

Dr. Kenneth Kidd  
LIT 4930, Section 106G  
MWF 6  
Spring 2018

kbkidd@ufl.edu  
Office: TUR 4008  
Hours: MWF 9  
& by appointment

## *The Children's Classic*

This syllabus also posted here: [kbkidd.org](http://kbkidd.org) and on our Canvas site.

### **Texts**

Pierre Bayard, *How to Talk About Books You Haven't Read*

\*Carlo Collodi, *Adventures of Pinocchio* (1883)

Christopher Paul Curtis, *The Watsons Go to Birmingham – 1963* (1995)

Louise Fitzhugh, *Harriet the Spy* (1964)

Norton Juster, *The Phantom Tollbooth* (1961)

Laura Miller, *The Magician's Book*

Philip Nel, *Was the Cat in the Hat Black?*

J. K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* (1997)

\*\*Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver's Travels* (1726)

\*Free here: <http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/500>

\*\*Free here: <http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/829>

Books specified on the UF Textbook Adoption site. You may buy them anywhere, and any format is fine, too.

There are also readings on e-reserves, under LIT4930/Kidd. Go to <https://ares.uflib.ufl.edu/> and follow the prompts. Please bring to class or otherwise have accessible these readings when we're discussing them or be able to recall in detail. All readings on the schedule below will be from e-reserves, except for the books above, or the two essays here, which are available free on the web:

- T. S. Eliot, "What Is a Classic?": <http://bracchiumforte.com/PDFs/tseliot.pdf>
- Sainte-Beuve, "What is a Classic?": <http://classiclitter.about.com/library/bl-texts/csaintebeuve/bl-csaintebeuve-classic.htm>

We will use Canvas for major essay/project submission and return: <http://elearning.ufl.edu/>

### **Overview**

*Classic* is an overdetermined and elastic term. It tends toward seemingly contradictory things: timelessness and finitude, exceptionality and the commonplace, the remote and the familiar, the organic and the manufactured. Moreover, *classic* tends toward children's literature as much as away from it. The notion of a children's classic amplifies the contradictions of *classic* more broadly, especially to the degree that children's literature has been devalued. The idea of the children's classic has helped legitimize children's literature and has thus proven useful; at the same time, *classic* continues to signify a traditional faith in aesthetics, and as such engenders skepticism alongside faith. No matter: J. M. Coetzee writes that "the interrogation of the classic,

no matter how hostile, is part of the history of the classic, inevitable and even to be welcomed."

This course attends to the making (even forging) of the children's classic. We will begin with classic definitions of the classic: Sainte-Beuve, Matthew Arnold, T. S. Eliot, Frank Kermode. We will take up the classic in relation to popular and academic culture, reading on such subjects as book and publishing history, canonicity and "great books", bestsellerdom, middlebrow culture, the public sphere, literary prizing, and anticensorship work. We'll consider the classic as an object of fantasy and/or valuation: the good object, the bad object, the object that endures.

### **Attendance Policy**

Your participation is vital, and attendance is mandatory. You are allowed to miss three class session without explanation. For each subsequent missed class without a doctor's note I reserve the right to reduce your final course grade one-half of a letter grade. If you are not here when I take attendance -- usually at the beginning of class, but sometimes at the end -- you will be counted absent. If you are late, you will be marked absent. If you have attendance challenges, or are often late, please do not sign up for this class.

### **Academic Honesty**

All students are required to abide by the Academic Honesty Guidelines which have been accepted by the University. The academic community of students and faculty at the University of Florida strives to develop, sustain and protect an environment of honesty, trust and respect. Students are expected to pursue knowledge with integrity. Exhibiting honesty in academic pursuits and reporting violations of the Academic Honesty Guidelines will encourage others to act with integrity. Violations of the Academic Honesty Guidelines shall result in judicial action and a student being subject to the sanctions in paragraph XIV of the Student Conduct Code. The conduct set forth hereinafter constitutes a violation of the Academic Honesty Guidelines (University of Florida Rule 6C1\_4.017). For more information about academic honesty, including definitions of plagiarism and collusion, see:

<http://www.dso.ufl.edu/judicial/academic.php>.

