

Syllabus - Spring 2008

The syllabus is organized into 14 units. We will cover one unit per week.

Harry Potter series

We will read, examine, and discuss all seven books in the Harry Potter series (*Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*). In addition to discussing its immense popularity, we will look at the values expressed through the books, the development of the characters and plot, speculate on what's next and what we would like (or would have liked to see happen), and basically have a good time.

Unit 1: The Classics

Granted most of the books we read this semester have stood and will stand the test of time, but these classics are a good place to start. With two notable exceptions, the scope is narrowed somewhat here, as we will mostly look at classic books where animals are the lead or are central characters. From pigs to spiders to grocery store smiling dogs to rabbits to bears to mice, cats, dogs, authors have used animals to impart values about what really matters—love, friendship, loyalty, creativity, desire, morality and much more. These are stories that get told over and over. We will also examine the lasting stories that have stayed with each of us and examine the nature and roots of stories themselves

Unit 2: Religion and Spirituality, Part 1

Writers have been trying to explain religion and religious beliefs and spirituality for years in children's books. This unit will focus primarily on Christianity, theism, and spirituality. Other religious and wisdom traditions and stories will be explored in the next unit. There will also be some introduction to the history and origins of religion and religious holiday symbols as well as an opportunity to explore more about poetry. Basic childhood development will also be covered here.

Unit 3: Religion and Spirituality Part 2—Wisdom from Around the World

From Judaism to Buddhism to Islam to Hinduism to folktales from all over the planet, children's literature expanse is not limited to Christianity. We will focus on a wide variety of non-Christian beliefs through children's books and look at the commonalities and differences among the beliefs of people around the world. This will also be our first

opportunity to put in to concrete, practical use some of the reading and to critique books on religion around the world.

Unit 4: Death and Loss

Some believe that we should shield children from loss and dying as best we can. Others would argue that life is about loss and facing death and children and youth have no immunity. The books here are remarkable and deal with the themes of death and loss in compelling, admirable ways. We will also look at, to many's surprise, at the work of an author who most would not normally connect with loss as a theme but who is more viewed with producing favorite books of young boys. There will also be an opportunity to compare the products when children's books are made into movies or to interview others about the children's books in their lives.

Unit 5: Family

Family means many different things to different people and it is widely represented in children's books. We will explore some of the ways the concept of family is depicted in children's books, from humor to anger to sadness. From Detroit to ducks to Alaska to hitchhikers, families and their ties will be in great evidence. We will also look at some thought-provoking ideas about what stories authors may tell and begin to develop a more critical, diverse eye into the way books are written.

Unit 6: Girls, etc.

Powerful women. Questioning girls. First love. Figuring out life. We will read about the lives of women of all ages and their experiences as female in these incredible books. We will read about dragon slayers and menstruation and first love and role models. We will also explore the writings of an artist turn writer. We will also look at sexism and oppression from a variety of options.

Unit 7: Boys, etc.

Adventure? Absolutely. Humor? It's here too. Identity? Tough decisions? Love? While it is often noted that boys tend to read books about adventure and humor and girls tend to read more relationship oriented books, these books will cover the wide range of outstanding literature written about the life of boys and boys becoming men. From the backdrops of Thoreau to Los Angeles to the Canadian wilderness to school, the lives of boys of all ages are clearly more complex than many initially think. We will also have the opportunity to look either at the lives and pressures on boys or examine books for very young children.

Reading Week: March 24-28

Unit 8: Social Issues and Ethics

Some of the best books for children deal with a wide variety of issues—honor and telling the truth, fitting in and stereotypes, dealing with what is right and what is wrong, and much more. A school that still “auctions slaves”? Work stoppages on the farm? Fighting over words? Being wrongly accused? All of these themes and more will be explored in these diverse books. We will also take a look at the work of Leo Lionni who raises many ethical questions in his books and explore our own particular topical interests in children’s books.

Unit 9: Violence and Conflict

No stranger to children’s books, stories of violence and conflict rank amongst the most read and well regarded of children’s books. Abuse, rape-bullying, fighting—are one extreme. There are also books about choosing peace, overcoming differences, and deciding what is good and bad. And then there is Dr. Seuss, who probably wrote more about conflict than any other children’s author. Another practical application will take place for the use of children’s books will also be given here.

Unit 10: War

Wars come and go. Children are often involved. There are those who want to fight, those who want it to end, those who survive, and those that don’t. Many different wars are covered though there is universality to the experiences here—even when told by both the “winners” and “losers”. War is often taught as battles and dates and victories and strategies. Here we will look at war told through stories, either real stories or those based on real-stories. We will also potentially explore age appropriateness of literature for children, music, or ways to educate children through story.

Unit 11: Biography

Telling the stories of real people brings children to greater understanding of the world they are apart of, how the world has worked, and how the world might be. Some of the best stories are of people who have overcome great hardship and difficulty—ranging here from poverty to oppression to disability to not being understood. The author spotlight will be on the delightful Bill Peet and his work. We will also have a chance to compare biography and autobiography or learn more about a favorite author.

Unit 12: Non-fiction

There is a lot of non-fiction out there for children. Some of it is excellent (and a lot is not). We will look at some of the better offerings ranging on topics to the commonality of humans throughout history in the face of disease, Antarctic exploration, the variety of sharks, to sex education and more. We will even get to make some recommendations of books ourselves here.

Unit 13: Science Fiction & Friendship

This unit is a hodgepodge. It was originally to be science fiction only, but between the lack of few good picture books for science fiction and some great books on friendship that really did not fit elsewhere, they two were combined. Yet there is a connection. All the books here speak to how we relate to each other. Science fiction gives us a venue to critique from a distance what humanity will do and is doing to itself and the planet. The books here deal with cloning, consumerism, and the range of emotions and experience that is desirable for life—and who gets to decide. We will also look at how to “case a children’s book”.

