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Panel Chair Melek Ortabasi
Panel Discussant Sharon Domier (UMass Amherst)
East Asian Studies Librarian
University of Massachusetts Amherst
address: W.E.B. Du Bois Library
University of Massachusetts
Amherst, MA 01003-9275
phone: 413-577-2633

Panel Proposal **Text, Nation and the Battle for Childhood in 20th Century Japan**
Keywords Japan, children's literature, textbooks, school education, childhood, nation

AV yes

“Teaching Children to Do Things With Words: Yanagita Kunio and the Postwar Education Debate”

After WWII ended, Yanagita Kunio, the founder of “native ethnology” (*minzokugaku*) was already over 70. Nevertheless, he accepted proposals from two different publishers to become chief editor for two new school textbook series. The results, *Atarashii kokugo* (New Japanese Language) and *Nihon no shakai* (Japanese Society), were first published in the early 1950s. In direct consultation (and sometimes argument) with the representatives of the reorganized Ministry of Education, Yanagita as editor struggled to conform to the new U.S. Occupation-approved requirements even as he tried to help reshape the contents of the curriculum according to his own ideas about education.

This little-known fact about Yanagita's later career is actually a logical conclusion to many years of writing on childhood, youth, and education – in which the role of everyday language in shaping children's identity plays a central role. A vocal critic of the public school education system established during Meiji, with its emphasis on difficult written texts directed at *yūtōsei* (superior students), it is not surprising that Yanagita saw the postwar pedagogical panic as a unique chance to reenvision both language teaching curriculum content and social studies teaching methodology along more practical lines. Using the textbook series he edited, as well as some of his educational writings, this paper will show how Yanagita's prewar critique of modern schooling, which he claimed robbed children of the ability to speak their own minds, is closely connected to his postwar insistence on educating children to become “good citizens/voters” (*ii senkyomin*) with well-developed critical thinking skills.