

TOPICS FOR COMPOSITION - Fall 2018
ENC 1145: Writing About Toys - 13605

Instructor Name: Kevin Cooley

Course meeting times & locations: M,W,F | Period 7 (1:55 PM - 2:45 PM), MAT 0117

Office Location and Hours: TUR 4359

Course website: Canvas

Instructor Email: kevin.cooley@ufl.edu



Course Description:

What is a *toy*? What is the purpose of playing with toys? How do the stories we tell about toys affect our relationship with them? Do toys represent a twisted marketing scheme designed to brainwash children into constant consumption and rigid gender norms? Or do they unlock imaginative worlds with limitless potential in the minds of blooming creators?

This course will tackle such questions by examining and performing writing about toys. Our course will consider documentary film, children's picture books, comic strips, fiction, stop-motion film and animation, studies concerning sociological topics, and, finally, commercial narratives like *Transformers* and *GI Joe*. To unravel the logic, violence, and love that exists between toy and player, our readings will also examine the nature of play itself and the political roles of toys, especially through *Articulating the Action Figure*, edited by Jonathan Alexandratos.

Students will gain critical thinking skills and argumentative abilities from this course, honing their abilities to analyze objects beyond the traditional scope of the humanities' concerns in a variety of disciplines.

General Education Objectives:

- This course confers General Education credit for either Composition (C) *or* Humanities (H). This course also fulfills 6,000 of the university's 24,000-word writing requirement (WR).
- This course confers General Education credit for Composition (C), and also fulfills 6,000 of the university's 24,000-word writing requirement (WR).
- *Composition courses* provide instruction in the methods and conventions of standard written English (grammar, punctuation, usage), as well as the techniques that produce effective texts. Composition courses are writing intensive. They require multiple drafts submitted to your instructor for feedback before final submission.
- Course content should include multiple forms of effective writing, different writing styles, approaches and formats, and methods to adapt writing to different audiences, purposes and contexts. Students should learn to organize complex arguments in writing using thesis statements, claims and evidence, and to analyze writing for errors in logic.
- The University *Writing Requirement (WR)* ensures students both maintain their fluency in writing and use writing as a tool to facilitate learning. To receive Writing Requirement credit, a student must receive a grade of C or higher and a satisfactory completion of the writing component of the course. This means that written assignments must meet minimum word requirements totaling 6000 words.

General Education Learning Outcomes:

At the end of this course, students will be expected to have achieved the following learning outcomes in content, communication and critical thinking:

- **Content:** Students demonstrate competence in the terminology, concepts, theories and methodologies used within the academic discipline.
- **Communication:** Students communicate knowledge, ideas and reasoning clearly and effectively in written and oral forms appropriate to the discipline. Students will participate in class discussions throughout the semester to reflect on assigned readings.
- **Critical Thinking:** Students analyze information carefully and logically from multiple perspectives, using discipline-specific methods, and develop reasoned solutions to problems.

Required Texts:

[Articulating the Action Figure: Essays on the Toys and Their Messages](#), edited by Jonathan Alexandratos.

[The Doll House](#), by Rumer Godden. *Puffin Books* edition.

Assignments:

All written assignment will be turned in via Canvas unless explicitly stated otherwise. Paper copies will not be accepted; there are no exceptions to this rule.

| Major Grading Category | Potential Points | Word Count |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------|-------------|
| Participation | 100 points | -- |
| SICQ Assignments (8 entries) | 200 points | 2000 |
| Critical Making Project and Essay | 150 points | 250 |
| Short Research Essay | 150 points | 1000 |
| Baldwin/Liversidge Archive Reflection | 25 points | 250 |
| Personal Analysis Essay | 125 points | 800 |
| Analytical Research Paper | 250 points | 1700 |
| TOTAL | 1000 points | 6000 |

SICQ Assignments (x8):

Perform the following tasks in 250 original words (plus quotes) or more:

- **Summarize** (in brief terms) the main point of major reading of the week.
- **Identify** one point of the author's/creator's that you have a strong opinion or feeling about (agreement, disagreement, confusion, excitement). Explain why this might be the case.
- **Connect** the reading in question to another reading in the course, to a political group/ideology/party, or to a reading/ideological camp from your own academic interests.
- **Quote** the reading twice by copy/pasting or transcribing *two* snippets you think would be useful to incorporate into a later project (**this does not count toward your word count**). Think: what ideas, perspectives, and techniques could inform one of your analytical essays, your creative projects, or your pursuits in other courses? In your own words, explain why you think these quotes might be helpful to archive (**but this does count toward your word count.**)

The goal of this assignment is to prepare you to synthesize various sources (scholarly articles, think pieces, visual media, etc.) and put these sources into conversation with one another to build an argument. With these skills, you will be able to write a SICQ research paper (get it?!).

