

AMS 370/ENG 324 (Unique # 30800/35330)  
Children's Literature and American Culture Spring, 2013  
Professor Julia Mickenberg



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Office Hours: Mondays 1:00-2:00 and Tuesdays 9:00-11:00

This course will trace the history of American childhood through children's literature. Its larger aims are threefold: First, it will use children's literature as a lens for understanding American culture and American cultural history more generally. Second, by considering children's literature from an interdisciplinary perspective, students will gain insights into the scholarly practices that characterize American Studies as a discipline, and experience applying those practices. Finally, it will teach students to research, draw upon literary criticism and other scholarship, and write well. It is easy to take children's literature for granted: we've all read it, and, indeed, we all read it as kids. What could be simpler, more obvious, or less worthy of critical examination? It is my hope that after this class a children's book will never be simply a children's book but, rather, a window into American culture. This course will offer tools and a framework for seeing through that window.

Readings:

Ann Scott MacLeod, *American Childhood: Essays on Children's Literature of the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*  
Steve Mintz, *Huck's Raft: A History of American Childhood*  
Louisa May Alcott, *Little Women* (Norton Critical Edition)  
Dr. Seuss, *The Cat in the Hat*  
Maurice Sendak, *Where the Wild Things Are*  
Louise Fitzhugh, *Harriet the Spy*  
Alice Childress, *A Hero Ain't Nothin' But a Sandwich*  
Gene Luen Yang, *American Born Chinese*

Additional readings available through blackboard or in packet

Recommended web resources:

1. Resources accompanying the *Norton Anthology of Children's Literature*

<http://www2.wwnorton.com/college/english/nacl//links/scholarly.html>

2. Nineteenth Century American Children and What They Read

<http://www.merrycoz.org/kids.htm>

Course requirements:

1. Attendance, active and informed participation in class discussions, Missing more than two classes is likely to affect your grade in the course

2. Informal and/or short pieces of writing as assigned (in class or out of class)

3. Three formal papers:

a) Paper 1: Essay on the ways in which understandings of childhood evolved from the late 17<sup>th</sup> century to the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, using three assigned literary texts, and historical background from the readings (you may do further research if it seems fruitful but it is not necessary that you do so). 4-6 pages

b) Paper 2: Essay on *Little Women* and American girlhood, using the book, background on historical context, as well as at least one piece of literary criticism. 4-6 pages.

c) Paper 3: Children's literature in contemporary American Culture. Choose a text that is currently popular with American children (it doesn't have to be recently written, just currently read) and write a 7-10 page essay that discusses the cultural significance of this text. Your paper should include textual analysis and should also incorporate literary criticism, historical research related to the text's original production and a discussion of its relation to contemporary American culture. Possible research avenues are:

relationship between an author's biography and his or her literary production; controversies the text has generated; spin-offs in popular culture (films, toys, games, children's clothing, etc.) and their relationship to the original text; the adult-child crossover phenomenon; and social or political issues that are reflected or commented upon within the text. As per the subject of this class, you should make an argument about what this text—and its reception—tells us about childhood at a given historical moment.

4. Short presentation (approximately 5 minutes) and 1-page summary of criticism or other material related to one of the books (sign up at the beginning of the semester for a slot), probably done in teams of two (write the summary yourself). If there is not criticism on this particular book, you can find material on the author, the genre, or related

subjects. For example, if you can't find an article on *A Hero Ain't Nothin' But a Sandwich* (and probably you can) you might look for articles on Alice Childress, on children's literature in the 1970s, race and children's literature, the "problem novel," etc. You'll want to check with other teams presenting on the same book to make sure you haven't selected the same piece of criticism. Also, see me if you're having problems finding something.

#### 5. Presentation on final research paper

Grading:

Paper 1: 20%

Paper 2: 25%

Paper 3: 30%

Participation and class performance (includes attendance, in-class participation, informal/short writing, criticism summary, presentations, and peer review): 25%

#### Additional Policies and Procedures

*Flags:*

This course carries the flag for *Cultural Diversity* in the United States. Cultural Diversity courses are designed to increase your familiarity with the variety and richness of the American cultural experience. You should therefore expect a substantial portion of your grade to come from assignments covering the practices, beliefs, and histories of at least one U.S. cultural group that has experienced persistent marginalization.

