

Call for papers

Waste and Children's Culture: Thematics, Aesthetics, Ethics

International hybrid workshop at Stockholm University, Sweden, 23–24 October, 2025



*Oh, I love trash!
Anything dirty or dingy or dusty
Anything ragged or rotten or rusty
Yes, I love trash!*

“I Love Trash”, *Sesame Street* (1970)

Traditionally, children's culture has been associated with pastoral and rural settings unaffected by urbanization and environmental degradation. Today, however, there is no place on Earth left untouched by the unwanted leftovers of human activity. We live in what Marco Armiero calls the Wasteocene, referring to a socio-economic system increasingly defined by its production of wasted things, people, and places. In line with this development, contemporary children's culture is obsessed with waste, rubbish, and polluted environments. Like Oscar the Grouch in *Sesame Street*, it loves trash!

This international and interdisciplinary workshop wants to examine and trace the history of this change. It wants to disrupt traditional, nature centered perceptions of environmental children's culture by turning its attention to waste – as theme, aesthetic attitude, and ethical tool. The workshop takes inspiration from Waste Studies, a growing interdisciplinary field of cultural analysis that expands traditional approaches of ecocriticism by focusing on decay, built environments, and toxic sites. Building on insights from writings on rubbish, garbage, and excrement – such as *Purity and Danger* (1966) by Mary Douglas, *Wasted Lives* (2004) by Zygmunt Bauman, *On Garbage* (2005) by John Scanlan, *The Ethics of Waste* (2005) by Gay Hawkins, *The Literature of Waste* (2015) by Susan S. Morrison, *Waste and Re-Use in Twentieth-Century Fiction* (2016) by Rachel Dini – it wants to destabilise expectations of what waste is and does to children's culture. How is waste, trash, and pollution used as theme, metaphor, and/or environmental message? How is waste used as an aesthetical mode of artistic creation? What are the ethical implications and eco-pedagogical potential of waste? How could a waste-oriented approach to children's culture provide valuable insights for the broader field of waste studies?

The purpose of the workshop is to bring together scholars of children's culture, (e.g. children's and YA literature, picture books, graphic novels, film and television, theater, play, education, history) from different countries who are in particular interested in the topic of

waste. You can choose to participate in-person or join via livestream. The workshop is intended as a space for the development of projects and the proceedings will have a hybrid round-table format, with a 15-minute in-person or virtual presentation followed by a 15-minute round of comments and discussion. There will be an opportunity to develop papers into full articles as we are planning to submit a proposal for a collection to an international publisher. We invite international and historically diverse approaches which might consider topics such as:

- Representations of waste in children's culture
- Waste motifs, metaphors, narratives, and forms
- Waste in children's and YA literature, picturebooks, graphic novels, and poetry
- Waste in different genres such as climate fiction, dystopia, fantasy, and science fiction
- Wastelands, toxic sites, landfills, garbage dumps, ruins, and trashcans
- Hoarders and rubbish collectors
- Waste aesthetics in children's culture
- Waste and avant-garde children's culture
- Waste and pop art children's culture
- Waste and children's theater scenography
- Waste and children's film and television
- Collage, assemblage, bricolage, objets trouvés
- Waste ethics in children's culture
- The junk playground/adventure playground
- Children's culture, waste, and eco-pedagogy
- Children's culture, waste, and ecoliteracy
- Children's culture and re-cycling
- Children's culture and consumerism
- Children's culture, environmental devastation, and pollution
- Waste and childhood discourses

We welcome submissions from established scholars, early-career researchers, and PhD-candidates. Participants should submit a title, an abstract of maximum 300 words, and a short bio.

Deadline for submissions: 28 May, 2025

Submit abstract to: Lydia Wistisen, lydia.wistisen@littvet.su.se

Organizers:

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