

Learning About Disaster: Children, Emotion and Crisis

27 June 2025
Victoria University, Melbourne



Augustus E. Mulready, *Remembering Joys That Have Passed Away*, 1873. Oil on canvas. Guildhall Art Gallery, City of London.

Keynote: Stephanie Olsen, Tampere University

In 1946, the Finnish author Tove Jansson published her now world-renowned children's story, *Comet in Moominland*. In the tale, the Moomins, a type of troll, learn that a comet is going to hit the earth a few days later, and the tale revolves around the family as they seek out each other and find a cave to try and hide from disaster. Ultimately, the comet misses the earth and so there is a happy ending. But for a time, the child reader is presented with the possibility of extinction, or at least, a world-changing event. The Moomin tale is not unique in presenting crisis, disaster or tragedy for children; indeed, many children's tales seem replete with such imagery. Despite contemporary pretensions towards childhood as a time of innocence, children are often provided access to a rich array of accounts that encourage them to reflect on large existential questions of life and death.

In our current historic conditions, as climate crisis looms, wars uproot families, and new economic conditions require old and young people to imagine the future anew, how we introduce children to large global challenges and the real-world impacts on the people involved seems a pressing question. This event is designed to explore how we have represented crises in art, literature, media, heritage and educational resources designed for children and young people and how they have, in turn, responded to such materials. We are particularly interested in the place of children's emotion in such representations, in how children respond to these resources, and as an analytical tool for reflecting on the crisis or disaster take form in works for children. We encourage papers from any time period, including the present, and from all relevant disciplines. We interpret 'children's literature' widely,

including visual representations, film, new media, tv, and radio, as well as more traditional resources aimed at children and young people.

Topics may include:

- Apocalypse, disaster, and crisis in children's art and literature
- Teaching disaster to children – the pedagogy of crisis
- Disasters that happen to children and their representation
- Crisis in children's own writings, art or educational productions
- Religion, crisis and childhood
- Current events and news for children
- Managing children's emotions
- Emotional crises in works for children/children's work

Please send a title, 200-word abstract, and two sentence bio to katie.barclay@mq.edu.au by the 15 December 2024. Papers are anticipated to be 20 mins long; proposals for panels or roundtables are welcome. If you would like to propose something alternative, please get in touch to discuss.

Conference organisers: Katie Barclay, Dianne Hall, Dolly MacKinnon, Una McIlvenna, Charlotte-Rose Millar

This event is part of a series by the organisers that press us to consider the intersections of future, feeling, children, temporality, crisis and our imagined responses. Please look out for further information.

