

CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

Summer B, 2017

LIT 4331: 4F62

Turlington 2323

Period 3: 11 a.m. – 12:15 pm

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Office Hours: Wednesdays, 1:30-3pm, and by appointment

Course Overview

The term “children’s literature” might well be considered an oxymoron: after all, any text explicitly produced for a pre- or semi-literate audience may be suspected of not satisfying certain conventional or otherwise institutionalized expectations of literature. The purpose of this course, then, is to examine how “children’s literature” has been defined as both a literary form and a scholarly field of study. We will discuss, for example, how the emergence of this specific literary form in the late eighteenth century coincided with the rise of new culturally-, materially-, and historically-informed notions of childhood – and how, in turn, books for young people have since marked significant shifts in ways of thinking about childhood and child readers. Additionally, we will discuss the aesthetics of children’s books (e.g, what makes them “literature” – or should that question even matter?) as well as their cultural and political implications (e.g., how does children’s literature, as a form traditionally produced by older generations for a new and rising one, at once reaffirm and contest dominant social norms and values?)

In order to meet these objectives, we will read a variety of books written for and about children: biographies, fantasies, picture books, historical novels, verse novels, pop culture sensations, and long-regarded classics. As we analyze these texts, we will consider how our discussions contribute to, and work in dialogue with, major interventions in the scholarly field of children’s literature studies, as demonstrated within Philip Nel’s and Lissa Paul’s landmark text, *Keywords for Children’s Literature*.

Required Texts

At least one exam booklet – a “blue book” or “green book” readily available at the UF bookstore or Target Copy on W. University Ave.

Keywords for Children’s Literature, ed. Philip Nel and Lissa Paul

Roald Dahl, *Boy*

Roald Dahl, *James and the Giant Peach*

Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics*

David Wiesner, *Tuesday*

Jon Scieszka and Lane Smith, *The True Story of the Three Little Pigs*

Laura Ingalls Wilder, *Little House on the Prairie*

Christopher Paul Curtis, *Bud, Not Buddy*

Jacqueline Woodson, *Brown Girl Dreaming*

Melanie Crowder, *Audacity*

A.A. Milne, *Winnie the Pooh*

Course Requirements

Attendance/Participation: 20%

Quizzes/Short Assignments: 20%

Weekly In-class writing exercises: 60% (10% per each weekly in-class assignment)

Attendance/Participation

Since this is an intensive summer course, it is imperative that you be present for each and every session. Indeed, one (1) absence during a summer course is the equivalent of three (3) absences during a regular (fall/spring) semester; for this reason, each unexcused absence will contribute to the devaluation of your final grade by one letter grade.

If you are absent because of an illness, please provide me with a doctor's note. If you anticipate being absent for a legitimate reason – e.g., a religious holiday or an academic or athletic event – please consult me in advance.

Although I will occasionally give brief lectures, most class sessions will be devoted to large- and small-group conversation. For this reason, it is important that you not only be physically present in class, but that you actively participate in each session. I expect you to come to each class having read the assigned materials and prepared to offer the questions and insights you formed during your independent reading; additionally, I expect you to respond attentively and respectfully to the questions and insights offered by your classmates.

Texting policy: *Each instance of texting will be counted as an unexcused absence.* After all, when you text, your body may be present in class, but your mind is not.

Laptop/phone policy: If you bring a laptop to class, please sit in the first row(s), and please only use your laptop to access the assigned text(s) and/or to record notes. The same policy stands if you are accessing an assigned text on your phone.

Quizzes/Short Assignments

During the course of the semester, I will give brief (and often unannounced) quizzes that assess your reading of the assigned (literary) materials as well as your comprehension of previous lecture/discussion sessions. These quizzes will give me an indication of how attentively you have responded to the assigned materials and previous sessions. Additionally, the questions I ask in these quizzes will be designed so as to offer a segue to key themes in upcoming lectures and discussions, and thus will provide us all with a greater opportunity for focus.

