

The Good, the Sad, and the Funny: Morality and Affect in Japanese Picturebooks

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However charming or avant-garde they may be, picturebooks do serious work, teaching the youngest members of society who we are and how we fit into our world. Advocacy of moral behavior plays a key role in this socializing project. In this talk, I focus on Japanese picturebooks published since the 1960s, where ethical instruction is framed in terms of fun and feeling rather than overt didacticism. Having identified a suite of childhood virtues that form an implicit moral canon for the picturebook repertoire, I examine common strategies for conveying and cultivating these ethical dispositions, both on the page and in the classroom. Furthermore, I argue that if anything the stakes for picturebook morality are rising. At the same time that anxiety about the future of Japanese childhood has grown more acute, public intellectuals, self-described picturebook therapists, and other advocates have moved to appropriate picturebooks as resources for the moral re-education of adults. As a result, picturebooks are becoming increasingly visible as sites for public reflection on what it means to be—and to feel, and to act—human.

Heather Blair is Associate Professor of Religious Studies at Indiana University. A Japan specialist, she focuses primarily on lay religiosity and intersections between visual culture and religion, both in the Heian and the modern-to-contemporary periods. Her publications include *Real and Imagined: The Peak of Gold in Heian Japan* (2015) and articles in venues such as *Monumenta Nipponica*, *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, and *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies*. She is currently working on a monograph with the working title *The Gods Make You Giggle: Finding Religion in Japanese Picturebooks*.

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