INF2141
Winter 2011
Children’s
Cultural Texts & Artifacts

Instructor: Sara Grimes
Winter 2011
Seminars: Monday 1-4 pm

Description
INF2141 will provide students with a forum for engaging in historically grounded explorations of the centrality of cultural texts and artifacts within contemporary childhood. From toys to fairy tales, books to videogames, this course adopts a multi-disciplinary approach to examine how texts and artifacts not only play a crucial role within children’s culture, but furthermore reflect and reproduce dominant (and oftentimes conflicting) ideologies, traditions, controversies and social values.

Students will examine the complex interplay between children’s texts and artifacts, particularly as it relates to the concurrent rise of transmedia intertextuality and commercialization within children’s culture. They will learn about the key issues, institutions and “cultural gatekeepers” (including librarians) involved in the production, circulation and management of adult-produced texts and artifacts for children, and the ways in which children in turn engage with these texts and artifacts as part of a deeply meaningful shared cultural experience.

A variety of examples and case studies will be examined, through in-class analysis and discussion of foundational children’s books, films, television series, toys, video games and digital applications. Recurring motifs, narrative themes and genres will be addressed. Special emphasis will be placed on understanding the continuities and discontinuities that exist between new and traditional cultural forms. Students will also be invited to consider the unique set of opportunities and challenges associated with digital technologies, and how they are currently (re)shaping children’s culture in potentially significant ways.
Topics

Historical overview of cultural texts and artifacts that play a central role within children’s culture, including children’s literature, film, television, videogames, toys, mobile devices and emerging technologies.

Contemporary issues, major debates and core theories within the study of children’s texts (literature, media) and artifacts (information technologies, toys, etc.)

Children’s texts and artifacts as the locus of controversy and debate, social movements and policy development.

Continuities and discontinuities between new and traditional cultural forms, for instance between children’s literature and digital media.

Dominant themes, motifs, narrative tropes and genres found across children’s culture.

Relationship between convergence (technological and corporate) and commercialization within children’s cultural production (and consumption).

Goal and Objectives

Through this course, students will gain an understanding of the key issues, traditions and trends that surround children’s texts and artifacts, from books to videogames and beyond. By developing a theoretically and historically grounded foundation in children’s cultural and textual studies, students will be prepared for a wide range of future engagements with children’s literature and new media, including both academic inquiry and children’s collection development.

Students will gain familiarity of the various interests involved in the production and management of children’s literature and media, enabling them to better understand and evaluate current and future developments in this area.

Students will gain an awareness of a diverse range of children’s cultural texts and artifacts, their many contexts, and the increasingly complex relationships between them.

Students will develop the skills required to embark upon rigorous critical analysis of children’s texts and artifacts, including textual and discourse analysis of individual cases, as well as social/cultural studies of child audiences and the children’s industries.

Format

The class will meet for three hours each week to engage in a seminar style session, which will include in-class discussions, group activities, guest lecturers, case studies, as well as media screenings and demos. On their own time, students must complete weekly course readings and written assignments.

Prerequisites

There are no prerequisites. This course is open to students at both the Master and PhD level.
Course Materials

Textbook/Readings


Additional readings will be made available via Blackboard and/or placed on reserve.

Website/Resources
Course materials and resources aimed at helping students with assignments and key concepts will be made available online, through Blackboard (http://portal.utoronto.ca) and through a course weblog. Students are responsible for keeping up to date with these online resources, and are expected to log into Blackboard during the first week of class to enroll for email notices. Please be sure to check Blackboard periodically for new materials, announcements, updates and other important information. Presentation slides will be made available on the course website at the start of lecture (not before), and will be posted to Blackboard within 2-3 days of each lecture.

Media Screenings
As the subject matter includes discussion and analysis of children’s media texts, over the course of the semester a number of media screenings will be held during the last hour of lecture. Students who miss the scheduled screenings will be responsible for coordinating their own rescheduled viewing time, which will need to be done in a timely and comprehensive manner.