Examples of Quiz Questions

- *In Brown Girl Dreaming*, Jacqueline is nearly named “Jack.” Who insisted that she be named “Jack” – and why?
- During yesterday’s meeting, we discussed the various ways in which the character Laura in *Little House on the Prairie* demonstrates Michelle Abate’s formulation of the “tomboy” in her entry in *Keywords for Children’s Literature*. Give one (1) example of how Laura’s characterization supports (or contests!) one of Abate’s claims – and very briefly explain how you came to this conclusion.
- ***You do not have to respond to quiz questions in complete sentences!*** A few words or fragments will do, so long as you sufficiently respond to the question at hand.

Occasionally, I may ask you to compose a brief (paragraph-long) written response to a larger, more critical, question. I may ask you to respond to this question during the class session, or I might ask you to email your response after class hours. So long as you offer a response that demonstrates your ability to offer well-supported insights, your written response will earn a 100% quiz grade. If you offer a barely-developed response or one that suggests that you haven’t adequately read the assigned text(s) that informs the question, you will receive a 50% quiz grade. If you don’t respond at all, you will receive a “0” for one quiz grade.

Example of a Short (Paragraph-long) Assignment

- This past week, during our discussion of Roald Dahl’s *Boy*, we considered how Dahl’s own historically- and culturally-contingent experience of childhood might be different from our own (early twenty-first century) notion of childhood. In preparation for our upcoming discussion of Dahl’s *James and the Giant Peach* this Monday, identify one (1) way in which Dahl’s understanding of childhood in *Boy* is expressed and/or critiqued in *James* – and briefly account for how you perceive this correspondence. Email your response to me *no later than* 11pm on Sunday night – that is, 12 hours before we begin our discussion of *James*.
- Earlier this week, we discussed how Laura Ingalls Wilder’s *Little House on the Prairie*, although it is set in the late-nineteenth century, was written during the Great Depression of the 1930’s – and as such, comments indirectly on the conditions in which it was produced.

Christopher Paul Curtis's *Bud, Not Buddy*, by contrast, is actually set during the Great Depression. Identify one (1) way in which Curtis's novel establishes its Depression-era setting, and give specific examples to support your claim. Take the first 10 minutes of class to write your response.

I reserve the right to give a quiz or short writing assignment at any time during the class period (for example, at the very beginning, the very end, or any point in between). For this reason, it is additionally important that you be present during the entire class session.

Weekly In-class Writing Assignments

Although I will occasionally give brief and informal take-home/email assignments – the satisfactory completion of which should earn you full quiz credits – I will not expect you to produce longer or formal assignments outside the parameters of our daily class meetings. Instead, I will ask you to complete an in-class writing exercise on the final day (Friday) of each week. The form of this exercise may vary from week to week: for example, it may take the form of 10 brief “quiz-like” questions that evaluate your attentiveness to the week's reading and discussion; it might take the form of 4-5 “short answer questions” that ask you to define key terms in relation to the week's literary readings; or it might take the form of an essay question that prompts you to develop an original argument in light of the readings and discussions we have sustained in class that past week.

In any case, I will be sure to inform you of the form each week's in-class writing exercise will take at the very end of Thursday's session. At this time, I will also inform you of what materials you may (or may not) bring to the Friday writing session.

You must bring an exam booklet – e.g. a “blue book” or “green-book” – to each writing session. These booklets are designed with a cover flap so that their contents might remain anonymous: thus, I might read your weekly writing exercises as fairly and objectively as possible. Additionally, these exam booklets are thick enough to contain multiple in-class exercises; in this way, you may be able not only to keep track of your weekly grades (and thus factor them into your final grade average) but also study my marginal comments in order to anticipate future modes of developing even clearer and better responses.

You will have the entire class period (one hour and fifteen minutes) to complete each in-class assignment. Since the assignments will be timed, I will not grade them in the same way I might grade a formal take-home assignment with a substantially longer deadline. Even so, I will expect your essays and short answers to offer clearly written, well organized, and well supported statements that convincingly respond to the assigned question(s). Essays and short answers that earn “A” grades are those that not only address the question at hand but that also demonstrate original argumentation and particularly keen critical insight.

