

Children's Literature

English 203
Spring 2020

TR 1:30 – 2:45
Sarah Brunet 132

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Office Hours: T 3-4, W 1:30-2:30 and by appt: Brunet 116

What is this course about?

This course offers a selective survey of literature for children. The course emphasizes the literary quality rather than the pedagogical value of literature for children. During the course of the semester we will focus on finding the cultural, historical, and literary contexts for the literature of childhood, exploring the relationship between what we know and what we think we know about children and their literature, and understanding a body of literature that is widely enjoyed but rarely respected.

Why is this course important?

This course is important because children are important—they are, after all, in the words of the song, the future. And, as Marah Gubar reminds us, they are also us—that is, “children and adults are fundamentally akin to one another,” even if they are also different from us in important ways (Gubar, “Kinship,” 299). And the literature that we associate with their lifestage—children’s literature—both helps define childhood and, in many ways, forms us as adults as well. We’ll talk more about this in class. It’s also important because it provides the opportunity to read closely and to write persuasively, two skills that are useful in a variety of contexts far beyond the confines of the course.

Textbook requirements

Lewis Carroll, [*Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*](#) & [*Through the Looking-Glass*](#)

J.M. Barrie, [*Peter and Wendy*](#)

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

Grace Lin, *Where the Mountain Meets the Moon*

Christopher Paul Curtis, *Bud Not Buddy*

Shaun Tan, *The Arrival*

Roald Dahl, *Matilda*

Gene Luen Yang, *American-Born Chinese*

J.K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*

Jacqueline Woodson, *Brown Girl Dreaming*

Course Assignments

1. Reading Journal

What is it? You will keep an informal record of your reading, preferably kept in writing (not electronically) in a bound journal. See [here](#) for the benefits of writing by hand.

What's the purpose of this assignment? The ungraded reading journal is an opportunity to gather your thoughts about the reading, ask questions, note historical facts, word definitions, and literary techniques, etc., that might be of interest. It will serve as a resource both for class discussion and for graded work. Note that we will also use this frequently for in-class writing.

2. Picture Book Response

What is it? You will write one brief but focused response to a passage from an award-winning picture book of your choice, articulating a thesis grounded in the text.

What's the purpose of this assignment? Response papers give you a chance to dig a little deeper into a text, to practice developing increasingly sophisticated arguments, and to try out ideas that you may use in longer papers. You'll also have the opportunity to think about how picture books work in a focused way.

3. Analytical Essay

What is it? You will write one analytical essay that develops an argument about two or more texts or other materials for the course.

What's the purpose of this assignment? Formal essays are the standard currency of academic discourse, so it's a good idea to master them. They demonstrate your analytical skill, your ability to focus and develop an argument and to support it with evidence, and to read a text closely. All of these are valuable skills beyond as well as within the classroom.

4. Persuasive Writing

What is it? You will write a letter or editorial defending the study of children's literature, drawing on the reading you've done and the analytical skills you've developed.

What's the purpose of this assignment? Persuasive writing is another valuable skill. You demonstrate your mastery of material by your ability to defend your choices to a skeptical audience, developing a claim with evidence and examples.

5. Research Paper

What is it? You will write one examination of a favorite text from childhood, or a book you've come to know through this course, analyzing it in the context of the author's other work, the genre of the work, the historical context, and/or other relevant materials, developing an argument about its importance and its meaning.

What's the purpose of this assignment? This assignment introduces you to the conventions of literary research, giving you the opportunity to delve more deeply into the history and story of one book that's important to you. You'll have the opportunity to collect, assess, and sift evidence and then, as with the other, shorter essays, to develop an argument and support it with evidence.

Tips for doing well in my class

Do the reading! Come to class prepared to discuss the reading for the day. (Keeping a reading journal will help with this.)

Come to office hours (or make an appointment to see me). Meeting with me informally will give you a chance to discuss any issues of concern, books that you are interested in, questions you have about the class, etc. I'm also happy to talk over paper ideas in my office.

Let me know about any issues you're having as soon as they arise. I'm flexible, but I can't read your mind.

