

Dr. Kenneth Kidd
ENG 4110
T 7, R 7-8 and T E1-3 (screenings)
Spring 2002

Office: TUR 4214
392-6650, ext. 302
Hours: T 6 & 8; R 8
& by appointment

Children's Films

Texts (available at Goerings)

Ian Wojcik-Andrews, *Children's Films: History, Ideology, Pedagogy, Theory*

William H. Armstrong, *Sounder*

Salman Rushdie, *The Wizard of Oz*

And a coursepacket from Xerographic (available at Goerings)

(There are also several essays yet to be put into packet form – more info soon.)

Overview

What makes a children's film? How do films ostensibly for and/or about children – or films claimed by young people -- function cinematically, ideologically, and pedagogically? What distinguishes young viewers from adult viewers? How do children's films negotiate gender, race, class, and sexual orientation, within a given culture and/or transculturally? How might we assess the Disney canon? How studio-specific are certain sorts of film ventures? What trends have we seen so far – and what might we expect in the future?

These are among our concerns in this course, which profiles (rather than surveys) the history and evolution of children's film(s) and explores individual films from a variety of critical perspectives. We will include films that have not typically been marketed solely to/for children, both domestic and foreign, in an attempt to reconsider the nature and nurture of childhood in the global world order. We'll make use of film theory and analysis, as well as psychoanalysis, media studies, and feminist and queer studies. I've chosen some important and representative films for our collective viewing experience, but students will have the opportunity to research and write about additional films.

By and large we will conduct class as a seminar, so participation is vital. Please come to class every day on time having attended the screenings and read the assigned material. Be ready to share your responses. Most of the films we are watching are available from video stores and libraries, but I still want you to attend the screenings. You are allowed to miss two screenings without penalty (this is separate from the regular attendance policy); otherwise I expect you there – TUR 2334. You're getting a course credit for coming, plus there's that sense of community and camaraderie. I have not put any films on reserve, but I may do so if necessary (only a few of these are not widely available).

If you take more than three unexcused absences from regular class, your final grade will be reduced one-third of a letter grade for each absence. Habitual tardies will be considered absences.

Assignments and Grading

Your course grade will be based on the following assignments. There are no exams; your entire grade comes from your writing and class participation. This means that while you won't have to remember all of the films and texts in detail, you will be writing about most of them. Because we have a lot to do, I don't plan to devote class time to writing issues, but I'm certainly available for help. I may give unannounced quizzes if necessary.

Memos (8)	20%
Essay 1	20%
Essay 2	20%
Essay 3	30%
Group Presentation & active participation	10%

Memos. Over the semester, you will write 8 short responses to the films and/or the readings, of around 1-2 ss typed pp. each. Out of some thwarted business urge I call such a response a "memo." You may address a number of issues or focus more in-depth on one or two; just try to be relatively coherent, and support your responses with examples and details. I do not expect a thorough interpretation, but your memo should offer some kind of evaluation or analysis. In other words, it should be more than simply a list of random thoughts. Avoid needless plot summary.

Memos should address the film screened that week as well as any assigned reading. Use that week's reading to examine the film, and vice versa, where possible. If there is no assigned reading, try to contextualize the film using what we've already read. Memos are always due on Thursdays, and always in class – that means no emailed papers. If you plan to miss class, please put your memo in my mailbox before the start of class. Otherwise please bring them to class. Only one per week, please. The memos do not need to be perfect, but please correct spelling and typing errors. I will grade each memo and average the grades. If there are quizzes, they will be averaged in with the memos.

Essay 1. Analyze a film of your choice either with respect to a film genre or school – for instance, Italian neorealism, the epic fantasy film, or the teen horror flick – or to the historical period in which the film was produced (if not necessarily set) – for instance, the Great Depression era, or the civil rights movement, or the economic boom of the 1990s. Your challenge here is to respect your film's specificity while situating it in an appropriate context, one that helps us understand the film. 5-7 d-s pp.