### **Students with Disabilities**

The Disability Resource Center in the Dean of Students Office provides students and faculty with information and support regarding accommodations for students with disabilities in the classroom. Staff at the Disability Resource Center will assist any student who registers as having a disability. Official documentation of a disability is required to determine eligibility for appropriate classroom accommodations. For more information about Student Disability Services, see: <http://www.ufl.edu/disability/>

### **Electronic Media**

You may bring a laptop, ebook reader, or tablet to class for the purpose of note-taking and reviewing assigned articles. Please do not surf the web, check email, check Facebook, etc. If I discover such activity happening you will be forced back into the dark ages of traditional print. Please put your phones on silent. NO TEXTING during class. I know it's hard. Refraining from such will build character.

### **Assignments and Grading**

Memos and possible quizzes	20%
Essays 1, 2, 3	25%; 25%; 30%

No late work accepted.

Memos. You will write 4 reading responses of 1-2 ss-typed pages each, to be turned in during class (not sent electronically) on Monday meetings of your choice. The memo is simply a short meditation on the assigned reading for that week. Your memo should offer a response to that material. You may concentrate on one or two of the readings, or you can synthesize them. 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. This assignment is designed to stimulate class discussion, help you remember the texts, and generate ideas. Each memo will be letter graded.

Quizzes. There may be unannounced quizzes which you may not make up unless you can provide documentation of illness or emergency. These quizzes will usually consist of 3-4 short questions about the reading that you can answer in several sentences or less.

Analytical Essays. In each of the below options, your essay should run at least 5 d-s pp., with 12-point font, and you should use scholarly (peer-reviewed) sources as specified below. You may choose each of these options **once**.

They are due by the specified due dates below (Essay 1, 2, 3) but you can turn drafts in earlier, and if you do so I will respond and make suggestions for revision. I will grade it when either the deadline approaches, or when you tell me it's finished.

I give slightly more weight to each essay when calculating your course grade, on the theory that you will be improving your writing.

Please submit to Canvas in the form of a Word Document.

Option 1. Reread a children's or young adult classic that you read first when younger, and reflect on the experience and what you learn/wonder from it, drawing explicitly upon Spacks' chapter "Always a Stranger?" in e-reserves. A more speculative approach is fine, but you should draw on the terms and categories of Spacks' chapter. Your only required source for this option is Spacks, but you might also consider drawing on Weikle-Mills or Stimpson.

Option 2. Read a book that you haven't read but feel like you know anyway, as described in Bayard's *How to Talk About Books You Haven't Read*. Write about your experience reading that book, drawing on terms and categories from Bayard's account.

Option 3. Pick any alleged children's classic that we are not reading together and speculate about how it got be understood as such. Research the author, the genre, the book's reception and institutional history. Look at reviews, critical articles, and other materials; draw on whatever theoretical work is useful. What are the cultural terms of this book's classicdom – who understands it that way, under what conditions, for how long, and with what consequences? Use at least 2 scholarly sources.

Option 4. Pick any current or historical children's book that is not (yet) considered a classic, and speculate about why it hasn't (yet) enjoyed such status, performing the same kind of analysis you would undertake above. You could choose from something that's still in print or

otherwise available, through libraries or perhaps the Baldwin Library of Historical Children's Literature: <http://cms.uflib.ufl.edu/baldwin/Index.aspx> Use at least 2 scholarly sources.

Option 5. Write an analysis of the adaptation or translation of a children's literary classic into another medium (tv, film, videogame, etc.). This should not be a simple comparison – the book does X, the film does Y; even if you think the newer form is lacking, focus on what's gained and lost with respect to the text's classicity – that is, focus on the processes and consequences of classic "transfer" or the attempt at such. You might want to draw on adaptation studies such as McFarlane, *Novel to Film*, and Aragay, *Books in Motion*. Use at least 2 scholarly sources. You may discuss adaptations of one our case study titles if you like.