Take advantage of the opportunity to **revise your written work**. Very few writers produce their best work with their first drafts.

Keep an open mind. If we're doing it right, this class should challenge some assumptions. Consider the possibility that "common sense" is neither, or that "what everyone knows" is not in fact universally true.

Course Calendar

Week	Date	Topic/Activities	Due on this date
January			
1	T 1/14	Course introduction: what is a child? What is children's literature?	Email questionnaire
	R 1/16	Picture books	Check out one picture book from the Caldecott list Read: Hunt, "Children's Literature" (on blackboard)
2	T 1/21	Picture books, continued	Read: Sanchez-Eppler, "Childhood," Gubar, "Kinship" (on blackboard)
	R 1/23	Defining childhood in the "classics" (mostly girls)	Begin <i>Alice's Adventures in Wonderland</i> (read through ch. 7; p 76)
3	T 1/28	Classics, continued	<i>Alice</i> , continued (read through ch. 3 of <i>Looking-Glass</i> ; p. 158) Paper #1 due (this is a change)
	R 1/20	Classics, continued	<i>Alice</i> , continued (finish the novel)

February			
4	T 2/4	Childhood & Classics, continued (mostly boys)	Begin <i>Peter and Wendy</i> Through ch. 10
	R 2/6	Classics, continued	Finish <i>Peter and Wendy</i>
5	T 2/11	Definitions and classics, continued (mostly animals, still gendered)	Begin <i>Charlotte's Web</i> Through ch. 11
	R 2/13		Finish <i>Charlotte's Web</i>
6	T 2/18	Whose stories are these? Home (?) and Away	Begin <i>Bud Not Buddy</i> Through ch. 11 Paper #2 due
	R 2/20		Finish <i>Bud Not Buddy</i>
7	T 2/25	Children and parents	Begin <i>Where the Mountain Meets the Moon</i> through ch. 16
	R 2/27		Continue <i>Where the Mountain Meets the Moon</i> through ch. 32
March			
8	T 3/2		Finish <i>Where the Mountain Meets the Moon</i>
	R 3/4	Parents and children	Read <i>The Arrival</i>
9	T 3/10	SPRING BREAK	
	R 3/12	SPRING BREAK	Note changes below!!
10	T 3/17	EXTENDED BREAK	
	R 3/19	EXTENDED BREAK	Details will be conveyed weekly
11	T	The places children go: schools, libraries,	Library research orientation (in

	3/24	and everywhere else...	Zoom class); bring book ideas
	R 3/26	Magical school	Begin <i>Harry Potter & the Sorcerer's Stone</i>
12	T 3/31		Continue Harry Potter
April			
	R 4/2		Proposal and annotated bibliography due; small group work on paper #3 (see assignment sheet) Continue Harry Potter
13	T 4/7		Finish <i>Harry Potter</i>
	R 4/9		Begin <i>Brown Girl Dreaming</i>
14	T 4/14	Becoming a reader, and a writer	Major project (paper #3) due Continue <i>Brown Girl Dreaming</i>
	R 4/16		Continue <i>Brown Girl Dreaming</i>
15	T 4/21		Finish <i>Brown Girl Dreaming</i>
	R 4/23		Workshop and review—final Zoom session

PORTFOLIOS WITH ALL REVISED WORK ARE DUE AT THE TIME OF THE FINAL EXAM, S 5/2 12 pm

What are the course policies?

Student responsibilities:

- Stay engaged
- Complete the work
- Have an open mind
- Take notes
- Assume good intentions
- Keep a positive mindset
- Be accepting, driven, helpful, and attentive
- Be realistic, respectful, and easy to get along with
- Talk things through
- Get a second opinion
- Get feedback
- Practice effective self-care (sleep, eat, etc.)
- Listen to peers

Instructor responsibilities:

- Be consistent
- Explain
- Give instructions
- Provide examples
- Use visuals when appropriate
- Be clear about expectations
- Provide interesting course materials
- Make course materials accessible, challenging, understandable
- Work to mitigate bias in course materials
- Provide opportunities for improvement
- Be understanding

Late policy:

All students have one “get out of jail free” card—if you need extra time for an assignment, you may have it, no questions asked, once in a semester. Please don’t ask me to judge the validity of your excuse; simply let me know you’ll be late and tell me when to expect your work.