Essay 2. Argue for a working definition or theory of “children’s film,” basing your argument on at least one fairly detailed example. Your approach may be formal – that is, concerned primarily with composition strategies (framing, lighting, camera movement, editing, etc.) – or ideological/thematic/pedagogical, or both (I don’t mean to imply that form isn’t ideological, or that ideology refuses form). 5-7 d-s pp.

Essay 3. Write an 8-10 d-s pp. essay on the children's film topic of your choice, using whatever texts and methodologies you prefer. Your essay may be an in-depth analysis of a select films, or may be more theoretically driven (in which case you must still furnish persuasive evidence). This essay may be an expansion of Essay 1 or 2.

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, you will lead discussion for the first 50-minute session of Thursday’s class (Period 7). Together you should prepare a handout (or handouts) containing at least the following: basic credits (director, distributor, date, etc.), a sense of how the film was received critically and at the box office, and any other general information that you think is pertinent. Then, lead the class in an analysis of the film, both on its own terms and with respect to the day’s reading, or reading that the class has already done. Do not summarize the class readings – use them to examine the film. You may bring in other materials as well, but remember that you’ll need to explain them. I encourage you to show brief clips (several minutes at most) in illustration of your points or questions. Presentations may be formal or informal, and you may use whatever formats you think are appropriate. At the end of the presentation, please turn in your individual presentation notes, either in note/outline form or in traditional memo form (this will count as one of your 8 memos). I hope the presentations will be fun, but I will evaluate them on how effectively they address the film and facilitate discussion. I recommend that you meet with me at some point to talk about your plans.

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.

The schedule below is tentative; we still need to finalize the reading for a few classes and perhaps make other adjustments. If major changes are made, I’ll distribute a new schedule; in any case, course policies and assignment due dates will remain the same.

Schedule

January

- 8 Introduction(s).
No screening.
- 10 Buckingham, Ch. 1; Wojcik-Andrews, Parts One and Two. Film excerpts.
- 15 Wocjik-Andrews, Part Three.
Screening: *Bright Eyes* (1934).
- 17 Wocjik-Andrews, Part Four; Buckingham, Ch. 5.
- 22 Byrne & McQuillan, Ch. 1. In-class screening of early animated shorts.
Screening: animated shorts continued; *The Three Caballeros* (1944).
- 24 Burton-Carvajal
- 29 Byrne & McQuillan, Chs. 4 and 5.
Screening: *Song of the South* (1946).
- 31 No class.

February

- 5 Wocjik-Andrews, Part 5.
Screening: *Forbidden Games* [*Les Jeux Interdits*] (1951-2).
- 7 Erens. Group 1 presentation. **Essay 1 due.**
- 12 Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” ? (tba).
Screening: *Mary Poppins* (1964).
- 14 Group 2 presentation.
- 19 Armstrong, *Sounder* (1969).
Screening: *Sounder* (1972).
- 21 Neff, “Strange Faces in the Mirror.” Group 3 presentation.
- 26 Rushdie, *The Wizard of Oz*.
Screening: *Pixote* (1981).
- 28 Group 4 presentation.

March

[Spring Break March 4-8]

- 12 Gordon, “*E.T.* as Fairy Tale”; review Rushdie.
Screening: *E. T.* (1982)

- 14 Group 5 presentation.
- 19 Talk on your inner dog. Reading tba.
Screening: *My Life as a Dog* [*Mitt Liv som Hund*] (1985).
- 21 Group 6 presentation. **Essay 2 due.**
- 26 Talk on your inner pig. Reading tba.
Screening: *Babe* (1995).
- 28 Group 7 presentation.
- April**
- 2 Sedgwick.
Screening: *My Life in Pink* [*Ma Vie en Rose*] (1998).
- 4 Group 8 presentation.
- 9 Mental hygiene films screened in class. Eberwein.
Screening: *American Pie* (1999)
- 11 Bernstein. Group 9 presentation.
- 16 Talk on postmodernism.
Screening: *Shrek* (2001).
- 18 Group 10 presentation.
- 23 Wrap-up. **Essay 3 due.**
No screening.