Evaluation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignments</th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Due</th>
<th>Requirements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unauthorized Biography</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>Week 5</td>
<td>1,500 words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Book/Media Review</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>Week 10</td>
<td>1,000 to 1,500 words</td>
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<tr>
<td>Term Paper</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>Week 14</td>
<td>3,000 to 3,500 words</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>Active engagement in weekly seminars</td>
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Assignment 1: The Unauthorized Biography of...
1,500 words (due Week 5: Jan. 31, 2011): 30%
Students will select a character or fable that appears within two or more children’s cultural texts (and/or artifacts), and that can be considered as “foundational” in some way (defining “foundational” and why the text should be considered as such is part of the assignment). You will conduct research in the library, online, and other archives to find out as much as you can about the history of this character (or fable), in order to answer the following questions:
- Who is the character (or fable)? What are their attributes, characteristics, flaws, strengths, background, physical attributes, origin story, friends, enemies, etc.? Where do they live, what do they do, what are their goals and dreams, what do they symbolize/represent?
- Who created the character or fable? Where or how did it originate? How has it evolved over time? Who currently “owns” it (if anyone)?
- Where, how and when does the character (or fable) appear? In what forms? In what relationships? In what incarnations? To what ends? Is there consistency across these various formats, or are there noticeable differences?
- Why is this character (or fable) “foundational”? What is their significance within children’s culture, media or literature? Within the larger culture? What were your criteria for defining a character/fable as foundational, and how did your subject meet these criteria?
- Are there gaps or contradictions in the character’s biography? (Hint: The histories of children’s characters are rarely linear or clear cut). If so, why might that be?

As this is an “Unauthorized Biography,” your assignment should read as a narrative. Because you are being asked to write up your findings as a sort of story, you are free to integrate some creative elements. For instance, you might write a biography of Cinderella that refers to your subject as though she were a person. However, be sure that you stay true to the literature, sources and evidence consulted: Don’t bend or manipulate the information that you’ve uncovered, and don’t make anything up (i.e. don’t take too much creative freedom).

**Learning Objectives:**
- To gain an appreciation of the longevity and malleability of our culture’s most beloved children’s characters and/or fables.
- To gain insight into the nature and reach of transmedia intertextuality within children’s culture, and the ways in which characters and fables don’t only morph over time but across media as well, through reinterpretations, appropriations and retellings.
- To gain an understanding of the commercial or market dimensions of children’s culture, and the ways in which characters and fables can come to function as “brands” (in terms of tie-ins, cross-promotions, licensing agreements, target marketing etc.).

**Assignment 2: Critical Book/Media Review**
1,000 – 1,500 words (due Week 10) 20%
Many top-tier children’s literature, librarianship and media studies journals, including The Lion and the Unicorn, Journal of Children and Media, and Jeunesse, contain review sections. The reviews are similar to those found in the popular press, in that they summarize and evaluate a particular book title, media text or artifact. Where they differ, however, is in the way both their descriptions and assessments are grounded in theory and in previous academic literature. They are critical in that they often employ critical theory, discourse analysis, feminist theory or other interpretive approaches in the analysis and deconstruction of their subject matter—the texts, their authors, and the socio-political contexts within which they appear.

For this assignment, you will write a critical review of a book or media text relevant to the themes and topics addressed in this course. Your review should include the following:
- Full bibliographic information (author/producer, title, year, publisher, format, etc.).
- A brief description of the text (contents, storyline, characters, etc.) or artifact (design, features, etc.).
- Informed assessment of the text’s origins, preferred reading, intended function, underlying biases, discursive elements, etc. (Hint: This section should make up the bulk of your assignment, and be solidly grounded in and supported by academic literature).
Students have the freedom to choose to review either a) a children’s text/artifact OR b) an academic book/article on a subject relevant to this course. Students are furthermore encouraged to identify a potential venue where they might submit their review for publication once the assignment has been graded and returned.

