

ELAN 6410: Adolescent Literature
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Overview of the class

In this web-based course, we will be immersing ourselves in a range of books that can engage, challenge, and give pleasure to adolescent readers. We will be reading a good deal—at least twenty book-length texts representing different genres, authors, topics, levels of difficulty, and levels of literary reputation. And though we will sometimes be reading deeply, for the most part we will be reading widely. Our goal is to become as familiar as we can with at least three groups of texts: 1) the increasingly large menu of high quality, award-winning books explicitly intended for adolescent readers; 2) the range of books originally intended for adult readers that seem to invite thoughtful interest from adolescents; and 3) those widely read but seldom respected books that adolescents often find on their own—romances, horror fiction, and science fiction.

In offering the course, I begin with the assumption that reading literature is not simply, or even mostly, an academic skill or a cultural achievement. It is, rather, a deeply textured human pleasure, and it is best taught and practiced as such. We read many different kinds of texts for practical reasons in our daily lives—newspapers, cookbooks, web pages, editorials, textbooks, phone books, and directions for our laptop computers. We read because of our work, because we need information, because we want to pass a test, because we want to impress our friends, because we want to know how to cook a soufflé. We read, much of the time, because we have to, because we need to. But we read *literature* for reasons different from these: we read literature because we want to. And why we want to read a particular book, why an adolescent reader would want to read a particular book, is precisely what we'll be talking about together throughout the course.

Readings

No single book is required by title for the course, although, as I said earlier, you will need to read and comment on a minimum of twenty books. You will choose these twenty from seven categories in order to encourage your sampling from a range of genres, themes, and intended audiences. The categories are: 1) contemporary adult fiction; 2) contemporary adolescent fiction; 3) “classic” adolescent literature; 4) multicultural fiction for adolescents 5) non-fiction; 6) fiction that addresses issues of sexual identity; and 7) genre fiction—romance, horror, and science fiction.

A list of suggested titles for each of the first six categories is provided on the attached reading list. These titles have been culled from a range of credible sources and

should provide you with some useful guidance in making your selections. Suggested titles for the genre fiction category are too numerous and varied to list, but I'm hoping that you'll find a good deal to choose from in almost any bookstore or library.

All of these books can be ordered from Amazon and most can be found in the Athens Public Library or in your hometown library. Most are also available in bookstores such as Borders or Barnes and Noble. Once you start looking, none of them should be too hard to find.

Though you aren't required to read any particular book, you are required to read a minimum number of books in each category. Here are the numbers:

Contemporary Adult Fiction: 2 books
Contemporary Adolescent Fiction: 3 books
'Classic' Adolescent Fiction: 1 book
Multicultural Literature for Adolescents: 3 books
Non-fiction: 2 books
Fiction with themes of sexual identity: 1 book
Genre fiction: 2 books (1 from each of two genres)
Your choice: 6 books

Total: 20 books

Clearly, you are going to have a great deal of freedom in constructing your own reading list for the course. There are a fairly large number of books in each category to choose from, you can suggest an alternative to those listed if you can explain why, and you have six books that you may choose freely on your own from any category or genre. You will be reading a lot, but it is reading that you will have selected. Such freedom to choose can teach us something about ourselves as readers, and I hope we can think about that as the course unfolds.

Writing

Because we won't be meeting together, writing will have to take the place of talk—at least some of the time. Most of our communication will be on the course listserv or on the course WebCT site, and almost all of our written work will be publicly shared in the class. Our writing will take two basic forms:

- Responses to reading. For each book that you read, I will ask that you write a one-page response (about 250 words) that describes the book's characters, setting, and plot and that provides an interpretation of the book's themes or an evaluation of the book's qualities (or both). There are at least three purposes for these responses: First, they should give you a chance to think through and summarize your most important reactions to the book. Second, they should provide you with a record of your reading that you can use at some point in your teaching. And third, they should provide a resource for other students in the class—a resource

that they can use to guide their own reading or to inform their own teaching. These responses are not free-writes, edgy rants, or open-ended speculations. Think of them as a kind of memo--a public document with work to do in the world. These responses will be posted each week on the WebCT site, and will be organized by the title of the book under discussion. We will talk more about this before we begin the class.

In addition to the responses to individual books, I will ask you to write three papers of relatively modest length:

- A 4-6 page paper on one book that provides a “close reading” of the themes, characters, symbols, setting, or meaning of the book. Think of this as the kind of paper you wrote many times as an undergraduate English major.
- A 4-6 page paper that pairs a book intended for adolescents with a book that is often taught in school. How are the two books alike and different? How do the two books help illuminate one another? How might they be productively combined in a single unit of instruction?
- A 6-8 page paper that explores the common themes or topics of at least three books that you have read for the course. What do the books have in common? How interesting or important is the theme and how thoughtfully do each of the books engage it? Do these books belong together in our teaching?