Critical Making Project and Essay:

In conjunction with Ian Bogost's thoughts on critical making in "Carpentry," your job here will be to make some kind of argument in the construction of an object that is not exclusively composed of text. This could take many forms, and there are very little limits to the way you can go about meeting this assignments demands. Be creative, utilize your skills, and don't be afraid to try something new here.

You will also:

- Draft a 250-word proposal for this project, which will outline the argument you see your piece making and which will need my approval.

Baldwin/Liversidge Archive Reflection:

Write 250 words reflecting on your experience with the various play-items in the Baldwin and Liversidge collections. What items stuck out to you, and why? How did your encounter with these items change the way you think about toys and play with toys? What was it like to play with them?

Some potential ways to go about this project:

- Build a toy that makes an argument. We have seen and will see many dominant trends within the toy industry (irregular and caricatured bodies, stereotypes about race, dehumanizing work conditions, etc.) What would it look like to build a toy that argues with, pushes back on, or rectifies, or comments on these trends?
- Create promotional material for a toy that makes some kind of argument.
- Compose a creative fictional narrative (perhaps in comics or prose form) that concerns itself with toys, and ultimately makes some kind of statement about toys.

This is by no means an exhaustive list. If you have an idea that is not featured here and you believe it satisfies the goals of this assignment, feel free to run it by me before/outside of the proposal.

All/any written components of this assignment will be turned in via Canvas. Because many submissions here will be odd/bulky physical objects, you are permitted to submit your project during class on the assignment's due date.

Short Research Essay:

Write a 1000 word analytical essay (roughly 5 pages) that articulates the political work a given text performs. The primary text(s) you analyze *must* be related to toys/play or themselves be toys or play items.

Some good candidates for primary texts to analyze would be toys and play items (dolls, action figures, puppets, electronic toys), advertisements featuring toys, “toyetic” media productions, videogames-as-toys, and animation featuring toys and posable models. This is, however, by no means an exhaustive list of acceptable topics.

Your essay will include at least three scholarly sources that you will put into conversation with one another, and at least one of these sources must be from our in-class readings. You may make use of as many “non-scholarly” sources as you see fit to build the argument that you want to build, but these sources will not count toward the three scholarly source obligation.

Personal Analysis Essay:

In this 800 word assignment, you will reflect on your own experience with toys and play by analyzing them in the lens of at least two of our class readings (and the SICQ assignments you've composed about them). Make an argument about your own life experiences based on our class readings.

It may be helpful to ask yourself:

- How did the gendered function of toys change or fortify your conception of yourself, and how do these readings help you make sense of that conditioning?
- In what ways did toys and play with toys normalize certain behaviors and make other behaviors seem unacceptable?

- What attitudes and ideas did your exposure to toys reinforce about race, or about the international production and traffic of toys?
- What toys did you develop a strong emotional, affective, or psychologically intense relationship with? Why?
- What did you/can one learn from play with toys? What have you/can one learn from thinking about toys as critical objects, as we have done in this class?

Analytical Research Paper:

Write a 1750 word research paper (roughly 7 pages) that articulates the political work a given text performs. The primary text(s) you analyze *must* be related to toys/play or themselves be toys or play items.

Some good candidates for primary texts to analyze would be toys and play items (dolls, action figures, puppets, electronic toys), advertisements featuring toys, “toyetic” media productions, videogames-as-toys, and animation featuring toys and posable models. This is, however, by no means an exhaustive list of acceptable topics.

Your research paper will include at least five scholarly sources that you will put into conversation with one another, and at least one of these sources must be from our in-class readings. You may make use of as many “non-scholarly” sources as you see fit to build the argument that you want to build, but these sources will not count toward the five-source obligation.

Course Policies:

1. You must complete all *assignments* to receive credit for this course.
2. *Attendance:* Absences beyond three unexcused absences will result in the loss of one third of a letter grade per absence. Absences in excess of six will result in an E grade. Three tardies will amount to one absence. <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/attendance.aspx>
3. *Paper Format & Submission:* All papers will be submitted electronically, via Canvas. No exceptions.
4. *Late Papers/Assignments:* There are *absolutely no* late paper submissions.
5. *Paper Maintenance Responsibilities.* Keep duplicate copies of all work submitted in this course. Save all returned, graded work until the semester is over.
6. *Academic Honesty and Definition of Plagiarism.* Plagiarism violates the Student Honor Code and requires reporting to the Dean of Students. All students must abide by the Student Honor Code: <https://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/process/student-conduct-honor-code/>.
7. *Participation:* Students are expected to voluntarily contribute to classroom discussions, to be prepared to discuss all readings by their syllabus-appointed due dates, and to engage with the material at hand whenever called upon. Being an introvert is cool; being disengaged is not. Attendance will be considered when calculating participation grades.
8. Students with *disabilities* who are requesting accommodations should first register with the Disability Resource Center (352-392-8565, www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/), which will provide appropriate documentation to give the instructor.
9. For information on UF Grading policies, see: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/grades.aspx>