Attendance policy:

Class proceeds by discussion, and if you’re not in class, you miss out on that. If you miss a class, I’m likely to reach out to see if you’re ok; you’re responsible for keeping up with the material, however.

Academic Integrity.

Plagiarism is using another’s words or thoughts without attribution. In an internet age it is particularly difficult to avoid—we all end up cutting and pasting, and losing track of where we found what. It is critically important, however, to give credit where it is due—to acknowledge our influences, our borrowings, our debts. Doing so is a way of honoring our intellectual mentors (even those we’ve never met) and becoming part of an intellectual tradition. If you are in doubt as to whether you should cite something, ask me, ask a librarian, or just cite it. You’ll rarely go wrong that way. If I see something in a paper that should have been cited, or that seems as if it might be borrowed, I’ll discuss it with you first. If we can’t come to an agreement about the source, or the problem persists, I will involve the Honor Council at that point.

Course Outcomes

Successful students in this class will be able to:

- understand something of the history and present-day status of children’s literature in relation to a variety of institutions (familial, educational, economic, religious, etc.);
- analyze a variety of genres of children’s literature in relation to institutions (as listed above), interpretive frameworks, and/or other literature;
- respect and understand the literature, our own analysis of it, and the opinions of others;
- apply the knowledge and skills developed in the classroom in new situations, and frame new questions about the material.

If you experience difficulties in this course, do not hesitate to consult with me. There are also other resources that can support you in a variety of ways.

Academic Skills Center (<http://asc.richmond.edu>, 289-8626 or 289-8956): Assists students in assessing their academic strengths and weaknesses; honing their academic skills through teaching effective test preparation, critical reading and thinking, information conceptualization, concentration, and related techniques; working on specific subject areas (e.g., calculus, chemistry, accounting, etc.); and encouraging campus and community involvement. Hours at the Center are: **Sunday through Wednesday 3:00-9:00 p.m. and Thursday 3:00-7:00 p.m. On-call tutors are also available.**

Boatwright Library Research Librarians (<http://library.richmond.edu/help/ask/> or 289-8876): Research librarians assist students with identifying and locating resources for class assignments, research papers and other course projects. Librarians also provide research support for students and can respond to questions about evaluating and citing sources. Students can email, text or IM or schedule a personal research appointment to meet with a librarian in his/her office on the first floor Research and Collaborative Study area.

Career Services (<http://careerservices.richmond.edu/> or 289-8547): Can assist you in exploring your interests and abilities, choosing a major or course of study, connecting with internships and jobs, and investigating graduate and professional school options. We encourage you to schedule an appointment with a career advisor early in your time at UR.

Counseling and Psychological Services (<http://wellness.richmond.edu/offices/caps/> or 289-8119): Assists currently enrolled, full-time, degree-seeking students in improving their mental health and well-being, and in handling challenges that may impede their growth and development. Services include brief consultations, short-term counseling and psychotherapy, skills-building classes, crisis intervention, psychiatric consultation, and related services.

Disability Services (<https://disability.richmond.edu/students/index.html> or 289.8032) The Office of Disability Services works to ensure that qualified students with a disability (whether incoming or current) are provided with reasonable accommodations that enable that student to participate fully in activities, programs, services and benefits provided to all students. Please let your professors know as soon as possible if you have an accommodation that requires academic coordination and planning.

Speech Center (<http://speech.richmond.edu> or 289-6409): Assists with preparation and practice in the pursuit of excellence in public expression. Recording, playback, coaching and critique sessions offered by teams of student consultants trained to assist in developing ideas, arranging key points for more effective organization, improving style and delivery, and handling multimedia aids for individual and group presentations.

Writing Center (<http://writing.richmond.edu> or 289-8263): Assists writers at all levels of experience, across all majors. Students can schedule appointments with trained writing consultants who offer friendly critiques of written work.