Option 6. Select any prize-winning title, and analyze the title in relation to the prize that it won. What qualities do or don't seem to meet the prize's criteria? Draw on the terms and categories of English's *The Economy of Prestige*. You may also draw from other scholarly sources as needed.

Option 7. There are many guides for adults on the subject of "best books for children." Pick one such guide, and do an analysis of the guide's literary/cultural investments or ideologies. What constitutes the best, how is such identified/negotiated/presented, and what are the possible consequences? Use at least two scholarly sources.

Option 8. In consultation with me, develop your individual research project on the children's classic. I must approve the topic and we should discuss the research plan.

Grade Scale. I give A's to essays using an original and spirited argument to illuminate complexities of language and theme. *You need an argument.* 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.

I give all assignments letter grades, but will calculate grades numerically, then translate back into UF equivalencies. To determine your grade, I use the following table:

A+ 100	C 75
A 95	C- 70
A- 90	D+ 67
B+ 87	D 65
B 85	D- 60
B- 80	E 0
C+ 77	

Final letter grades now have certain point equivalences at UF. See <http://www.registrar.ufl.edu/catalog/policies/regulationgrades.html>

## Schedule

### January

- 8 Introductions.  
 10 **Classic Definitions.** Sainte-Beuve; Eliot; Calvino.  
 12 continued. Coetzee; Mukherjee.  
 ---  
 15 MLK; no class.  
 17 Coetzee and Mukherjee continued if needed. Lecture on Kermode, *The Classic*.  
 19 **Something About the Author.** Woodmansee.  
 ---  
 22 **Books of My Heart.** Weikle-Mills; McDowell; Stimpson.  
 24 continued.  
 26 **Theorizing the Children's Classic.** Kidd, "Classic"; Stevenson, both essays.  
 ---  
 29 Collective Case Study 1: Swift, *Gulliver's Travels*, Parts I & II.  
 31 Swift, *Gulliver's Travels*, Parts III & IV.

### February

- 2 O'Malley. **Tour of the Baldwin Library**, with Curator Suzan Alteri. Meet on the second floor of Library East (Smathers). Essay 1 due.  
 ---  
 5 Collective Case Study 2: Collodi, *Pinocchio*.  
 7 Collodi, *Pinocchio*. Wunderlich and Morrissey.  
 9 Collodi, *Pinocchio*. O'Sullivan.  
 ---  
 12 **Reading, Not Reading, Rereading.** Bayard, *How to Talk About Books You Haven't Read*.  
 14 continued.  
 16 Spacks.  
 ---  
 19 **ChLA and the Scholarly Canon.** Cech; Demers; Natov and DeLuca; Gupta.  
 21 **Canons, Prizes, Bestsellers.** Fitzsimmons. Kidd, "Prizing"; English.  
 23 continued.  
 ---  
 26 **Adapting the Classic.** Maynard et al.; Hatfield.  
 28 **When Classics Go Bad.** Arac; Nel, *Was the Cat...*, Introduction.

### March

- 2 Nel, *Was the Cat...*, Chs. 1 and 2.  
 ---  
 5-9 Spring Break  
 ---

12	<b>The Case of Narnia.</b> Miller, <i>The Magician's Book</i> , Part 1.
14	Miller, Part 2.
16	Miller, Part 3. <u>Essay 2 due.</u>
---	
19	Collective Case Study 3: Juster, <i>Phantom Tollbooth</i> .
21	continued.
23	<i>The Phantom Tollbooth</i> film versions.
---	
26	Collective Case Study 4: Fitzhugh, <i>Harriet the Spy</i> .
28	continued.
30	continued.
---	
<i>April</i>	
2	Collective Case Study 5: Curtis, <i>The Watsons Go to Birmingham- 1963</i> .
4	continued.
6	continued. Nel, Ch. 4.
---	
9	Nel, Ch. 5.
11	Collective Case Study 6: Rowling, <i>Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone</i> .
13	continued.
---	
16	more Potter.
18	probably more Potter.
20	<b>What was a classic?</b> The course in review.
---	
23	no class; extra office hours
25	In-class evals. <u>Essay 3 due.</u>