10. *Grade Appeals*. In 1000- and 2000-level courses, students may appeal a final grade by filling out a form available from Carla Blount, Program Assistant, in the Department office (4008 TUR). Grade appeals may result in a higher, unchanged, or lower final grade.
11. *Course Evaluations*. Toward the end of the semester, you will receive email messages asking you to go online and evaluate this course: <https://evaluations.ufl.edu/evals/Default.aspx>
12. Students who face difficulties completing the course or who are in need of counseling or urgent help may call the on-campus Counseling and Wellness Center (352) 392-1575, or contact them online: <http://www.counseling.ufl.edu/cwc/Default.aspx>
13. There is such a thing as responsible use of technology in the classroom. However, if I catch you using electronic devices irresponsibly in my classroom, I reserve the right to dock your participation grade with no notice whatsoever. I will not waste time with individual discipline that we could be using for group work and group learning.
14. *UF's policy on Harassment*: UF provides an educational and working environment that is free from sex discrimination and sexual harassment for its students, staff, and faculty: <http://hr.ufl.edu/manager-resources/recruitment-staffing/institutional-equity-diversity/resources/harassment/>
15. *Policy on environmental sustainability*. Whenever possible, I will use paper-sparing electronic media to distribute our course materials. Consider purchasing electronic editions of assigned texts when they are available, or used copies of print texts. If you do not elect to keep your print books, consider sharing them with others after the semester ends. (For example, you could donate them to the Alachua County [Friends of the Library](#) annual book sale.)



COURSE SCHEDULE:

| Date of Classes / Focus of Week | Class Topic / Media | Readings/Assignments Due |
|---|--|--|
| WEEK 1: Sifting Through the Toybox | | |
| W, Aug 22 nd | <i>Introduction</i> | |
| F, Aug 24th | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Roland Barthes, “Toys” |
| WEEK 2: Toying with A Theory of Toys | | |
| M, Aug 27th | <i>Understanding Toys</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman, selections from <i>Rules of Play</i> • SICQ Assignment (Barthes) |
| W, Aug 29th | <i>Founding a Field of Study</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Posing the Question: An Action Figure Studies Manifesto” in <i>ATAF</i> |
| F, Aug 31st | <i>Assembling the Pieces of a Field of Study</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “The Toys that Made Us” select episode(s) • SICQ Assignment (Salen/Zimmerman) |
| WEEK 3: Now You, Too, Can Critically Make With Toys! | | |
| M, Sep 3 rd , <i>Holiday, No Class</i> | -- | -- |
| W, Sep 5th | <i>Creative Making</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ian Bogost, “Carpentry” • SICQ Assignment (Bogost) |
| F, Sep 7 th | <i>Creative Making as Therapy</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sonia M. Stace, “Therapeutic Doll Making in Art Psychotherapy for Complex Trauma” • Critical Making Project pitch due |
| WEEK 4: Toyetic Production | | |
| M, Sep 24th | <i>From Recycling to Industry</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Walter Benjamin, “The Cultural History of Toys” |
| W, Sep 26th | <i>G.I. Joe, Transformers, and the Toyetic 80s</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Hypercommercialism and Hasbro’s GI Joe A Real American Hero,” J Richard Stevens, in <i>ATAF</i> • SICQ Assignment (Benjamin) |
| F, Sep 28th | <i>Is There a Life Beyond the Toyetic?</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “She-Ra and the Gendered Dimensions of Action Figures,” by Keith Corson in <i>ATAF</i> • Critical Making Project Due |
| WEEK 5: Toys, Touch, and Animation | | |
| M, Oct 1st | <i>The Potential of Toy-Animation</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jan Svankmajer, selections from <i>The Tactile Imagination</i> |
| W, Oct 3rd | <i>Toppling Toyetic Animation</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Toy Story, The Lego Movie, and the Wordsworthian Imagination,” by Geoff Klock in <i>ATAF</i> |
| F, Oct 5th | <i>Stop Motion: The Island of Misfit Toys</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “On Stop Motion”, by Barry Purves; available on Canvas |
| WEEK 6: Playing Straight, Queering Toys | | |

