

English 350  
S. Slote  
Fall, 2011

Office Hrs: TTh 9:00-10:30; MWF 2:30-3:30  
and by appointment  
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## Topics in Children's Literature

From Maurice Sendak:

*"Once a little boy sent me a charming card with a little drawing on it. I loved it. I answer all my children's letters — sometimes very hastily — but this one I lingered over. I sent him a card and I drew a picture... of a Wild Thing on it. I wrote, "Dear Jim: I loved your card." Then I got a letter back from his mother and she said, "Jim loved your card so much he ate it." That to me was one of the highest compliments I've ever received. He didn't care that it was an original Maurice Sendak drawing or anything. He saw it, he loved it, he ate it."*

Among many things, Maurice Sendak's anecdote is a wonderful reminder that children engage literature in ways that adults do not. And yet, adults produce the texts that can be so formative, evocative—or delicious—for their child readers. Therein lies a central question that has engaged writers and readers of children's books from the genre's "official" start in the seventeenth century to the present day: what *should* children's literature be and do for its young audience? What responsibilities do the adults who produce it have to entertain and instruct? These questions, as well as a study of how others have answered them, will be vital to our work in the course. Our goals for the semester include:

- familiarizing ourselves with the history of children's literature as a genre—exploring, for example, its connection to literacy and the rise of middle-class culture;
- considering the complex relation between adult producers of children's literature texts and the children who are the audience for those texts;
- exploring a variety of ways that Western culture, at different historical moments, has defined what is "valuable knowledge" for children, and how children's literature participates in that definition;
- examining representations of minority cultures in children's books and considering the ideological values embedded in those representations;
- examining some ways the definition of childhood itself has changed, according to specific historical and cultural forces;
- engaging some of the current critical debates in children's literature; for example, the debate over how much "real" history children should encounter in the books they read, or the debate over how much control corporate media giants have over what children read. (What about *Harry Potter* or recent dystopian fiction in this context?)

### Course Requirements:

1 Short Essay (about 4-5 pages in length)	15%
Literary Criticism Review	15%
Independent Research Essay	25%
In-Class Packet Exam	15%
Take-home Final Exam	20%
Class Participation & Service Project or Report	10%

### Required Texts:

The Grimms, *Selected Tales*. (Penguin Classics)  
Roald Dahl, *George's Marvelous Medicine*. (Penguin/Puffin)  
Frances Hodgson Burnett, *A Little Princess*. (Harper Trophy)

Required Texts, continued

Louis Sachar, *Holes* (Yearling)  
 Karen Cushman, *The Midwife's Apprentice* (Harper Trophy)  
 Avi, *Crispin: The Cross of Lead* (Hyperion)  
 C. S. Lewis, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (Harper Trophy)  
 Laura Ingalls Wilder, *Little House on the Prairie* (Harper Collins)  
 Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (Dover)  
 J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Hobbit* (Houghton Mifflin)  
 J. K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* (Scholastic)  
 Juilius Lester, *Day of Tears* (Jump at the Sun)  
 Paula Fox, *The Slave Dancer* (Laurel Leaf)  
 Lois Lowry, *Number the Stars* (Laurel Leaf)  
 Suzanne Collins, *The Hunger Games* (Scholastic)  
 Course Packet (available at the bookstore)

On Reserve (these books are marked "R" in course schedule):

Maurice Sendak, *Where the Wild Things Are* and *In the Night Kitchen*  
 Dr. Seuss, *The Cat in the Hat*  
 Ezra Jack Keats, *The Snowy Day*  
 Mary Hoffman, *Amazing Grace*  
 Pat Mora, *Tomas and the Library Lady*  
 Gary Soto, *If the Shoe Fits*  
 Leslea Newman, *Heather Has Two Mommies*  
 Michael Wilhoite, *Daddy's Roommate*  
 Justin Richardson, *And Tango Makes Three*  
 Virginia Lee Burton, *The Little House* and *Mike Mulligan and the Steam-Shovel*  
 Eve Bunting, *Terrible Things*  
 Patricia Polacco, *The Butterfly*  
 Karen Hesse, *Cats in Krasinski Square*  
 David Adler, *The Number on My Grandfather's Arm*

Course Policies:

**Attendance and Participation:** Your presence, preparation and active participation in class discussion are crucial to your success in the course. Repeated absences will negatively affect your final grade. At the end of the syllabus, you will find a copy of the guidelines I follow in evaluating class participation.

**Service Component or Oral Report:** You will choose between doing an in-class oral report or service work outside of class. The oral reports will be tied to the material we are studying, and may include a report on an author's biography, on other works by the same author, or on other issues connected to the course. Service work will entail serving as a visiting reader on two occasions to a group of children. (I am in the process of making arrangements for this project and will provide more details soon.)

**Late Essays:** Essays that are turned in late without prior excuse will be penalized one grade for each day late (a "B" paper turned in a day late becomes a B-, etc.). **Please note that all written work must be completed in order to qualify to pass the course.**

**Plagiarism:** Obviously a bad idea. All your work must be your own, and outside sources must be properly cited according to MLA guidelines. If you have any questions about the proper use and acknowledgement of sources, please ask. I, like you, am bound by the Honor Code and will refer any plagiarism to the Honor Committee.

**Please note:** Students with disabilities who believe they may need accommodations in this class are encouraged to contact Disability Services at (814) 332-2898. Disability Services is part of the Learning Commons and is located in Pelletier Library. Please do this as soon as possible to ensure that such accommodations are implemented in a timely fashion.

