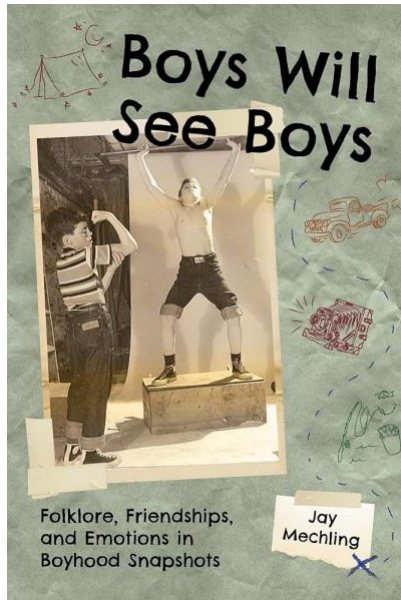


Journal of Folklore and Education Reviews



Boys Will See Boys: Folklore, Friendships, and Emotion in Boyhood Snapshots, by Jay Mechling
(Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2026, 228 pp.)

Mary Sellers is an English professor at the Community College of Aurora in Aurora, Colorado.

“Every American adult, male and female, thinks they understand boys.” With these provocative words, Jay Mechling begins the first chapter of his latest book, *Boys Will See Boys*. The book taps into his decades of research into boyhood and young adulthood echoing some of the themes discussed in his ethnography of the Boy Scouts, *On My Honor: Boy Scouts and the Making of American Youth* (2001/2004), and analysis of vernacular photographs of soldiers, *Soldier Snapshots* (2021). His goal in his latest work was to “read the snapshots taken by boys of boys

in order to understand how their collective behavior in their friendship groups, away from adult surveillance, gives us valuable information in understanding the dynamic relationship between boys’ nature and their socialized second nature, between their internal experiences and their external realities of their group culture and society” (174). In other words, Mechling sets out to explain what boys do and find valuable when they escape from the watchful eyes of authorities.

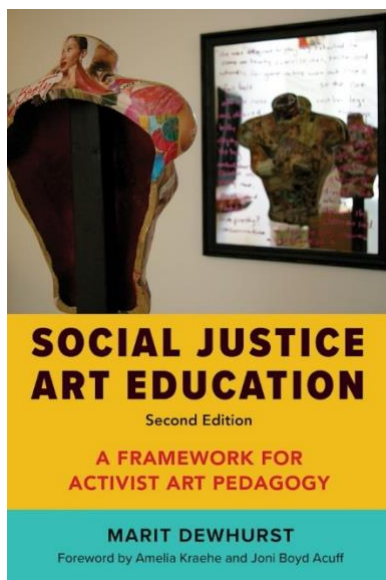
In addition to his primary goal, Mechling also set out to write the book “in a way that preserved the scholarly observations but set aside (or explained) any scholarly jargon, in order to make the book readable for the general audience” (7). He succeeds admirably with both goals.

In his introduction, Mechling lays out his methodology in an orderly and understandable way. He chose film camera photographs of boys that he felt were taken by other boys. His subjects were predominantly white, American, middle-class, and aged 10 to 26 years, although he includes a comparative section on Hitler Youth in similar camping settings.

After the introduction, the book is divided into two parts: “Theory” and “The Snapshots,” and each section uses a plethora of scholarship in folklore studies, boyhood studies, and psychoanalysis. The first part, “Theory,” encompasses chapters on boys’ nature, male adolescence and identity, and boys’ friendships. “The Snapshots” features eight sections. The first two discuss the material culture of boys. The next two chapters focus on bonding and masculinity displays. A discussion of deep play and fantasy precedes an analysis of Hitler Youth and their similarities to American boys. The book ends with the idea that these photos of boys serve as melancholy souvenirs. These

chapters could serve to introduce visual ethnography to a class or to discuss the importance of explaining and defending one's interpretations with scholarship.

This book can be used by a wide audience. Mechling uses a vast array of sources to provide a solid defense of his methodology and interpretations of photos, making it appealing to academics. He drew heavily on the work of Simon Bronner, Alan Dundes, Gregory Bateson, and Nancy Chodorow, although hundreds of researchers receive mention. Despite the heavy use of scholarship, the book remains approachable and entertaining for a non-scholarly audience, even a high school one, although that audience may find the psychoanalytic interpretations such as "wrestling both is and is not sex" to be new to them. This book fulfills its purpose by admirably helping readers and scholars explore not only why "boys will be boys" but how "boys will see boys."



Social Justice Art Education, Second Edition: A Framework for Activist Art Pedagogy, by Marit Dewhurst
(Cambridge: Harvard Education Press, 2023, 176 pp.)

Claire Denny is the Folk Arts Education Specialist at the Folk Arts - Cultural Treasures Charter School in Philadelphia.

Marit Dewhurst's *Social Justice Art Education, Second Edition: A Framework for Activist Art Pedagogy*, expands upon her foundational tenets in her original publication. In this edition, Dewhurst acknowledges and responds to current political and social landscapes educators find themselves in the United States. As more educators attempt to navigate polarized conversations pertaining to equity, identity, and the role of education in society,

this book presents both a practical guide and a reflective call to action for educators committed to art activist pedagogy.