| | | |
|--|--|--|
| M, Sep 10th | <i>Queer Readings of Hyper-gendered Dolls</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Selections from Erica Rand's <i>Barbie's Queer Accessories</i>. |
| W, Sep 12th | <i>Bronies and Ponies</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "The Same Aisle: The Intersection of Resistance and Discipline in Brony Fandom, or, Friendship is Mythological," by Tracy L. Bealer in <i>ATAF</i> |
| F, Sep 14th | <i>The Hero We Deserve</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "The Lego Batman Movie Is the Brokeback Batman We've Always Wanted" • SICQ Assignment (Rand) |
| WEEK 7: The Materiality of Toys | | |
| M, Sep 17th | <i>The Racial Price of Play</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mel Y. Chen, "Lead's Racial Matters" |
| W, Sep 19th | <i>Toys Are the New Coal</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Watch, "Santa's Workshop - Inside China's Slave Labour Toy Factories Part 1" |
| F, Sep 21st | <i>Class Visit: The Baldwin and Liversridge collections.</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SICQ Assignment (Chen) |
| WEEK 8: Toys, Psychoanalysis, and Psychology | | |
| M, Oct 8th | <i>Transitional Objects</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Donald Winnicott, selections from <i>Playing and Reality</i> • Baldwin/Liversridge Reflection Due |
| W, Oct 10th | <i>Are You My Toys?</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Short Analytical Essay rough draft due [No SICQ assignment] |
| F, Oct 12 th , No Class, H-coming | -- | -- |
| WEEK 9: Science Gets Lit. : Who Gets to Analyze Toys? | | |
| M, Oct 15th | <i>How Does Science Analyze Toys?</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • H. Dittmarr, et al, "Does Barbie make girls want to be thin?" |
| W, Oct 17th | <i>Peer Review Short Essay in Class</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SICQ Assignment (Dittmar) |
| F, Oct 19 th | <i>Toy Stories: Literature and Toys</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rumer Godden's <i>The Doll's House</i>, Part 1 • Short Analytical Essay final draft due. |
| WEEK 10: Literature and Toys | | |
| M, Oct 22nd | <i>Literature and Toys: Continued</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rumer Godden's <i>The Doll's House</i>, Part 2 |
| W, Oct 24th | <i>Poetry, Prose, and Toys</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rumer Godden's <i>The Doll's House</i>, Part 3, "The Dolls," by William Butler Yates |
| F, Oct 26 th | <i>Literature and Toys: Conclusion</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sandra Ciscernos, "Barbie-Q" |
| WEEK 11: The Horror of Toys | | |

| | | |
|---|---|--|
| M, Oct 29th | <i>Why Scare Toy Story's Sid?</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Why are dolls so creepy?,” by Marquand Smith. |
| W, Oct 31st | <i>Drawing On or Drawing Out Horror?</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Tottie: The Story of a Doll's House,” select episodes. |
| F, Nov 2nd | <i>Toy Horror Outside the West</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “One-Man Hide and Seek.” a Japanese urban legend and creepypasta by Saya in Underworld • SICQ Assignment (Smith) |
| WEEK 12: Blurring Pink and Blue in the Toy Aisle | | |
| M, Nov 5th | <i>Gender, Fandom, and Toys</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “G.I. Joe vs. Barbie: Anti-fandom, fashion, dolls, and one-sixth scale action figures,” by Victoria Godwin |
| W, Nov 7th | <i>Tiny Shoulders, Impressionable Minds</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Watch: “Tiny Shoulders: Rethinking Barbie.” Available on Hulu |
| F, Nov 9th | <i>Towards a New Toy Aisle</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I Was Always Wonder Woman,” an interview with <i>IAmElemental's</i> Julie Kerwin,” by Jonathan Alexandratos in <i>ATAF</i> • Personal Analysis Piece Due |
| WEEK 13: Writing About Toys | | |
| M, Nov 12th, <i>No Class, Holiday</i> | -- | -- |
| W, Nov 14 th | <i>How to Write About Toys</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>They Say, I Say</i>, chapters (selections TBA) |
| F, Nov 16th | <i>How Not to Write About Toys</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thomas J. Endres, “Will Justice be Done?” in <i>ATAF</i> • Kevin Cooley’s “Review of <i>Articulating the Action Figure</i>,” in <i>Imagetext</i> (focus particularly on rebuttal to Endres’ piece). |
| WEEK 14: Thanksgiving | | |
| M, Nov 19 th | <i>Writer’s Workshop</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Reading TBA</i> |
| W, Nov 21, <i>No Class --Thanksgiving</i> | -- | -- |
| F, Nov 23, <i>No Class -- Thanksgiving</i> | -- | -- |
| WEEK 15: Unconventional Toys | | |
| M, Nov 26 th | <i>Video Games</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Final paper rough draft due |
| W, Nov 28th | <i>Adult Toys</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “How Feminists Made Sex Toys Better, Safer, And More Fun.” by Lyn Comella |
| F, Nov 30th | <i>Animal Toys</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Why Do Animals Like to Play?” by Jason G. Goldman • “Five Surprising Animals that Play.” by Sarah Zielinski |
| WEEK 16: Conclusion | | |
| M, Dec 3rd | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Watch “Dream of Toyland (1908)”, and “The Doll (Shojo No Piero)” (2018) |
| W, Dec 5th | <i>Conclusion</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Final paper due |