These papers will be due at three more-or-less evenly spaced points during the course, with the longer paper coming last. I will ask that all three papers be posted to the WebCT site on the day they are due or before. Again, the purpose of this sharing is to make available what we are learning from our reading to other students in the class. Since we are going to be reading many different texts, we want to do everything we can to profit from the reading of our colleagues and have them profit from our own.

At three points in the course, after you have submitted each of the three longer papers, I will respond to the work you have done to that point, including your one-page responses to the reading. As some of you know, I respond to student work using a digital voice recording. I will read your work and respond orally on an MP3 file which I will then send to you as an email attachment. I can say more about your work than I can write, and the process, I think, makes the usual teacher-student relationship a bit more like a conversation.

The Web

I confess that this is the first time that I have taught a web-based course, and though I have talked to colleagues who have taught such courses, and though I think I have some sense of how this class will unfold, I can't be as certain as I'd be if we were meeting in a more conventional venue. Some of you may have had experience with web courses, but I'm guessing that most of you are new to them too. So we're kind of in this

together. At a couple of points in the semester, I will probably ask for a mid-point evaluation and perhaps a mid-course correction. I will be teaching this course again next summer, and I will offer an undergraduate version next spring. I'd like to learn from my missteps and make the revisions that need to be made. I hope you can help with that.

Course Schedule

Officially this is a first-session summer school course, which means that, officially, it is supposed to meet for two hours a day beginning June 5th and ending July 10th. That is what we would do if we weren't working from the web.

But we are working from the web, so we have a certain amount of flexibility in how we schedule things. We won't be meeting in person at all, unless you'd like to schedule an appointment with me. Instead of spending time in class, you'll be spending your time reading and writing.

What I would like to do is have the WebCT site for the course ready for your use no later than the beginning of Maymester, that is, by May 16th. This is an optional beginning for you. Some of you may still be teaching, others may have competing obligations. But the site will be ready, and you will be able to begin working if you like. (Actually, you can begin reading now if you have the time. Just be sure to do your one-page responses while the books are fresh in your mind).

I will schedule due dates for the papers during the regular first-session schedule, that is, between June 5th and July 12th. But you can complete them well before the due dates if that fits your schedule better. And I will respond to the papers as they are posted.

I hope this all makes sense. Please be in touch with me at marshall56@gmail.com if you have further questions. I am really looking forward to reading and thinking with you this summer.