This course carries the *Independent Inquiry* flag. Independent Inquiry courses are designed to engage you in the process of inquiry over the course of a semester, providing you with the opportunity for independent investigation of a question, problem, or project related to your major. You should therefore expect a substantial portion of your grade to come from the independent investigation and presentation of your own work.

This course carries the *Writing* Flag. Writing Flag courses are designed to give students experience with writing in an academic discipline. In this class, you can expect to write regularly during the semester, complete substantial writing projects, and receive feedback from your instructor to help you improve your writing. You will also have the opportunity to revise one or more assignments, and you may be asked to read and discuss your peers' work. You should therefore expect a substantial portion of your grade to come from your written work. Writing Flag classes meet the Core Communications objectives of Critical Thinking, Communication, Teamwork, and Personal Responsibility, established by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board.

#### **Religious Holy Days**

By UT Austin policy, you must notify me of your pending absence at least fourteen days prior to the date of observance of a religious holy day. If you must miss a class, an examination, a work assignment, or a project in order to observe a religious holy day, I will give you an opportunity to complete the missed work within a reasonable time after the absence.

#### **University of Texas Honor Code**

The core values of The University of Texas at Austin are learning, discovery, freedom, leadership, individual opportunity, and responsibility. Each member of the university is expected to uphold these values through integrity, honesty, trust, fairness, and respect toward peers and community.

### **Use of E-mail for Official Correspondence to Students**

- All students should become familiar with the University's official e-mail student notification policy. It is the student's responsibility to keep the University informed as to changes in his or her e-mail address. Students are expected to check e-mail on a frequent and regular basis in order to stay current with University-related communications, recognizing that certain communications may be time-critical. It is recommended that e-mail be checked daily, but at a minimum, twice per week. The complete text of this policy and instructions for updating your e-mail address are available at <http://www.utexas.edu/its/help/utmail/1564>.

### **Documented Disability Statement**

Any student with a documented disability who requires academic accommodations should contact Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) at (512) 471-6259 (voice) or 1-866-329-3986 (video phone). Faculty are not required to provide accommodations without an official accommodation letter from SSD. *(Note to Faculty: Details of a student's disability are confidential. Faculty should not ask questions related to a student's condition or diagnosis when receiving an official accommodation letter.)*

- Please notify me as quickly as possible if the material being presented in class is not accessible (e.g., instructional videos need captioning, course packets are not readable for proper alternative text conversion, etc.).
- Please notify me as early in the semester as possible if disability-related accommodations for field trips are required. Advanced notice will permit the arrangement of accommodations on the given day (e.g., transportation, site accessibility, etc.).
- Contact Services for Students with Disabilities at 471-6259 (voice) or 1-866-329-3986 (video phone) or reference SSD's website for more disability-related information: [http://www.utexas.edu/diversity/ddce/ssd/for\\_cstudents.php](http://www.utexas.edu/diversity/ddce/ssd/for_cstudents.php)

### **Behavior Concerns Advice Line (BCAL)**

If you are worried about someone who is acting differently, you may use the Behavior Concerns Advice Line to discuss by phone your concerns about another individual's behavior. This service is provided through a partnership among the Office of the Dean of Students, the Counseling and Mental Health Center (CMHC), the Employee Assistance Program (EAP), and The University of Texas Police Department (UTPD). Call 512-232-5050 or visit <http://www.utexas.edu/safety/bcal>.

### **Q drop Policy**

The State of Texas has enacted a law that limits the number of course drops for academic reasons to six (6). As stated in Senate Bill 1231:

“Beginning with the fall 2007 academic term, an institution of higher education may not permit an undergraduate student a total of more than six dropped courses, including any course a transfer student has dropped at another institution of higher education, unless the student shows good cause for dropping more than that number.”