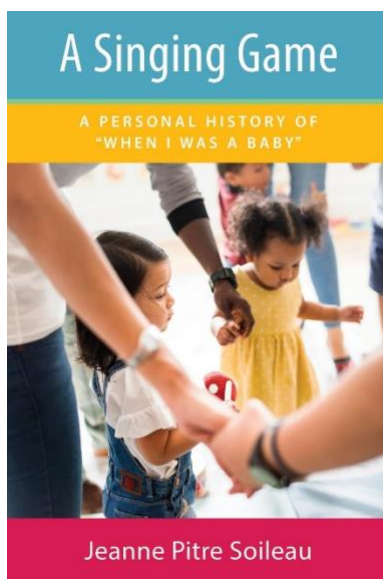
The updated edition maintains the framework of the first publication, namely, an exploration of the three interconnected processes of activist artmaking: connecting, questioning, and transforming (previously labeled as translating in the first edition). These concepts provide a flexible structure for understanding how participants, with a focus on student youth, engage critically with injustice through artistic practices. Dewhurst emphasizes that social justice art education (SJAЕ) is not merely for creating artwork "about" injustice, but rather is concerned with how the art is made, how relationships are built, and how power is brokered throughout the creative process. This distinction and exploration of the "how" is expanded upon in the second edition.

Dewhurst reframes activist art as a collaborative and deeply contextual educational practice by focusing on instruction instead of product alone. Throughout the book, the reader is provided thought-provoking activities, guided questions, as well as possible extensions to her work and

research. Reminders of positionality, power dynamics, and the importance of critical examination of practices before engaging in SJAE are central to the book's messaging as well, as it requires the reflective practice SJAE embodies.

There are points throughout the book where the ambitious scope of SJAE work could be perceived as overwhelming. Dewhurst openly acknowledges that activist artmaking is "messy, complex, and challenging" and requires flexibility. Readers may benefit from practical instructions to help further the work among those not as familiar with SJAE teaching but inspired by its potential. Regardless, the second edition of Dewhurst's book deepens conversation pertaining to art-making and activist pedagogy, which is rooted in relationship building, cultural legacies, and a vested interest in achieving social change.

For arts- and justice-minded individuals seeking to deepen their pedagogical practice, this text serves a vital and condensed resource. At the book's conclusion, Dewhurst encourages readers to continue to evolve their preparatory work, practices, and "radical dreams" through the inherently collaborative work of social justice art education.



A Singing Game: A Personal History of "When I Was a Baby," by Jeanne Pitre Soileau
(Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2026, 123 pp.)

Sara Mendez is the founder and Executive Director of the Catholic Arts and Sciences Academy.

In *A Singing Game: A Personal History of "When I Was a Baby,"* Jeanne Pitre Soileau takes an unusual approach to children's folklore. Instead of surveying dozens of games, she follows one singing game, "When I Was a Baby," across more than 150 years. The result is part memoir, part folklore history, and part case study. Through historical collections, decades of her own fieldwork, and contemporary online performances, Soileau shows how children reshape the game to reflect the world they know. As the lyrics, gestures, and performance styles change, so do the social values and cultural experiences they express.

The book's greatest strength is its combination of careful scholarship and personal reflection. Soileau describes becoming what she calls an "accidental folklorist" while teaching in New Orleans during the early years of school integration. What began as playground observations grew into decades of collecting children's lore throughout Louisiana. Those experiences do more than tell the story of her career. They show how long-term fieldwork develops through trust, curiosity, and careful listening. For students learning ethnographic methods, those chapters are just as valuable as the historical analysis that follows.

The book also demonstrates the value of studying a single tradition in depth. By comparing versions collected from the 19th century through the present, Soileau reveals how children revise performances to reflect changing ideas about family, gender, race, humor, and everyday life. Her comparisons between African American and white performances are especially compelling. She avoids reducing those traditions to simple differences. Instead, she highlights distinct performance styles while showing how both communities continually recreate the game in response to their own experiences.

The narrow focus will not appeal to every reader. If you want a broad introduction to children's folklore, this is not that book. The detailed comparison of dozens of variants occasionally slows the pace. At the same time, that close attention is exactly what makes the study convincing. By staying with one tradition, Soileau demonstrates how much cultural history can emerge from a single playground game.

For educators, *A Singing Game* offers an excellent model for teaching folklore as lived experience rather than as a collection of texts. The book fits especially well in undergraduate and graduate courses on folklore, ethnography, childhood studies, oral tradition, and qualitative research. Individual chapters would also work well in methods courses because they illustrate participant observation, documentation, and performance analysis in accessible ways. Although the book is not written for K–12 classrooms, it reminds teachers that children's play deserves serious attention. What children sing, perform, and pass to one another is more than entertainment. It is cultural knowledge in motion.