Example of a Short Answer Question

- How does Scott McCloud define “closure”? Identify one specific example of closure in David Wiesner's *Tuesday* and draw on your reading of McCloud to explain how it is significant to the narrative offered in this picture book.

Example of an Essay Question

- This week, we drew on Mavis Reimer’s keyword, “Home,” in order to analyze major themes in Jacqueline Woodson’s verse novel, *Brown Girl Dreaming*. Compose an essay in which you demonstrate how this same keyword might frame a discussion of Melanie Crowder’s own verse novel, *Audacity*.

Disabilities

If you have a disability, please contact me as soon as possible and I will be sure to accommodate your specific needs. I will need a letter from the university disabilities office so that I might make arrangements. <https://www.dso.ufl.edu/drc>

Academic Honesty

Plagiarism is strictly forbidden and punishable by failure. Please be sure to sign the honor code on each exam booklet you use.

Tentative Schedule

(Texts will be discussed in class on the day they are listed, so be sure to read them in advance)

WEEK ONE: Introduction: Childhood and Its Books

- Monday, 26 June:** Class Introduction
- Tuesday, 27 June:** *Keywords, “Childhood”*
- Wednesday, 28 June:** *Keywords, “Children’s Literature” and “Culture”*
- Thursday, 29 June:** Roald Dahl, *Boy*
- Friday, 30 June:** In-class writing exercise

WEEK TWO: Key Components of Children’s Literature: Story, Verse, Image

- Monday, 3 July:** Roald Dahl, *James and the Giant Peach* **AND** *Boy*
Keywords: “Intention”
- Tuesday, 4 July: No class – Happy Independence Day!**
- Wednesday, 5 July:** Dahl, *James and the Giant Peach* **AND** *Boy*
Keywords, “Fantasy”
- Thursday, 6 July:** Dahl, *James and the Giant Peach*

Keywords, "Image"

Friday, 7 July: In-class writing exercise

WEEK THREE: The Picture Book

Monday, 10 July: David Wiesner, *Tuesday*
Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics*

Tuesday, 11 July: Wiesner, *Tuesday*
McCloud, *Understanding Comics*

Wednesday, 12 July: Jon Scieszka and Lane Smith, *The True Story of the Three Little Pigs*
Keywords: "Picture Book"

Thursday, 13 July: Scieszka and Smith, *The True Story of the Three Little Pigs*
Keywords: "Modernism," "Postmodernism"

Friday, 14 July: In-class writing exercise

WEEK FOUR: Reading Children's Fiction through History and History through Children's Fiction

Monday, 17 July: Laura Ingalls Wilder, *Little House on the Prairie*
Keywords: "Realism"

Tuesday, 18 July: Wilder, *Little House on the Prairie*
Keywords: "Domestic," "Race," "Tomboy"

Wednesday, 19 July: Christopher Paul Curtis, *Bud, Not Buddy*
Keywords: "Character," "Story"

Thursday, 20 July: Curtis, *Bud Not Buddy*
Keywords: "African American"

Friday, 21 July: In-class writing exercise

WEEK FIVE: The Verse Novel

Monday, 24 July: Jacqueline Woodson, *Brown Girl Dreaming*
Keywords: "Voice"

Tuesday, 25 July: Woodson, *Brown Girl Dreaming*

Keywords: "Home," "Identity"

Wednesday, 26 July: Melanie Crowder, *Audacity*

Keywords: "Multiculturalism"

Thursday, 27 July: Crowder, *Audacity*

Keywords: "Class"

Friday, 28 July: In-class writing exercise

WEEK SIX: Children's Literature and Culture: Past and Present

Monday, 31 July: A.A. Milne, *Winnie the Pooh*

Keywords: "Golden Age"

Tuesday, 1 August: Milne, *Winnie the Pooh*

Keywords: "Classic," "Popular"

Wednesday, 2 August: Milne, *Winnie the Pooh*

Keywords: "Aesthetics"

Thursday, 3 August: Milne, *Winnie the Pooh*

Keywords: "Innocence," "Nature"

Friday, 4 August: Final in-class writing exercise