Spring 1-15-1997

ENG 3405-001: Children's Literature

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English 3405.001  Children's Literature Spring 1997  
Dr. Carol Stevens  
Office: 315 J Coleman Hall  
Hours:  T and Th 11-12 and 5-5:30,  W 10-12, and by appt.  
Phone:  581-6970 (leave a message if I'm not there.)  

Course description and objectives: An upper-level literature course in which we will read and discuss picture books, poetry, oral literature (including myths, legends, folk-tales, fables), traditional and contemporary fiction with a view toward developing a variety of perspectives literary, psychological, and social/cultural and expanding our repertoire of works for children to which we are capable of responding as adult readers. This is a content- rather than methods-oriented course. Students will read the equivalent of up to 100 pages of new material per day. (That's about 1-2 children's books per week, just to keep things in perspective.) Lively, intelligent discussion is essential.  

Prerequisites: Successful completion of English 1001C and 1002C or the equivalents, and sophomore standing.  

Texts: Saltzman, ed. The Riverside Anthology of Children's Literature, 6th ed.  
Coerr, Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes.  
Jacques, Redwall.  
Keene, The Secret of the Old Clock.  
Lowry, The Giver.  
Tolkien, The Hobbit.  

Grading: Unless otherwise specified in class, your grading will be based upon:  
two papers on assigned topics, approximately 5-6 pages apiece, worth 30 points each  
A comprehensive mid-term exam worth 25 points  
A final exam worth 30 points  
A group presentation and study guide worth 15 points  
Shorter written work which may include quizzes, attendance, substantive participation worth 20 points  
Total 150 points--135-150 points = A, 120-134 = B,  
105 - 119 = C, 90 - 104 = D, below 90 = F  

PLEASE NOTE: In order to receive a passing grade, you must complete all major assignments. Each assignment does something specific, and if you have not completed each, you have not completed the course.
THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THIS COURSE:

Some basic assumptions of the course:
Books for children always reflect the society that produces them.
Books for children have always been agents for transmitting cultural values, customs, etc.
"Children's books" as a separate classification are a function of publishing and marketing concerns. The classification "children's books" does not necessarily reflect either what children read or what writers write.

Some ground rules for class discussion:
We agree to share our thoughts and experiences freely.
When someone else is speaking, we agree to listen.
We may not necessarily agree with a person, but we will respect that person's right to their own thoughts and experiences.
We recognize that each of us speaks out of our own experiences, and that what we think is sometimes based on incomplete or mistaken information. Each of us will probably be wrong about some things, and misinformed about some others. We accept responsibility for obtaining the most accurate and complete information we can and revising our judgments when necessary.
We accept responsibility for teaching each other.
We agree to familiarize ourselves with basic reference sources in the field of children's literature and to use them carefully both in discussion and in writing.
We agree to read carefully, think critically, and discuss thoughtfully, and to pass our insights on to others.
We agree that if any member of the class wishes to contribute something to discussion, but wishes it to remain within the group, it will.

Responsibilities and policies:
As stated above, you must turn in ALL assigned writing to pass the course, as well as accumulating sufficient point totals.

Your written work needs to be available as specified on the syllabus or assignment sheet. Late papers will be penalized.

Class discussion and attendance points cannot be made up. Nor can reading quizzes or discussion-prep writing, as the sole purpose of these is to assure readiness for the discussion that follows. If you're not here for the discussion, the quiz is pointless.

Plagiarism—using the thoughts or words of another without giving proper credit—is a serious offense. Any plagiarizing or other academic dishonesty will result in an F for the assignment, will most likely result in an F for the course, and will be reported to Judicial Board. If you have not yet learned what plagiarism and academic dishonesty are, learn at once.
Papers must be typed, double-spaced, according to MLA style. If you do not know MLA Style, consult the Writing Center or a recent composition handbook. You must submit TWO copies of each paper on the day that it is due, one for me to mark and return to you and one for me to keep. In addition, for your own protection, you should keep a copy for your own records until the graded copy is returned to you. Either additional printouts if you are using a computer, or photocopies if you type, are acceptable.