Useful guides for writing critical book reviews can be found on the University of Toronto Writing website (http://www.writing.utoronto.ca/advice/specific-types-of-writing/book-review), as well as the University of Alberta library website (http://guides.library.ualberta.ca/).

Learning Objectives:
- To gain awareness of the review process and the function of critical reviews within academic discourse.
- To develop skills in both conducting a focused, critical analysis of a specific text, and contextualizing this analysis within broader themes, theory, history and literature.
- To develop skills in the evaluation and deconstruction of texts, as well as assessing the strengths and weaknesses of published work.
- To develop strategies in situating oneself (opinion and bias) within academic writing.

Assignment 3: Term Paper
3,000 – 3,500 words (due Week 14: April 4, 2011): 40%
Term papers should be between 3,000 – 3,500 words length, and written on a topic related to the course, of the student’s own choosing. Suggested (optional) topics for this assignment will be discussed during two in-class brainstorming sessions, which will be scheduled in advance.

Learning Objectives:
- To build and demonstrate a working knowledge of your term paper topic, which includes a clearly articulated familiarity with the relevant issues, debates and controversies (where applicable).
- To demonstrate thoughtful, informed engagement with the course materials, by drawing upon and synthesizing key concepts explored in the readings, lectures, class discussions and individual course work completed over the course of the semester.
- To engage critically with the relevant theories, and establish your own stance or position on a specific topic (of relevance to the course)—one that is firmly grounded in the existing literature, and supported through the construction of logical and balanced arguments.

Participation
Ongoing: 10%
Evaluation of students’ participation in this course will be based on level of engagement in lecture and in class discussions, and demonstrated familiarity with course readings & related content. Bonus marks (up to 3% total) will be awarded for students who contribute consistently and meaningfully to the course’s online forums (Blackboard and course blog).
Guidelines for Assignments

All written assignments for this course must be submitted in person, on paper, and handed in at the start of lecture (1pm). All assignments should be written as clearly and cleanly as possible (i.e. thoroughly proof read for typos, spelling and grammar, hanging sentences, etc.), in a formal but accessible academic language. The overall “look and feel” should be professional (i.e. no crumpled papers or faded printing). The required format for all assignments is as follows:

- Typed, 1.5 space, 11 or 12 point font, one-inch margins, page numbers in the upper or lower right hand corner. Double sided printing is fine, as long as it’s legible.
- Align paragraphs in a standard way and avoid superfluous indentation.
- The document must be stapled together – no loose pages, no paperclips.
- No cover page required, but be sure to include your name & student number on page 1.
- Total word count should be indicated at the end of the essay.
- Use of footnotes/endnotes is permitted, but these should be used sparingly.

NOTE: Assignments that do not meet a minimum standard (in terms of legibility, formatting and proof reading) will be returned for re-submission, with late penalties in full effect.

Referencing

The American Psychological Association (APA) citation style is the most commonly used in academic writing in the social sciences. I recommend that you use APA for this course, as it’s good to get used to the style that you will likely be using over the course of your graduate career (and beyond). That said, if you think you have a valid professional reason for using another style, you are invited to talk to the instructor at least two weeks before the assignment is due and request that an exception be made. Permission to use referencing styles other than APA will be granted on a case by case basis, but only to students who make arrangements in advance.

The key here is that quotes and sources must be properly and consistently cited, using:
   (a) in-text citation (including author name(s), year and page number); and
   (b) a full list of references or bibliography at the end of your paper.

This is a necessary component of academic writing, as well as a good safeguard against inadvertent forms of plagiarism.