## Schedule

Readings from the packet are marked (P); readings on reserve are marked (R)

9/2 F Introduction

9/5 M No Class

### *The Cultural Origins of Children's Literature*

9/7 W Read "Introduction" to *French Fairy Tales* (Zipes), "Cinderella," "Little Red Riding Hood" (handout)

9/9 F "Beauty and the Beast," "Bluebeard," "Riquet with the Tuft" (h)

9/12 M "Master Cat" (h); Bettelheim essay (P)\*

9/14 W From Grimms' collection: "Ashieppatte" (225); "Snowwhite" (74); "Little Redcap" (63)

9/16 F "Hansel and Gretel" (56); "The Water of Life" (150)

9/19 M Zipes, "Who's Afraid of the Brothers Grimm?" (P)\*; finish fairy tale discussion

### *Visions and Revisions of Fairy Tales*

9/21 W Disney Films

9/23 F Finish Disney discussion; Reading Instruction Day; essay 1 due

9/26 M Dahl, *George's Marvelous Medicine*

9/28 W Burnett, *A Little Princess*

9/30 F Burnett, *A Little Princess*, Kline, "The Making of Children's Culture" (P)\*

10/3 M Louis Sachar, *Holes*

### *The Cultural Work of the Picture Book*

10/5 W Reader Response Criticism (H); Zipes, "Why Children's Literature Does Not Exist" (P)\*; **illustrations assignment due**

10/7 F Seuss, *The Cat in the Hat* (R), Menand, "Cat People" (P)\*

10/10 M Sendak, *Where the Wild Things Are*; *In the Night Kitchen* (R); Johnston & Frazee, "Why We're Still in Love with Picture Books (Even Though They're Supposed to be Dead)"

10/12 W Checklist from Higgins, "Multicultural Children's Literature" (P); Mikkelsen, "Insiders, Outsiders, and the Question of Authenticity" (P)\*;

Keats, *The Snowy Day*; Hoffman, *Amazing Grace* (R)

10/14 F Soto, *If the Shoe Fits*; Mora, *Tomas and the Library Lady*; Newman, *Heather Has Two Mommies*; Richardson, *And Tango Makes Three*; Wilhoite, *Daddy's Roommate*

10/17 M FALL BREAK

*Constructions of History in Children's Literature*

10/19 W Finish Picture Books; Begin Wilder, *Little House on the Prairie*

10/21 F Wilder, *LHP*

10/24 M Murray, "Idealized Realism" (P); Burton, *The Little House*; Mike Mulligan and the Steam Shovel (R)

10/26 W Cushman, *The Midwife's Apprentice*; Zornado, "A Poetics of History..."(P)\*

10/28 F Avi, *Crispin*

10/31 M Avi, *Crispin*

11/2 W Fox, *Slave Dancer*

11/4 F Fox, *Slave Dancer*

11/7 M Lester, *Day of Tears*

11/9 W Baer, "A New Algorithm in Evil" (P)\*; Bunting, *Terrible Things*; Hesse, *Cats in Krasinski Square*, Adler, *Remember Not to Forget*; Polacco, *The Butterfly* (R)

11/11 F Lowry, *Number the Stars*

*Journeys to Other Worlds*

11/14 M Carroll, *Alice*

11/16 W Carroll, *Alice*

11/18 F Tolkein, *The Hobbit*

11/21 M Tolkein, *The Hobbit*

11/23-25 THANKSGIVING BREAK

11/28 M **Research essays due; research "presentations"**

11/30 W Lewis, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*

12/2 F Lewis, *LWW*

12/5 M Veldman, from *Fantasy, the Bomb and the Greening of Britain* (P); LeGuin, "The Child and the Shadow" (P)

12/7 W Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*

12/9 F Rowling, *HP*

12/12 M Collins, *Hunger Games*

12/14 W Collins, *Hunger Games*; take home exam distributed

**Final Exam due Monday, December 13<sup>th</sup>, 5 p.m.**

**Criteria for grading class participation:**

While it is difficult to quantify the success of a student's contributions to class discussion (at our best we all contribute differently), here are the general standards I will use to grade participation:

**A range:** Participation at this level is marked by its active nature, its consistency, and its quality. When **A** participants read an assignment, they prepare to participate in a class discussion; they read the assignments fully, carefully and critically enough to be ready not just to respond to my questions but also to initiate discussion with comments and questions of their own. Such participants will also come to class ready to make and argue assertions about the reading and to think out loud about a text's relation to its contexts; they will attend to the comments of others in class, agree, elaborate or civilly disagree with them, bring our attention to passages from the reading to make their point and at times connect such thinking with earlier readings or previous class discussion. In short, students who by their engagement in class discussion throughout the semester show themselves to be true students of the course material—persistently conscientious and inquiring—will get an **A** for their efforts. They will also make the course a lot better. (By the way, substituting quantity of participation for quality will not work.)

**B range:** Students who come to every class, have almost always done all the reading, and consistently respond to the questions of others in a way that demonstrates their command of the reading will earn a **B** participation grade. What separates this effort from an **A** one is not so much quantity (teachers are remarkably good at detecting bs) as the level of preparation—one's reading and thinking—that has gone on before one gets to class, especially the kind that enables students to *initiate* discussion. But you can't get a **B** participation grade by just showing up, either, or by talking every once in a while.

**C range:** A **C** participant comes to almost all the classes (no more than four unexcused absences), usually has done most of the reading most of the time, but not with the energy necessary to demonstrate through participation their ongoing engagement with the material. Such a discussant contributes infrequently, maybe one time every other class.

**D range:** Automatic pilot mode. You were physically there most of the time, spoke a few times maybe, but that was it.

**F:** Not coming to class is the traditional route.