Schedule (subject to change):

## **UNIT 1: ORIGINS OF AMERICAN CHILDREN'S LITERATURE AND THE EVOLUTION OF CHILDHOOD**

Introductions—Childhood and Children's Literature

Th. August 27: Introduction

Ts Sept. 1 Religion, Morality, and Colonial Childhood

- *New England Primer* (packet/Canvas)

- Mintz, "Children of the Covenant"

or

Courtney Weikle-Mills, "My Book and Heart Shall Never Part': Reading, Printing, and Circulation in the *New England Primer*." From *The Oxford Handbook of Children's Literature* (packet/Canvas)

Due: 1/2 to 1 page informal writing: How does the chapter in Mintz or the essay by Weikle-Mills help us understand the *New England Primer*? Include a quote from each.

Th, Sept. 3 Colonial America and Early Children's Literature

Reading:

- Mintz, "Red, White, and Black in Colonial America"

- John Bunyan, *Pilgrim's Progress*: pictorial version on Canvas, and text version in *Little Women*, Norton critical edition, 447-465

- James Janeway, *A Token for Children* (packet/Canvas)

Due: Pick out a passage from one of the primary texts to discuss in class

T. Sept. 8 The Enlightenment and Reading for Fun (a new concept!)

Reading due:

- Mintz, "Sons and Daughters of Liberty"

- John Locke, selections t.b.a. from *Some Thoughts Concerning the Education of Children* <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/1692locke-education.html>

- John Newbery, from *A Pretty Little Pocket Book* (packet)

For discussion in class: How do you see Locke's ideas reflected in Newbery's publication?

Th. Sept. 10 The Romantic Child



Reading due:

•Jean Jacques Rousseau, selections t.b.a. from *Emile*  
<http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/5427>

William Wordsworth, "Ode" <http://www.bartleby.com/101/536.html> (be prepared to discuss in class, especially in relation to Locke and Rousseau)

Informal writing due (about a page): How did Locke and/or Rousseau imagine children? What kind of citizen did they aim to create through education, and how?

Ts. Sept 15: Nineteenth Century American Children

Reading due:

1. MacLeod, "Images: American Children in the Early Nineteenth Century" 127-139;  
OR---"The Children of Children's Literature in the Nineteenth Century," pp. 143-156

2. Mintz, "Inventing the Middle-Class Child."

3. Francis Wayland, "Case of Conviction" (1831)  
<http://www.merrycoz.org/articles/WAYLAND.HTM>

4. Choose one other 19<sup>th</sup>-century works about children (listed under "19<sup>th</sup> Century Articles About Children" <http://www.merrycoz.org/CHILDREN.HTM>

Writing due:

One-page summary of the 19<sup>th</sup> century article you chose, linking it to the historical context provided in articles by Mintz and MacLeod

Th., Sept. 19 Nineteenth Century Children and What They Read

Reading Due:

1. MacLeod, "Children's Literature for a New Nation, 1820-1860"

2. Reading due: Maria Edgeworth, "The Purple Jar." In *Little Women*, Norton Critical Edition, 466-470

3. Choose a piece from two or three different magazines found on the "Nineteenth-Century American Children and What They Read" website and also read background on each of the magazines you choose. <http://www.merrycoz.org/kids.htm>

Informal writing due: Note the selections you read (just write down the author, title, date, and source). Then, summarize one of those pieces, and find one or two points of comparison with an eighteenth or seventeenth-century story that we read earlier.

Monday, September 21: Paper 1 due, 3:00 pm

Ts. Sept. 22 Workshops/conferences

Th. Sept. 24 Louisa May Alcott, American Girlhood, and *Little Women*

Reading due:

- MacLeod: "American Girlhood in the Nineteenth Century: Caddie Woodlawn's Sisters" pp. 3-29
- Louisa May Alcott, "Recollections of My Childhood", in *LW*, NCE, 428-433
- Recommended: Mintz, Chapter 9, "Children Under the Magnifying Glass"

Friday, September 25, 12:00 pm: Revised paper #1 due

Ts. Sept. 29 *Little Women*, cont'd

Reading due: *Little Women*, Book I, through chapter X

Th. Oct. 2 *Little Women*

Reading due: *Little Women*. Finish Book I

T. Oct 6 *Little Women*

Reading due: *Little Women*, Part II, Chapters I-XII ("Heartache")