Images

Students can include copyrighted images in their assignments as long as they follow the Canadian Copyright Act’s current exceptions for fair dealing, in that the images must only be used for the purposes of criticism or review, and each image must be accompanied by:
   (a) the source; and
   (b) the name of the author(s) (if given in the source)

Acceptable Secondary Sources

As graduate students, you will be expected to use a majority of academic (i.e. peer reviewed) sources when writing your term paper. Students are very much allowed, but not at all limited, to use course readings and other sources referenced in lectures in their own papers. Additional sources and relevant journals that are recommended by the instructor are also acceptable. However, students are strongly encouraged to track down those resources that are best suited to their specific area of interest or inquiry, rather than rely too heavily on those provided in class. Media texts (books, comics, television episodes, films, videogames, websites, etc.) can be used
and referenced as needed, but should always be treated as artifacts of study and analyzed accordingly. Here’s a good position to adopt:

"The materials of popular culture may become raw materials for our creative expression, vehicles for exploring aspects of our own personalities, and shared points of reference to facilitate social interaction. Anthropologists and historians look at artifacts as materials that encapsulate the values and practices of another culture. We can look at the contents of mass media as artifacts that help us to better understand our own culture. In both cases, though, deciphering an artifact’s meanings is a complex process, because the same artifact may serve multiple purposes, operate in multiple contexts, and become invested with multiple meanings." Reproduced from Henry Jenkins’ (2000) Children’s Culture Study Guide (URL: http://web.mit.edu/cms/People/henry3/resourceguide.html)

For cutting edge information, news, announcements, etc., popular press articles are of course acceptable. But these should be used to supplement or update rather than replace peer reviewed sources, and should never be used to explain a theoretical concept. They should also come from credible, verifiable sources, who have the credentials (whatever these may be) to back up their claims. Online sources are fine, as long as you can determine who wrote the content and for what purpose, and are prepared to defend the author's credibility and expertise if questioned. My definition of "expertise" is flexible. For example, if you're looking for parents' reactions to the Harry Potter phenomenon, an online forum where fathers, mothers and other caregivers discuss the Harry Potter books and films is an excellent source of "expertise."

**Late Papers**

Unless a formal extension has been negotiated with the instructor in advance of the due date, late assignments (defined here as an assignment submitted after the deadline) will be penalized by one full letter grade per week (e.g. from A to A-), for a maximum of two weeks. After that point, late assignments will no longer be accepted. Furthermore, late papers will not receive detailed feedback or comments.

**Extensions**

Extensions on assignments within the term must be negotiated in advance, and may require supporting documentation (e.g. doctor’s note). Students must email requests for extensions to the instructor at least 24 hours prior to the due date. Exceptions will only be made in extenuating circumstances. Extensions beyond the end of the term in which a course is taken are subject to the guidelines established by the School of Graduate Studies (Which can be found here: http://www.sgs.utoronto.ca/informationfor/students/track/extsn.htm).

**Grading**

Grading for this course will follow the iSchool's official Guidelines to Grade Interpretation of letter grades, as well as the University’s policy on Graduate Grading and Evaluation Practices. These sources define grades in the A range as “excellent” and grades in the B range as “good.” Please refer to the guidelines for detailed descriptions of these categories. Assignments will be graded and returned within 2-3 weeks of submission.
Ground Rules

Each student in this course is responsible for keeping up with the course materials, which includes (all) the required course readings, as well as topics, debates and concepts discussed in class. Students are expected to attend lectures and to take their own lecture notes (PowerPoint slides are a sad substitute for your own thoughts and observations). You are expected to participate in class discussions, and are encouraged to use your laptops/mobile devices during class to look up relevant information that will contribute to the discussion in a meaningful way. At all times, however, remember to be respectful of the instructor and of your classmates — turn your phone function off, turn off the sound on your computer, and be sure not to browse any websites that may be offensive or illegal, or that might be deemed irrelevant to the task of taking this course.

Students should arrive on time and are expected to stay for the duration. If you miss a class, you are entirely responsible for obtaining any information or materials given in class, either from your classmates or online. Unauthorized recordings of the lectures are not permitted.

Students with a Disability or Health Consideration

Students with diverse learning styles and needs are welcome in this course. If you have a disability or health consideration that may require accommodations, please feel free to approach the instructor and/or the Accessibility Services Office (http://www.accessibility.utoronto.ca/) as soon as possible. The Accessibility Services staff is available by appointment to assess specific needs, provide referrals and arrange appropriate accommodations. The sooner arrangements are made - the quicker we can assist you.

