debra Mitts-Smith, Assistant Professor

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**Title:** Animals on the Shelf: Scientific Information in the Depiction of North American Predators in Contemporary Informational Books for Young People

Contemporary informational books for children provide factual information on the world. Based on scientific research, informational books featuring wild animals describe the animal's anatomy, diet, behavior, and habitat. They also contain information on the ways in which biologists gather data, depicting them in the field tracking and observing animals and collecting specimens. In this way, informational books do more than disseminate scientific research; they inform their audience about the work of being a scientist. Yet these works also contain social and cultural messages that are far from neutral.

Building on my previous study of the wolf in contemporary nonfiction for children, this paper focuses the dissemination of scientific information in books about bears, mountain lions, coyotes, and other North American predators. Through a comparative analysis of these texts I consider the types of information included as well as information that is excluded. Since pictures, especially photographs, play an important role in these works, my presentation discusses their use as evidence of the scientific data. Images not only render the animals visible, but also help foster emotional responses in their viewers. As such, the illustrations may also carry social and cultural messages that sometimes complement but sometimes distort the text. This study concludes with an examination of how underlying social and cultural perspectives shape these works.

**Equipment:** laptop projector