UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE

PPD – Practitioner Professional Development

Reading for Learning

Why reading fiction is crucial for children's cognitive, emotional and social development.

Programme

09:30 -10:00   Arrivals and coffee

10:00 -11:00   **"Why reading is good for learning, well-being and citizenship", Prof Maria Nikolajeva**

On October 3, 2013, *Science*, the most influential scientific journal in the world, published an article with the provocative title "Reading Literary Fiction Improves Theory of Mind". A number of further studies confirm that reading fiction is beneficial for the development of cognitive, emotional and social skills that are indispensable for our lives. This introductory talk will demonstrate that fiction is a powerful educational implement that can potentially help children to become better human beings and citizens.

11:00 -11.30   Break

11:30 -12.30   **"Reading animals in children's literature", Dr Zoe Jaques**

This paper will argue that animal characters – perhaps the most commonly deployed 'device' in children's fiction – offer a sophisticated comment on human-animal relations which extends beyond the page and into the real world. Drawing upon the recent work of animal studies scholars, this talk will explore the doubleness implicit in attempting to teach children to 'be human' through the deployment of the non-human animal. It will make the case that the fictional animal rarely functions as an easily containable symbol but rather speaks to the complexities of the human-animal relations that circulate in much animal-studies philosophy.

12:30 -13:30   Lunch

13:30 -14.30   **"Introducing ecocriticism through Disney animation", Dr Aneesh Barai**

This paper will trace the shift in presentations of nature from *Bambi*, to *The Lion King*, to *Finding Nemo*, to discuss how Disney films endeavour to show us a world we don't have access to. When we consider how predators are initially omitted and later depicted in these films, we can see how Disney simplifies and humanises nature, in order to pull viewers into emotional engagements with the natural world, and provoke empathy and care for the non-human.

14:30 - 14:45   Break

14:45 - 16:00   **Hands-on workshop: Enhancing empathy skills through picturebooks**