

LIT 6934: The Second Golden Age of Children's Literature

Mondays, periods E1-E3 (7.20pm—10.20pm)

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Course Description

When the discipline of children's literature was first established in the 1970s and early 1980s, most scholarly studies and under/graduate courses in this new-found area focused primarily on texts produced in the Golden Age of children's literature – that is, the period between 1868 and 1926 that marked an outpouring of creative works for child audiences in North America, Britain, and Europe. In the past half-century since the discipline's founding, scholars, teachers, and librarians have largely shifted their focus to multicultural, transnational, and otherwise global works of literature for young people produced in the so-called "Third Golden Age" – that is, the last decade of the twentieth-century and the two first decades of the twenty-first.

Significantly, the institution of children's literature as a legitimate scholarly discipline coincided with what many of its practitioners have termed the "Second Golden Age of Children's Literature" – that is, that post-war period of children's literature whose works demonstrate the various possibilities, losses, and dangers faced by young people in an increasingly globalized world. And yet – perhaps ironically, given this coincidence – this rich moment of creative production remains comparatively under-theorized in children's literature studies.

The primary objective of this class, then, is to study mid-twentieth-century works of children's literature in their literary, historical, and cultural contexts. In doing so, we will discuss how (or whether) they demonstrate a distinct period of creative production – and for that matter, consider more generally the history and significance of periodization and canonization in literary and cultural inquiry. Since the few scholarly studies of the Second Golden Age that do exist tend to focus on British children's literature, our readings will focus primarily on American texts written during this era – with the ultimate hope of identifying new points of intervention in the field of children's literature studies.

Required Texts (in the order in which we will be reading them)

E.B. White, *Charlotte's Web*

Susan Cooper, *The Dark is Rising*

Ezra Jack Keats, *The Snowy Day*
Maurice Sendak, *Where The Wild Things Are*
Dr. Suess, *The Cat in the Hat*
Madeline L'Engle, *A Wrinkle in Time*
Robert C. O'Brien, *Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH*
Beverly Cleary, *Beezus and Ramona*
E.L. Konigsburg, *From the Mixed-Up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler*
Virginia Hamilton, *M.C. Higgins the Great*
Scott O'Dell, *Island of Blue Dolphins*
William H. Armstrong, *Souder*
S.E. Hinton, *The Outsiders*
Elizabeth George Speare, *The Witch of Blackbird Pond*
Julius Lester, *To Be a Slave*
Mildred D. Taylor, *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*
Sydney Taylor, *All Of A Kind Family*
Jean Craighead George, *Julie of the Wolves*
Laurence Yep, *Dragonwings*
Louise Fitzhugh, *Harriet the Spy*
Arnold Lobel, *Frog and Toad Are Friends*
Katherine Paterson, *The Bridge to Terabithia*
Zilpha Keatley Snyder, *The Egypt Game*
Judy Blume, *Otherwise Known As Sheila the Great*
Paul Zindel, *The Pigman*

*****Additional Critical/Theoretical Readings are available on Canvas, in each class module.**

Course Requirements

Attendance and Participation: 15%

Since this is a small seminar – practically a tutorial – it’s important that each member comes to each session prepared to discuss the assigned materials. Of course, absences are excused in cases of illness, religious holidays, and academic/professional meetings. If you anticipate being absent, please let me know in advance so that we can make arrangements.

Reading Assignments: 65%

Each week, you will write a brief response (approximately 2 pages) to at least one of the texts assigned for that meeting. The weekly response papers should give everyone an opportunity to reflect on the materials and offer questions, observations, and arguments to the group.

The form of the first two reading responses (22 January and 29 January) will be up to you. For example, you might reflect on a common theme in the readings; or conduct a close reading of a significant passage; or pose a discussion question followed by your own response to it.

For the following weeks, your responses will take the form of an article precis of a published essay written about one (1) of the assigned literary texts for the day. To get you started, I’ve uploaded articles on each of the assigned texts to the “Files” section on Canvas – but you are welcome to read articles or chapters that are not contained in this section. Your response should begin with an MLA citation of your chosen article/chapter. It should give a brief summary of the text’s major arguments, as well as an evaluation/critique of these arguments. It may also take into consideration the date of the text’s publication and its institutional context (for example, many of the essays in the files were written during or immediately after the Second Golden Age itself, when the field of children’s literature was in its first stages of development).