Th. Oct. 8 *Little Women* (and the "Bad Boy" tradition)

Reading due: Have *Little Women* finished

Ann Scott MacLeod, "American Boys" (p. 69-83)

T. Oct. 13 Critical Approaches to *Little Women*

Reading due (all read Vincent, you'll also choose one other piece to read carefully and summarize, while skimming other pieces):

- Elizabeth Vincent, "Subversive Miss Alcott" *LW* NCE, pp. 554-556
- Catharine R. Stimpson, "Reading for Love: Canons, Paracanons, and Whistling Jo March" *LW* NCE 584-599
- Elizabeth Keyser, "Portrait(s) of the Artist: *Little Women*" 600-623
- Barbara Sicherman, "Reading *Little Women*: The Many Lives of a Text" *LW* NCE 632-657

Writing due: 1 page summary of Stimpson, Keyser, or Sicherman's argument.

Th. Oct. 15 Children's literature and children's book publishing in the Twentieth Century

\*\*Class meets at Blanton Library for Natalie Frank exhibition

### **Part III: Case Studies in Twentieth-Century Children's Literature**

Monday, October 19 Paper due

T. Oct 20: World War II, the Baby Boom, and Children's Culture

- Mintz, "In Pursuit of the Perfect Childhood"
- Jack Zipes, "Breaking the Disney Spell" (Canvas)

Be prepared to discuss your favorite Disney fairy tale movie

Critical perspectives on Disney:

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Th. Oct 22

Reading Due:

Doctor Seuss, *The Cat in the Hat*

Louis Menand "Cat People: What Dr. Seuss Really Taught Us." *New Yorker*  
<http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2002/12/23/cat-people>

- Henry Jenkins "No Matter How Small: The Democratic Imagination of Dr. Seuss" (Canvas)

Critical perspectives on Disney

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T. Oct 27

Wild Things and Childhood Terror

Reading due:

*Where the Wild Things Are*

Moebius, "Introduction to Picture Book Codes" (Canvas)

Perspectives on Sendak and *Where the Wild Things Are*:

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Th. Oct. 29. Cold War Childhood and Childhood Innocence

Begin reading *Harriet the Spy*

- Mintz, "Youthquake"

MacLeod, "Girls' Novels in Post- World War II America"

Recommended:

- MacLeod, "Censorship and Children's Literature"

Discussion of final papers

T. Nov. 3

More on Research papers; *Harriet the Spy*, and post-war youth

Reading due:

Continue *Harriet the Spy*

- MacLeod, "The Transformation of Childhood in Twentieth-Century Children's Literature"

Robin Bernstein, "The Queerness of *Harriet the Spy*" (Canvas)

*Harriet the Spy*

Th. Nov. 5

Finish *Harriet the Spy*

Critical perspectives on Louise Fitzhugh, *Harriet the Spy* or related topic

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T. Nov.10

Reading due:

- Mintz, "Parental Panics and the Reshaping of Childhood"

- MacLeod, "Ice Axes: Robert Cormier and the Adolescent Novel"

*A Hero Ain't Nothin' But a Sandwich* (pages t.b.a.)

Th. Nov. 12

Reading due:

Finish *A Hero Ain't Nothin' But a Sandwich* (pages t.b.a.)

Critical perspectives on Alice Childress *A Hero Ain't Nothin' But a Sandwich*, or 1970s children's literature

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T. Nov. 17

Proposal and annotated bibliography due

One-page overview of social and historical context

Th. Nov. 19

Reading due: Reading due: *American Born Chinese*

Scott McCloud, "The Vocabulary of Comics." From *Understanding Comics*  
(Canvas/packet)

T. Nov. 24

*American Born Chinese*

Lan Dong, "Reimagining the Monkey King in Comics: Gene Luen Yang's *American Born Chinese*" (blackboard)

Critical perspectives on *American Born Chinese* or graphic novels

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Th. November 26

THANKSGIVING

Ts. Dec. 1

Review of Course material/Presentations

Th. December 3

Presentations

Friday, December 4

Final paper due