Course assignments:

You will receive an outline of assignments and due dates. Please keep up with it unless otherwise instructed, even if we are discussing something different in class.

Students with disabilities:

If you have a documented disability and wish to receive academic accommodation, please contact the coordinator of disability services (581-6583) as soon as possible.

Please Note: Every effort has been made to spell policies out clearly. Some changes will, of course, occur in the normal course of the semester. An announcement in class will be considered sufficient notice of such changes. Any additional handouts you receive should be considered part of this policy statement. Remaining in the course after these policies have been discussed and clarified signals that you have accepted them and agree to abide by them.
This syllabus is divided roughly into three areas:
1. Realistic fiction, both older and more recent
2. Fantasy, again including both older and more recent works
3. What might be termed "traditional" children's literature, such as folk and fairy tales, fables, myths, and heroic legends

You are receiving the syllabus covering the first area today, and will receive the others a week or so before we begin the areas they cover.

Picture books will, of course, be considered according to the categories into which they fit. Any picture book presented in class becomes part of the syllabus, and you are responsible for including it in your notes and being able to discuss it.

QUIZZES will, as a rule, be unannounced, may vary in format from identification to short essay, and may sometimes be replaced by short in- or out-of-class essays due the same day as the reading.

DISCUSSION questions and comments must be relevant and substantive, i.e. they must be about the reading and connections you are making with it. After the first two days, discussion of procedural matters will be limited to the final 5-10 minutes of the class period. If you need help with your paper, make an appointment with me a reasonable time before the paper is due. If you have a question about YOUR paper or grade, re-read your work and my comments on it and then make an appointment with me. It's not fair to other class members to make them sit through your conference.

STUDY GROUPS will be assigned novels. Everyone in the class will read the novel, but the study group will bear responsibility for preparing a study guide to distribute to the class and for presenting a 20-minute panel discussion on one major topic related to the book. You will receive at least one study guide to use as a model. Your success will be evaluated in terms of how well you promote understanding of the novel and how well you generate lively, intelligent discussion. Study groups will begin their presentations AFTER we have discussed the first two assigned novels, to allow time for preparation.

Read the syllabus CAREFULLY and PAY ATTENTION to modifications. Under NO circumstances will "I read the wrong material" be acceptable as an excuse!

Jan. 14 Introductions, policies, syllabus, brief in-class writing for next time: in Riverside Anthology, read "Trade and Plumb-Cake Forever, pp. 1-9" and pay particular attention to where our ideas of childhood come from.

Jan. 16 Discuss reading; clarify our ideas (and possibly understand our stereotypes) of children and children's
literature). Introduce realistic and genre fiction.

for next time: Read Secret of the Old Clock. Do not skip the pictures, publisher’s note, or Sara Paretsky’s introductory essay, "Keeping Nancy Drew Alive". Read the edition issued to class, not a later version.

A question to get you started: For many people, a "Nancy Drew" or "Hardy Boys" mystery defines the children's book. To what extent is that true for you? Why?

Jan. 21 Secret of the Old Clock and assign study groups

Jan. 23 Secret of the Old Clock and introduce the boys’ adventure book. Assign study groups: Little Women will be first.

For next time, in Classics of Children’s Literature, read Treasure Island, the prefatory material on the novel, "To the Hesitating Purchaser," and Parts One and Two.

Jan. 28 Treasure Island; for next time, Parts Three and Four.

Jan. 30 Treasure Island and assignment of first paper topic; for next time, Parts Five and Six.

NOTE: Little Women study group: Your study guide will be due for distribution at the next class meeting.

Feb. 4 Conclude discussion of Treasure Island. Introduce the historical novel of family life.

for next time: in Classics of Children’s Literature, read Little Women, the biographical material on Louisa May Alcott through Chapter 12, "Camp Laurence."

Feb. 6 Little Women, beginning with first study group’s panel presentation.

For next time: finish reading Little Women. Question: What’s missing?

NOTE: Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes study group: Your study guide will be due at the next class meeting.