Writing Support

The SGS Office of English Language and Writing Support provides free writing support to graduate students. Services are designed for both native and non-native speakers of English, and include non-credit courses, single-session workshops, individual writing consultations, and online resources. Students are encouraged to use these services as needed.

Academic Integrity

The iSchool has a strict zero-tolerance policy on plagiarism, as defined in section B.1.1. (d) of the University’s Code of Behavior on Academic Matters. Before you embark on your first writing assignment, please make sure that you:

- Consult the University’s site on Academic Integrity: http://www.utoronto.ca/academicintegrity/
- Acquaint yourself with the Code and Appendix “A” Section 2; http://www.governingcouncil.utoronto.ca/policies/behaveac.htm
- Review the material you covered in Cite it Right;
- Consult the site How Not to Plagiarize: http://www.writing.utoronto.ca/advice/using-sources/how-not-to-plagiarize
# Schedule of Lecture Topics and Readings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week 1: Jan. 3</th>
<th><strong>A Very Brief History of Modern Childhood</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Optional:</strong></td>
<td>Kincheloe, J.L. (1998). The new childhood. In Jenkins (pp. 159-77).</td>
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<th>Week 2: Jan. 10</th>
<th><strong>The “Impossibility” of Children’s Culture</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Screening:</strong></td>
<td>Excerpts from Jan Svankmajer’s <em>Alice</em> (1988) and <em>Peter Pan</em> (1953)</td>
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<th>Week 3: Jan. 17</th>
<th><strong>The Politics of Dollhood: Texts, Toys &amp; Socialization</strong></th>
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<td><strong>Screening:</strong></td>
<td>Meet <em>Strawberry Shortcake</em> (2003), series of toy ads 1983-present</td>
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<th>Week 4: Jan. 24</th>
<th><strong>From Penny Dreadfuls to Grand Theft Auto: Children’s Culture as a Hotbed of Controversy</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Screening:</strong></td>
<td>Bandura “Bobo Doll” experiment, Excerpt from <em>Tales from the Crypt</em> (2004)</td>
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**Week 5: Jan. 31**  
**Children's Culture as Public Service: Libraries, Public Television and “Good” Media**

| Screening: | *Horton Hears A Who* (1970) and *Mr. Dressup* (episode)  

**Important Deadline:** Assignment #1 Due

**Week 6: Feb. 7**  
**Recurring Motifs 1: On the Importance of Fairytales**

| | Bettleheim, B. (1989). *The uses of enchantment: The meaning and importance of fairy tales*. Vintage. (pp.35-75)  

**Week 7: Feb. 14**  
**Recurring Motifs 2: Gross, Weird & Wonderful**

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<th>Week 8: Feb. 21</th>
<th>Reading Week</th>
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**Readings:**


**Screening:** *Pokémon* (episode), demo of Nick.com


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<th>Week 9: Feb. 28</th>
<th>Transmedia Intertextuality and Commodity Flow</th>
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**Readings:**


**Screening:** Series of child-produced fan "mash ups," *Toy Story 3* (2010, excerpt)


**Important Deadline:** Assignment #2 Due In Lecture

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<th>Week 10: Mar. 7</th>
<th>Media Traces: Literary &amp; Media Themes in Children’s Play</th>
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**Readings:**


**Screening:** *Lego Star Wars* demo, clips & walkthroughs of key children’s games

### Week 12: Mar. 21  Multi-modal storytelling and Transmedia Technologies

**Readings:**

**Screening:** Demos of Storycentre, Storybird, Bitstrips and The 39 Clues [online]

### Week 13: March 28  Globalization & Disneyfication

**Readings:**

**Screening:** *The World According to Sesame Street* (2006)


### Week 14: April 4  Children as Makers (and Breakers) of Cultural Texts

**Readings:**

**Screening:** Demos of Scratch and LittleBigPlanet


**Important Deadline:** Term Paper Due in Lecture