Readings for Adolescent Literature

Adult Contemporary Literature

Kalisha Buckhanon, *Upstate*

Tracy Chevalier, *Girl with the Pearl Earring*

Amanda Davis, *Wonder When You'll Miss Me*

Alicia Erian, *Towelhead*

Gregory Galloway, *As Simple as Snow*

Mark Haddon, *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night Time*

Mohsin Hamid, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*

Khaled Hosseini, *The Kite Runner*

Kazuo Ishiguro, *Never Let Me Go*

Kingsolver, Barbara, *The Poisonwood Bible*

Jhumpa Lahiri, *The Namesake*

Ann Packer, *The Dive from Clausen's Pier*

Nancy Rawles, *My Jim*

Kit Reed, *Thinner than Thou*

Alice Sebold, *The Lovely Bones*

Curtis Sittenfeld, *Prep*

Martha Southgate, *The Fall of Rome*

Art Spiegelman, *Maus*

Tobias Wolfe, *Old School*

Contemporary Adolescent Literature

Laurie Halse Anderson, *Speak*

M.T. Anderson, *Feed*

Judy Blume, *Places I Never Meant to Be*

Joshua Braff, *The Unthinkable Thoughts of Jacob Green*

Ann Brashares, *The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants*

Martha Brooks, *The True Confessions of a Heartless Girl*

Stephen Chbosky, *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*

Robert Cormier, *The Rag and Bone Shop*

Sharon Creech, *Walk Two Moons*

Jennifer Donnelly, *A Northern Light*

Alex Flinn, *Breathing Underwater*

Mel Glenn, *Who Killed Mr. Chippendale*

Karen Hesse, *Phoenix Rising*

A. M. Jenkins, *Damage*

David Levithan, *The Realm of Possibility*

Melina Marchetta, *Saving Francesca*

Tom & Laura Mcneal, *Crooked*

Stephenie Meyer, *Twilight*

Christopher Moore, *Lamb: The Gospel According to Biff, Christ's Childhood Pal*

Michael Morpurgo, *Private Peaceful*

Richard Mosher, *Zazoo*

Kenneth Oppel, *Airborn*

Cynthia Rylant, *A Fine White Dust*

Louis Sachar, *Holes*

Jerry Spinelli, *Stargirl*

Sarah Weeks, *So B. It*

Scott Westerfeld, *Peeps*

Chris Wooding, *Poison*

Multicultural Adolescent Literature

Julia Alvarez, *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents*
Francesca Lia Block, *Witch Baby*
Joseph Bruchac, *The Heart of a Chief*
Linda Crew, *Children of the River*
Sharon M. Draper, *Romiette and Julio*
Will Hobbs, *Bearstone*
Merle Hodge, *For the Life of Laetitia*
Angela Johnson, *Bird*
Victor Martinez, *Parrot in the Oven*
Carolyn Meyer, *White Lilacs*
Kyoko Mori, *Shizuko's Daughter*
Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye*
Pam Munoz Ryan, *Esperanza Rising*
Walter Dean Myers, *Monster*
Lensey Namioka, *Ties That Bind, Ties that Break*
Gary Paulson, *The Crossing*
April Sinclair, *Coffee Will Make You Black*
Gary Soto, *Buried Onions*
Martha Southgate, *Another Way to Dance*
Rita Williams-Garcia, *Every Time a Rainbow Dies*
Wolfe, V.E., *True Believer*

'Classic' Adolescent Literature

Douglas Adams, *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*

Anonymous, *Go Ask Alice*

Judy Blume, *Forever*

Orson Scott Card, *Enders Game*

Robert Cormier, *The Chocolate Wars*

Chris Crutcher, *Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes*

Anne Frank, *Diary of Anne Frank*

Bette Greene, *Summer of My German Soldier*

Jeanne & James Houston, *Farewell to Manzanar*

Robert Lipsyte, *The Contender*

Lois Lowry, *The Giver*

Katherine Paterson, *Bridge to Terabithia*

Gary Paulson, *Hatchet*

John Steinbeck, *Of Mice and Men*

Mildred D. Taylor, *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*

Theodore Taylor, *The Cay*

Cynthia Voigt, *Homecoming*

Paul Zindel, *The Pigman*

Nonfiction

Steve Almond, *Candyfreak: A Journey Through the Chocolate Underbelly of America*

H. G. Bissinger, *Friday Night Lights*

Lynn Cox, *Swimming to Antarctica*

Barbara Ehrenreich, *Nickel and Dimed*

Henry Louis Gates, *Colored People*

Jon Katz, *Geeks: How Two Lost Boys Rode the Internet Out of Idaho*

Alex Kotlowitz, *There Are No Children Here*

Jon Krakauer, *Into Thin Air*

Lealan Jones, *Our America: Life and Death on the South Side of Chicago*

J.R. Moehringer, *The Tender Bar*

Walter Dean Myers, *Bad Boy: A Memoir*

Michael Pollan, *The Botany of Desire*

Mary Roach, *Stiff: The Curious Lives of Human Cadavers*

Brent Runyon, *The Burn Journals*

Julia Scheeres, *Jesus Land: A Memoir*

Eric Schlosser, *Fast Food Nation*

Rory Stewart, *The Places In Between*

Rory Stewart, *Prince of Marshes*

Tobias Wolfe, *This Boy's Life*

Koren Zailckas, *Smashed: The Story of a Drunken Girlhood*

Sexual Identity Themes

Nancy Garden, *Annie on My Mind*

Marion Dane Bauer, *Am I Blue*

Ellen Wittlinger, *Hard Love*

Garret Freymann-Weyr, *My Heartbeat*

Judd Winick, *Pedro and Me*

David Levithan, *Boy Meets Boy*

Bette Greene, *The Drowning of Stephan Jones*

Hobbs, V. *Get It While It's Hot. Or Not*

Plummer, L. *A Dance for Three*

Porter, C. Imani *All Mine*

Sapphire, *Push*

Graphic Texts

Allison Bechdel, *Fun Home*

Will Eisner, *The Contract with God Trilogy*

Will Eisner, *Last Day in Vietnam*

Garth Ennis & Steve Dillon, *Preacher Gone to Texas*

Neil Gaimen, *The Sandman Preludes Nocturnes*

Neil Gaiman and Charles Vess, *Stardust*

Phoebe Gloeckner, *The Diary of a Teenage Girl*

Alan More & David Lloyd, *V Is for Vendetta*

Alan More & David Gibbons, *Watchmen*

Marjane Satrapi, *Persepolis*

Art Spiegelman, *Maus I and II*

Bryan Talbot, *The Tale of One Bad Rat*

Craig Thompson, *Blankets*

Ware, F.C., *Jimmy Corrigan or The Smartest Kid on Earth.*

Gene Luen Yank, *American Born Chinese*

