

Dr. Kenneth Kidd
LIT 4333
MWF Period 8
Fall 1999

Office: TUR 4214
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Hours: MWF Period 7
& by appointment

Literature for the Adolescent

Texts

Francesca Lia Block, *Weetzie Bat* (1989)
Judy Blume, *Are You There, God? It's Me, Margaret* (1970)
Robert Cormier, *I am the Cheese* (1977)
Frank Chin, *Donald Duk* (1991)
Chris Crutcher, *Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes* (1993)
Christopher Paul Curtis, *The Watsons Go to Birmingham -- 1963* (1995)
Anne Frank, *Diary of a Young Girl* (1947)
S. E. Hinton, *The Outsiders* (1967)
Victor Martinez, *Parrot in the Oven: Ma Vida* (1996)
Robin McKinley, *The Hero and the Crown* (1984)
Francine Pascal, *Sweet Valley High #131, Fashion Victim* (1997)
Katherine Paterson, *Jacob Have I Loved* (1980)
J. D. Salinger, *Catcher in the Rye* (1951)
Sarah Shandler, *Ophelia Speaks* (1999)
Sue Townsend, *The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole, Age 13 3/4* (1982)

Overview

The term "adolescence" descends from Latin, and the earliest entries in the *Oxford English Dictionary* date from the fourteenth century. Shakespeare describes the "seven ages" of mankind; picaresque heroes and heroines like Gil Blas and Moll Flanders struggle to survive the vicissitudes of youth and poverty. As the nineteenth century unfolded, however, new genres dramatized the transition from childhood into adolescence, and glorified adolescence as a distinct and crucial period of development. By the end of the century, many "adult" novelists were devoting their attention to (if not quite writing for) adolescents; representative titles include Dostoevski's *The Adolescent* (1874) and Henry James' *What Maisie Knew* (1897). Such texts emerged alongside clinical-pedagogical literature about adolescence -- e.g. Granville Stanley Hall's two volume *Adolescence: Its Psychology and Its Relations to Physiology, Anthropology, Sociology, Sex, Crime, Religion, and Education* (1904). Literature by adolescents also began to appear by the century's end; the first adolescent diary written for publication was apparently Marie Bashkirtseff's *Journal* (1887).

That history, however, is not our focus, though it will inform our discussions. Adolescent fiction has come of age only recently, and we'll begin with some of the more canonical or foundational texts of mid-century (Anne Frank, Salinger). We'll concentrate on young adult literature from the 1960s to the 1990s. The modern teen is of course intimately connected to material culture; being a teenager means watching tv, driving cars, and buying lots of cool stuff. It also means being a social "problem," and many of our selections are problem novels in the "new realism" mode.

Although I will sometimes provide you with background information, for which you are responsible, we will conduct class as a seminar, which means that participation is vital. Please come to class every day on time having read the assigned material. Be ready to share your responses. On occasion I may ask you to work in small groups. If you take more than three unexcused cuts from class, your final grade will be reduced one-third of a letter grade for each excess cut. Habitual tardies will be considered absences. I will take attendance in a variety of

ways, sometimes at the end rather than the beginning of class. By Monday, please have read at least half of the assigned book, and please finish it by Wednesday. Quizzes are possible.

Assignments and Grading

Your course grade will be based on the following assignments. There are no exams; nearly all of your grade comes from your writing. This means that while you won't have to remember all of the texts in detail, you will be writing about most of them. Because we have a lot to do in class, I don't plan to devote class time to writing issues, but I'm very available during office hours for help. I'm always happy to read drafts.

I reserve the right to give unannounced quizzes if I feel that students are too far behind in the reading or if discussion lags; should we have quizzes, they will be averaged with the memos.

Memos (10)	30%
Essay 1	20%
Essay 2	30%
Group Presentation & active participation	20%

Memos. Over the semester, you will write 10 reading responses of 1-2 s-s., typed pages each. Out of some thwarted business urge I call such a response a "memo." The memo is simply a short meditation on the reading. Your memo should offer a response to the book as a whole; don't turn in a memo if you haven't finished the assignment. You may address a number of issues or focus more in-depth on one or two; just be as specific as you can, and support your responses with examples and details from the text. I do not expect you to have a thorough interpretation, but your memo should offer some kind of evaluation or analysis of the book as a whole. In other words, it should be more than simply random thoughts about the work. If you like, you may make use of outside readings (biographical sketches, scholarly articles, websites, etc.). This assignment is designed to stimulate class discussion, and to help you remember the texts and generate paper ideas.

You may write these at any point in the semester, but you may not do more than one memo per week. You may turn one in on Wednesday or Friday, but not on Monday. Bring them to class; I may ask you to use them. Hold on to them until the end of class, and then turn them in. They do not need to be perfect, but please correct spelling and typing errors. I will grade each memo and average the grades.