Please upload your response to Canvas no later than 12noon on the Monday we meet. This will give me some time to read them in preparation for the day’s discussion.

Final Project: 20%

At the end of the term, you will complete a project on some topic that is relevant to the study of the Second Golden Age (or related topics such as literary periodization, the history of children’s literature studies, prizing/censorship, etc). This may take the form of a conference paper, or a teaching guide and/or syllabus, an annotated bibliography, or a digital display or podcast – the form is up to you. What is most important is that this project addresses an intellectual interest and can be further useful to your scholarly/professional development. At the end of the semester, each seminar participant will have an opportunity to present their project and receive constructive responses from the group.

TENTATIVE SCHEDULE

Part I: Orientation: History and Methodology

8 January: Course Introduction

15 January: Holiday – Martin Luther King Day

22 January: Methodologies

E.B. White, *Charlotte's Web*

Ted Underwood, Introduction to *Why Literary Periods Mattered*

Pierre Bordieu, "The Field of Cultural Production, or The Economic World Reversed"

Kenneth B. Kidd "Classic" (from *Keywords for Children's Literature*)

29 January: Children's Lit in the Academy and the British Second Golden Age

Susan Cooper, *The Dark is Rising*

Peter Hunt, "Children's Literature and Children's Literature Scholarship: The British Perspective"

Beverly Lyon Clark, "Chapter 3: Kiddie Lit in the Academy" from *Kiddie Lit: The Cultural Construction of Children's Literature in America*

Lucy Pearson, Introduction and Chapter 1 of *The Making of Modern British Children's Literature, Publishing and Criticism in the 1960s and 1970s*

Valerie Krips, Introduction to *The Presence of the Past: Memory, Heritage, and Childhood in Postwar Britain*

Part II: Forms and Genres

5 February: Picturebooks

Leonard Marcus, chapters from *Minders of Make Believe*

Ezra Jack Keats, *The Snowy Day*

Maurice Sendak, *Where The Wild Things Are*

Dr. Seuss, *The Cat in the Hat*

12 February: Fantasy

Introduction to Maria Sachiko Cecire, *Re-Enchanted: The Rise of Children's Fantasy Literature in the Twentieth Century*

Madeline L'Engle, *A Wrinkle in Time*

Robert C. O'Brien, *Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH*

19 February: Realism

Corinne Hirsch, "Perspectives on Literary Realism: A Review"

Catherine M. Mercier, "Realism" (from *Keywords for Children's Literature*)

Beverly Cleary, *Beezus and Ramona*

E.L. Konigsburg, *From the Mixed-Up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler*

Virginia Hamilton, *M.C. Higgins the Great*

26 February: Historical Fiction

Sara L. Schwebel, Introduction to *Child-Sized History: Fictions of the Past in US Classrooms*

Scott O'Dell, *Island of Blue Dolphins*

William H. Armstrong, *Souder*

4 March: YA

Michael Cart, part 1 of *Young Adult Literature: From Romance to Realism*

S.E. Hinton, *The Outsiders*

Elizabeth George Speare, *The Witch of Blackbird Pond*

[11 March: Spring Break]

Part III: Canon

18 March: Contesting the "All White World" of Children's Literature

Nancy Larrick, "The All White World of Children's Books"

Julius Lester, *To Be a Slave*

Mildred D. Taylor, *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*

25 March: Mirrors, Windows, and Sliding Glass Doors

Rudine Bishop Sims, "Mirrors, Windows, and Sliding Glass Doors"

Sydney Taylor, *All Of A Kind Family*

Jean Craighead George, *Julie of the Wolves*

Laurence Yep, *Dragonwings*

1 April: Gender and Sexuality

Kenneth B. Kidd, "Out and About In Children's Literature Studies"

Louise Fitzhugh, *Harriet the Spy*

Arnold Lobel, *Frog and Toad Are Friends*

Katherine Patterson, *The Bridge to Terabithia*

8 April: Canon: Forgotten Classics

Schwebel and Van Tuyl, Introduction to *Dust Off the Gold Medal: Rediscovering Children's Literature at the Newbery Centennial*

Zilpha Keatley Snyder, *The Egypt Game*

Judy Blume, *Otherwise Known As Sheila the Great*

Paul Zindel, *The Pigman*

Conclusion

15 April: Student Presentations

22 April: Student presentations