Feb. 11 conclude discussion of Little Women and introduce problem novel. For next time, read Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes.

Feb. 13 Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes, beginning with 20-minute study group’s panel

for next time: work on your paper and get ahead on your reading. We’ll consider other categories of realistic fiction and begin considering the nature of fantasy.

NOTE: King of the Golden River study group, your guide is due next class meeting.

Feb. 18 Consideration of picture books which fall into the "realistic fiction" category regardless of style of illustration

for next class meeting, in Classics of Children’s Literature, read King of the Golden River, including intro. material.
February 20  Introduction to fantasy literature in general and Ruskin in particular. Study group discussion of *King of the Golden River*. Some consideration of its relationship to folk tale, which we will consider in Part 3 of this course. Please note: As we will be spending only one day on *King of the Golden River*, the *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* study guide is due today. For next week, have read, in *CL, Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. Also, please note that your papers are due Tuesday, though from what I've seen, folks are in pretty good shape for them. Remember that, with the exception of scheduled meetings at 1:00 and 2:00, I will be in all day to read drafts of papers. (Having me read a draft of your paper is optional, but often helpful.)

February 25  First papers due. Study group on *Alice in Wonderland*. Lecture and class discussion, and, I hope, some comic relief after the stress of completing your first papers. Begin prep for mid-term. (The two are NOT necessarily mutually exclusive.)

February 27. Continue discussion of *Alice*. Possible paragraph on a film version. Continue prep for mid-term. Mid-term may include all material from reading, class, and small-group discussion from the beginning of the semester to the present, and will incorporate short-answer and essay questions. Study Guide Chapters 1-10 of *The Hobbit* due next time.

March 4  Mid-term exam. Study group for *The Hobbit*, your study guide for Chapters 1 through 10 of *The Hobbit* will be due on the same day as the mid-term exam, so be alert and read ahead. Because of the length of the books, the study guide will be divided into two parts, but the class assignments will deal with the book in thirds. So the CLASS assignment is Chapters 1 through 7. This is a long and dense book, with many unfamiliar character and place names, so you may wish to make detailed notes for yourself.

March 6  *The Hobbit*, including maps and prefatory material through Chapter 7. Study group, be ready with the second half of the study guide for next time, and have your group prepared and ready to go at the beginning of class. (We WILL be relying on you to help with the discussion of this book the second day as well as the first. For next time, continue with your reading through the end of Chapter 14.

March 11 Study group panel on *The Hobbit*, and second half of study guide ready for distribution. Discuss Tolkien's contribution to 20th century fantasy. For next time, finish reading *The Hobbit*. *Redwall* study group, the first half of your study guide is due next time. We may, on Mar. 13, have a trivia contest (Bonus point certificates for the winners?) and you get to play "Stump the Teacher," so think of all the obscure trivia questions about *The Hobbit* you can, and write them down (WITH the answers) so you don't forget them.
March 13 Conclude discussion of Tolkien's work. Presentation of second paper assignment. *Redwall* study group, your study guide for the second half of the novel (through p. 180) is due next time. EVERYONE have the first half of *Redwall* completed for Mar. 25. While it is as lengthy as *The Hobbit*, I think you will find it easier and more accessible reading.

March 18 and 20 Spring break. Enjoy, but keep up with reading and work on your second paper. *Redwall* is next, and we will only be spending two days on it, in spite of the fact that the page length is greater than that of *The Hobbit*, for the reason I mention above. For next time: *Redwall*, pp. 1-180.

March 25 *Redwall* study group presentation, second half of study guide, and class discussion of first half of novel. For next time, *Redwall* pp. 181 to the end. *The Giver* study group: first half of your study guide is due next time.

March 27 Conclude discussion of *Redwall*. Distribute Study Guide on *The Giver*. For next class meeting, read *The Giver* through p. 110, just to the break below the middle of the page.

April 1 Study group presentation on *The Giver*, and distribution of second half of study guide. Discussion of the relationship between the "dark fantasy" and the realistic problem novel. For next time, finish *The Giver*.