Unit 14: Mystery

From the magic and mystery of Harry Potter to other mysteries for children of all ages, much of these books deal with a common theme of childhood (and of life)—how to deal with the unknown. From the fantastic (like Lord Voldemort) to the everyday (who is that substitute teacher we have), mysteries abound. We will explore the world of Harry Potter, Wellington the dog, missing hats, and small owls in Florida. What does this all mean? That mystery will be uncovered here. We will also reflect on the books we have read over the semester.

Course Expectations

1. Complete all the reading.

This is a graduate level course. The star of this class will be the literature and the books. There will be a lot of reading. You will enjoy reading these books.

In most units, there are options for reading a variety of books. There are many optional books also recommended. You will be expected to **read at least 42 novels** (included in this is the Harry Potter series) **and 85 picture books** including those in the author spotlight (All authors in the Author Spotlight are for picture books).

I want you to read more than this, but 125 books is the minimum to pass the class. The reading will go more quickly (and quite more enjoyably) than you think. The total number of books you need to read (125 picture books and novels) is less than the total number books on the required and “choose from” reading lists (over 190). This is to allow for those times when life gets in the way of class and to help out if and when some of the books are harder to find.

Almost all of the novels are in paperback. Many, but fewer, of the picture books, are also in paperback. You can find most of them in a good children’s library, at a good larger bookstore, or online. For the picture books, you may just be able to read them in the library or in a comfortable chair at a large bookstore. On the other hand, you may also want to purchase some of them. I was able to find all the books through the internet. Popular sites include:

www.abebooks.com www.amazon.com www.bn.com
www.booksamillion.com www.powells.com

Some books are out of print, and these have been relegated to the optional list. You can find these through www.abebooks.com.

Special book note: You will need to special order Aarvy Aardvark Finds Hope by Donna O'Toole at www.compassionbooks.com . I recommend sooner rather than later. I thought this book was out of print, but I did find it under a new publisher. And I think so much of this book, that I want everyone to read it. It's that good and meaningful.

Another option is through your local library and the inter-library loan. I highly recommend you talk with your librarian about getting some of the books through this way if your library does not have all of the titles. Usually they can get them with advanced notice, though it may take a couple of weeks. Plan ahead.

Complete a 1 page reflection paper once a week and submit a reading log.

These will e-mailed directly to the instructor and will not be shared with others unless (rarely) requested. The content of the paper will be a reflection on the reading (any one or all) but specific content will be at the writer's discretion.

In previous classes, students have reflected on themes of the books and how those have intersected with their personal lives. Students have also used the reflections as earmarks for themselves as to how they might use the books. Students have used the books as commentary for the state of the wider world and/or their piece of it. What you decide to reflect on is up to you. Make it something that has some meaning and usefulness for you.

These will be returned with comments and questions for further reflection. Also included here should be a list of completed readings each week. You may skip two weeks of reflection and still pass the class.

I do expect a **reading log** listing what you have read weekly. Here is an example, though you may submit this in a format of your choice.

For both the reflection paper and reading log an e-mail is strongly preferred over an attachment.

Keith Kron	Reading Log	Week 1	Unit (if different)
Charlotte's Web	EB White	Novel	
Because of Winn-Dixie	Kate DiCamillo	Novel	
Holes	Louis Sachar	Novel	
Winnie-the-Pooh	A.A. Milne	Novel choice	
101 Dalmatians	Dodie Smith	Novel choice	
The Tale of Desperaux	Kate diCamillo	Novel optional	
Stuart Little	EB White	Novel optional	
Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day	Judith Viorst/Ray Cruz	Picture Book	
Olivia	Ian Falconer	Picture Book	
The Velveteen Rabbit	Margery Williams	Picture Book choice	
The Tale of Peter Rabbit	Beatrix Potter	Picture Book choice	
Three Little Pigs	David Wiesner	Picture Book choice	
Fables	Arnold Lobel	Picture Book choice	
The Tale of Jemima Puddle Duck	Beatrix Potter	Picture Book optional	
Lily's Purple Plastic Purse	Kevin Henkes	Author Spotlight	
Chester's Way	Kevin Henkes	Author Spotlight	
A Weekend with Wendell	Kevin Henkes	Author Spotlight	
Julius, Baby of the World	Kevin Henkes	Author Spotlight choice	
Kitten's First Full Moon	Kevin Henkes	Author Spotlight Choice	
Circle Dogs	Kevin Henkes	Author Spotlight optional	
Holly, Reindeer and Painted Lights: The Story of Christmas Symbols	Edna Barth	Picture Book choice	Unit 2
Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone	Jo Rowling	Novel	Project list
Total Books	22	Novel=8	Picture

			Books=14
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Complete the special project weekly.

Length will vary depending on the project(s) involved. Usually this will involve some special reading, research, or reflection. Again, there will be options in most weeks. You will need to do a minimum of 10 to pass the class—and some are not optional. These will be noted. These, unlike reflection papers, will be posted for all to see. The project list will be posted in a special section on the website

4. Participate in weekly on-line discussions.

Each week the students and professor will post comments and questions to an on-line “Discussion” forum. This will allow students to communicate with one another and to ask questions of the professor. You will be asked to list your favorite book of the week as well as respond to a few questions posted by the professor. There will also be some “quizzes” which will not be graded but provide interesting questions of little known facts about the authors and books.

You will also need to be able to access a few websites for further research and reading.