

Dr. Kenneth Kidd
LIT 4333
MWF 8
Fall 2002

Office: TUR 4214
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Hours: MWF 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)
Frank Chin, *Donald Duk* (1991)
Robert Cormier, *I Am the Cheese* (1977)
Daniel Clowes, *Ghost World* (1988)
Virginia Hamilton, *Sweet Whispers, Brother Rush* (1982)
S. E. Hinton, *The Outsiders* (1967)
Robin McKinley, *The Hero and the Crown* (1985)
J. D. Salinger, *Catcher in the Rye* (1951)
Sarah Shandler, *Ophelia Speaks* (1999)
Cynthia Voigt, *Dicey's Song* (1982)
Ellen Wittlinger, *Hard Love* (1999)

There is also a small coursepacket from Xerographic, available (like these texts) at the campus location of Goering's.

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). See the attached history for a more detailed sketch.

That larger 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 year 2000. The modern teen is of course intimately connected to material culture; for better and for worse, being a teenager means learning how to produce and consume -- getting a job, watching tv, driving cars, and buying cheesy and cool stuff. It also means being a social "problem," and many of our selections are problem novels in the "new realism" mode. We'll try to account for both the continuity and transformations of the adolescent experience in the second half of the twentieth century; even though we know that the meanings of adolescence are variable, can we -- should we -- try to describe adolescence anyway? How useful are our particular definitions, esp. in terms of the socialization project and our commitment to developmental psychology?

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.

Please have each novel finished by Monday of each week, unless otherwise directed. On Monday we'll discuss the reading, identifying key issues, themes, and questions. Wednesdays will often be devoted to group presentations and the discussion that they generate. On Friday we have a supplemental reading, and/or I'll outline a critical interpretation of the novel and ask for your participation and feedback.

Assignments and Grading

Your course grade will be based on the following assignments. There are no exams; nearly your entire 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	25%
Essay 2/Project	30%
Group Presentation & active participation	15%

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. Sometimes I may ask you in advance to write about a particular issue, but usually I won't; if I don't, then you should develop your own response.

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 or unconnected 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, and I will accept them only on Wednesdays and in class -- do not email them to me, or leave them in my mailbox. I will return them on Friday or the following Monday at the latest. They do not need to be perfect, but please try to correct spelling and typing errors. I will grade each memo and average the grades.

Essay 1. Write a short analysis of any work of young adult literature that we are not reading in class. You may develop the essay any way you like, as long as you have an argument and draw from supporting evidence. Part of the challenge is to identify a worthwhile subject and approach; I do not want biographical criticism, although you may use some biographical data in your essay. 5 d-s pp.

Essay 2. Write a longer analysis of a young adult genre or special topic or particular author, using at least two outside primary readings and at least two outside secondary sources. If you like, you may instead use a particular critical methodology to illuminate and connect two texts. Whatever you choose to do, develop a specific argument and support your claims. Some biographical information may be appropriate, but this paper should not be a biographical essay. You must meet with me to discuss this paper. 8-10 d-s pp.

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 February, 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*.

Grading Scheme. 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. Try to find a way to involve the class.

This is very important: you need to think this through. The presentations can be terrific but they can also be lackluster. I don't want sloppy presentations in which people randomly present thoughts and information from the web -- work together, figure out what to emphasize, and pose critical questions to the class. I hope the presentations will be fun, but I will evaluate them on how effectively they address/dramatize the novel and facilitate discussion. You need to have something substantial to offer – a few assorted and unrelated pieces on author background and so forth won't suffice. You will receive a grade and a written assessment.

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 to contribute to discussion.

Reading Schedule

August

- 26 (M) Introductions.
 28 (W) Neubauer; Kristeva (CP).
 30 (F) Hine, Ch. 1; Seelinger Trites, Ch. 1 (CP).

September

- 2 (M) Labor Day.
 4 (W) Mental hygiene films. Hine, Ch.2 (CP).
 6 (F) Hannigan (CP). Begin *Catcher in the Rye*.

 9 (M) *Catcher*.
 11 (W) *Catcher*.
 13 (F) *Catcher*.

 16 (M) *The Outsiders*.
 18 (W) *The Outsiders*. Group 1.
 20 (F) *The Outsiders*.

 23 (M) Martin (CP). *Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret*.
 25 (W) *Are You There God?* Seelinger Trites, Ch. 4 (CP). Group 2.
 27 (F) No class.

 30 (M) *I Am the Cheese*.

October

- 2 (W) More *Cheese*. Group 3.
 4 (F) Still more *Cheese*.

 7 (M) *The Hero and the Crown*.
 9 (W) *The Hero and the Crown*. Group 4.
 11 (F) *The Hero and the Crown*.

 14 (M) Crew (CP). *Dicey's Song*.
 16 (W) *Dicey's Song*. Group 5.
 18 (F) *Dicey's Song*. **Essay 1 due**.

 21 (M) *Sweet Whispers, Brother Rush*.
 23 (W) *Sweet Whispers, Brother Rush*. Group 6.
 25 (F) No class.

- 28 (M) *Sweet Whispers*, cont. *Donald Duk*.
 30 (W) *Donald Duk*. Group 7.

November

- 1 (F) *Donald Duk*.

 4 (M) *Ghost World*.
 6 (W) *Ghost World*. Group 8.
 8 (F) Homecoming.

 11 (M) Veteran's Day.
 13 (W) *Weetzie Bat*.
 15 (F) *Weetzie Bat*. Sedgwick (CP).

 18 (M) *Hard Love*.
 20 (W) *Hard Love*. Group 9.
 22 (F) *Hard Love*. Duncombe (CP).

 25 (M) Lecture on teen film.
 27 (W) No class.
 29 (F) Thanksgiving holiday.

December

- 2 (M) *Ophelia Speaks*.
 4 (W) *Ophelia Speaks*. Group 10.
 6 (F) *Ophelia Speaks*. Discussion of girl websites.

 9 (M) Bracher.
 11 (W) Wrap-up. **Essay 2/projects due**.