

Dr. Kenneth Kidd  
4331 Children's Literature  
Spring 2001

Office: TUR 4214  
Phone: 392-0777 ext. 302  
Hours: MWF 7 and by  
appointment

## Course Description and Policies

### Required Texts (available at Goering's)

Lewis Carroll, *Alice in Wonderland*  
Beverly Cleary, *Dear Mr. Henshaw*  
Sharon Creech, *Walk Two Moons*  
Christopher Paul Curtis, *The Watsons Go To Birmingham -- 1963*  
William Pene Du Bois, *The Twenty One Balloons*  
Russell Freedman, *Lincoln: A Photobiography*  
Karen Hesse, *Out of the Dust*  
Carl Hiaasen, *Team Rodent*  
Ezra Jack Keats, *The Snowy Day*  
Gerald McDermott, *Arrow to the Sun*  
Theresa Nelson, *Earthshine*  
J. K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*  
Maurice Sendak, *Where the Wild Things Are*  
Doris Buchanan Smith, *A Taste of Blackberries*  
Maria Tatar, *The Classic Fairy Tales*

AND a coursepack from Xerographic, available at Goering's.

Where possible, I'd like for you to use the editions I ordered so that we'll be referring to the same pages, but if you already own other editions, or if you can find them cheaper elsewhere, that's fine. Please buy the coursepack immediately, as you'll need it first.

### Overview

This course surveys children's literature from its inception as a genre (or set of genres) to its present interdisciplinary forms. It has three major objectives: 1) to review the rich history and changing incarnations of children's literature; 2) to explore the ideologies of childhood from a variety of critical/theoretical perspectives; and 3) to help future and practicing teachers evaluate the artistic, literary, psychological, and social merit of books and multi-media texts available for use in K-12 schools. Because the course is offered by the English department, we shall concentrate on literary and cultural analysis. In other words, this course is not a teaching methods course. Do not assume that "childhood" and "children's literature" are consistent or self-explanatory terms – quite the contrary, as we'll see.

The traditional elements of literature (plot, character, setting, etc.) will often be our beginning points of analysis only. You are expected to familiarize yourself with terms and concepts that enable children's literature to be discussed as an intellectually and ideologically challenging discipline. We will be interdisciplinary and eclectic in our approach. We'll study canonical and contemporary texts from major and minor genres to see how children's literature has evolved. Alongside more traditional texts we'll try to address children's films, commercials, cartoons and other forms of mass and popular culture. Despite its infantilized and sentimentalized reputation, children's literature has grown up in many respects, addressing such tough issues as AIDS, sexual abuse, sexual harassment, drugs, war, racism, and homophobia.

Generally speaking, I've opted to emphasize contemporary rather than classic works of children's literature. You're welcome to cover other territory in your essay.

### **Format and Expectations**

Class format will be a combination of lecture and discussion. Arrive ready to talk. Because of the class size we have the opportunity to get to know one another and discuss the readings in detail. I will lecture when appropriate, and you are responsible for that information.

You are always responsible for the reading material, even if we do not discuss it in class. Sometimes I will discuss the readings in detail, but sometimes I will assume you've read and remembered it, and will provide you with additional information, so be prepared.

This is an informal class, but that does not mean that anything goes. Please don't read the newspaper or do homework during class. If you distract me or others by talking during discussion, I will ask you to leave.

Attendance is required. Please do not miss more than one class meeting -- that alone is equivalent to three classes in a regular semester. Missing more than one class meeting may result in a lower course grade; missing more than several means automatic failure.

### **Assignments and Grading**

Quizzes. In lieu of exams, there will be 5-10 quizzes, of around 5 questions each, which will test your recollection of the reading material assigned for that day and (where appropriate) information I've given you in the previous class session. These will be primarily content-based questions, but some may also require interpretation. Most of the questions will address the material for that day, but occasionally I may ask basic questions about previous material, so get into the habit of reviewing your notes before class. I will not announce the quizzes in advance, so don't ask me whether or not we'll have a quiz on any given day. You may not make these up unless you have official documentation of medical illness/emergency.