Essay 1. Write a 5 d-s pp. analysis of any young adult novel, either one we've read or an additional text. You may use any approach you like, provided that you support your interpretations. Don't repeat what we've said in class.

Essay 2. Write a 7 d-s pp. analysis of a young adult genre or special topic or particular author, using at least two outside readings. If you like, you may instead use a particular critical methodology (Marxism, feminism, psychoanalysis) to illuminate and connect two texts. Whatever you choose to do, develop a specific argument and support your claims. You must meet with me to discuss this paper by the end of March.

or

In lieu of the critical essay, you may plan and begin work on a young adult writing project of some kind, probably a novel but perhaps a work of poetry or nonfiction, even a play. If you would like to work on such a project, you must come talk to me about your ideas during office hours by the end of October, even though of course the piece will continue to evolve as you work on it. I will evaluate your project according to both its quality and the energy you put into it, with the

understanding that a good faith effort with relatively few writing errors can earn you an "A." In other words, I do not expect literary genius -- though that would be nice for everyone, you especially -- but I do expect you to put in some real time and effort. Your mission, should you choose to accept it, is to produce at least the following:

1. A chapter-by-chapter outline, or possibly a detailed section outline;
2. A complete first chapter;
3. Another fairly complete section, preferably a later one, which might include important scenes and dialogue; and
4. A short explanation of how you got your ideas and how they changed (if they changed) in the process of brainstorming, writing, and revising.

If you model your work on other writings, you might want to photocopy relevant sections and attach them as well. Probably it would be best to assemble a portfolio or folder so that these individual items don't get separated.

As always, I'd be happy to help in any way, so don't hesitate to come see me. This could be quite fun, but don't underestimate the time it will take. If you're looking for some inspiration, there are a number of creativity manuals out there; a particularly useful (if also somewhat flaky) one is Julia Cameron's *The Artist's Way*.

I give A's to essays using an original and spirited argument to illuminate complexities of language and theme. I give B+'s to well-organized, well-developed, relatively error-free essays with sparks of originality or daring, and B's to competent essays needing more complex development and/or clearer focus. Lower grades mean greater problems with development, structure, and grammar. Recurrent grammatical errors lower the grade; occasional spelling errors and typos don't. The best essays sustain complex and or audacious arguments; a good B essay capably summarizes and compares themes.

Group Presentation. Working in groups of 4-5, you will teach the class for one class period on Wednesday. Presentations may be formal or informal, and you may use whatever formats you think are appropriate -- you could act out key scenes, put together a talk show, develop a skit, and so on. Props and handouts are encouraged. Your group will need to do research on the author and text, and use that information and your own sense of the book's themes to guide your presentation. You must devote at least half of the class period to class discussion, and find a way to get everyone involved. I hope the presentations will be fun, but I will evaluate them on how effectively they address/dramatize the novel and facilitate discussion.

Active participation means attending regularly, asking questions, offering insights, sharing memos -- in short, being actively involved. I respect individual styles, and I do not expect you to talk all of the time, but plan to attend and contribute to discussion.

Reading Schedule

Week 1 (8/23-27)	Introductions. Frank, <i>Diary of a Young Girl</i>
Week 2 (8/30-9/3)	Frank, <i>Diary of a Young Girl</i> ; begin Salinger, <i>Catcher in the Rye</i>
Week 3 (9/8-9/10)	No class on 9/6 (Labor Day). Salinger, <i>Catcher in the Rye</i> (Group 1)

Week 4 (9/13-9/17)	Hinton, <i>The Outsiders</i> (Group 2)
Week 5 (9/20-9/22)	No class on 9/24. Blume, <i>Are You There, God?</i> (Group 3)
Week 6 (9/27-10/1)	Cormier, <i>I am the Cheese</i> (Group 4)
Week 7 (10/4-10/8)	Paterson, <i>Jacob Have I Loved</i> (Group 5)
Week 8 (10/11-10/15)	McKinley, <i>The Hero and the Crown</i> (Group 6) Essay 1 due 10/15.
Week 9 (10/18-10/22)	Chin, <i>Donald Duk</i> (Group 7)
Week 10 (10/25-10/27)	No class on 10/29. Townsend, <i>The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole</i>
Week 11 (11/1-11/3)	No class on 11/5 (Homecoming). Curtis, <i>The Watsons Go to Birmingham.</i>
Week 12 (11/8-11/12)	Crutcher, <i>Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes</i> (Group 8)
Week 13 (11/15-11/19)	Martinez, <i>Parrot in the Oven</i> (Group 9)
Week 14 (11/22)	Block, <i>Weetzie Bat</i> . No class 11/24 and 11/26 (Thanksgiving)
Week 15 (11/29-12/3)	Pascal, <i>Fashion Victim</i> and Shandler, <i>Ophelia Speaks</i> (Group 10)
Week 16 (12/6-12/8)	Shandler continued; wrap-up and reports Essay 2 due 12/8.