Essay 1. Reading Auto-ethnography. Why, what, when, and how do you read? Did reading play a formative role in your development as a child or teenager? Have reading and writing been therapeutic, helping you address personal and/or social issues? To what genres are you typically drawn -- science fiction, comic books, mystery, romance -- and why? Do you prefer fiction or non-fiction? Have your tastes changed? What might account for such shifts? Do you read for pleasure, knowledge, or distraction?

I don't usually ask students to write personal essays, and I do not expect this essay to be confessional in the modern talkshow sense. This is an exercise in reconstruction and speculation; you are both the ethnographer and the subject. Write a 5 double-spaced pp. analysis of your past and current reading practices. Attempt to organize your observations around themes or periods of your life. I'm particularly interested in your childhood reading habits, but if they don't seem that crucial, that's fine. Obviously you can't address all of the above questions, so just answer the ones that seem useful. You are welcome to experiment with format, as long as you chronicle your history as a reader in some accessible way. Try to emphasize one or two particularly significant experiences -- I call these literacy anecdotes. Be prepared to discuss this history in class (I will NOT ask you to reveal personal information).

Essay 2. Children's Forms. Write a 5-7 double-spaced pp. analysis of a children's culture "form," a product or production that isn't traditionally literary/textual -- such as a film, tv show, musical album or video, video game, toy, or playspace. The only stipulation is that the form you choose should be intended or designed for children. Treat that "text" as you would a traditional narrative; evaluate its structure, emphases, themes, ideological assumptions and effects. Use any methodology that's helpful; consult the essays in this packet on children's film and cartoon

strips (Wojcik-Andrews and Spigel), and/or make use of work in cultural studies, media studies, and other disciplines. Be sure to organize your analysis around a central thesis. You should use at least one secondary or critical source; provide a Works Cited page (MLA style).

Essay 3. Open Topic. Write a 7-10 double-spaced pp. analysis of any aspect of children's literature. You could focus on any genre or author or social/political issue; if you're more interested in the earlier literature, you could do some research in the Baldwin Historical Library (Rita Smith, the curator, and I would be glad to help you). It's up to you to choose a manageable topic, and to develop a thesis that organizes your discussion. You must use at least three works of literature, and three secondary sources; please provide a Works Cited page (MLA style).

Finally, you will receive a grade for active participation, which means coming to class regularly and on time, paying attention, asking questions, and contributing to discussion.

Essay 1	15%
Essay 2	20%
Essay 3	25%
Quizzes	30%
Active Participation	10%

### Schedule

#### January

- 10 Introduction(s).
- 17 History and Theory of Childhood and Children's Literature. Kruppa; Somerville; Kidd, "Outline..." (CP). Hiaasen, *Team Rodent*.
- 24 Folklore and Its Discontents. Tatar, Introduction; and sections on "Little Red Riding Hood" and "Beauty and the Beast."
- 31 Tatar: "Snow White;" "Cinderella." Bettelheim (both) and Darnton (in Tatar). **Essay 1 due.**

#### February

- 7 Film: *Freeway*. "How a Tale Becomes..."; Wojcik-Andrews (CP).
- 14 Picture This. Sendak, *Wild Things*; Keats, *The Snowy Day*; McDermott, *Arrow to the Sun*; Shaddock and Neff (CP).
- 21 Early Readers. Smith, *A Taste...* and Cleary, *Dear Mr. Henshaw*.
- 28 Fantasy. *Alice in Wonderland*.

#### March

- 7 Spring Break!
- 14 Du Bois, *The Twenty One Balloons*; Spigel (CP). **Essay 2 due.**
- 21 Rowling, *Harry Potter...*; Acocella (CP).
- 28 Historical Fiction. Curtis, *The Watsons...*

#### April

- 4 Hesse, *Out of the Dust*.
- 11 Biography. Freedman, *Lincoln: A Photobiography*.
- 18 No Place Like Home. Nelson, *Earthshine*; McRuer (CP).

25 Creech, *Walk Two Moons*. **Essay 3 due.**