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## ENG 4903-001: The Literature of Adolescence

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**English 4903-001**  
**The Literature of Adolescence (Young Adult Literature)**

Spring 1999

MW: 6-7:15

Office Hours: MWF: 10-11; MW 4-6

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**Course Description and Objectives:** This course in young adult literature balances an historical approach with concentrated emphasis on current fiction, poetry, and prose written in the young adult genre.

A. An historical approach to a study of this genre is necessary for various reasons:

1. By studying young adult literature from several periods in American literature, we will gain a sense of the genre's literary history.

2. Looking at origins of the young adult literature genre also allows us to analyze the genre's key elements and highlight expectations readers of young adult literature bring to the text.

3. Elements of the genre that are easily recognized and delineated in texts from earlier periods that are alien to us are not as obvious in current works set in a culture in which we are emersed.

B. According to Donelson and Nilson there are three main reasons to know the history of young adult literature:

1. "[We] ought to know not merely where [we] are but also how [we] got there."

2. "For anyone who cares about the mores and morals of our time reflected in adolescent books, there is a fascination in knowing how they came to be. There is no better way to see what adults wanted young people to accept as good and noble at any point in history than to examine adolescent books of the time"

3. "Third . . . many of the older books are surprisingly fun to read" (413).

To give us a sense of this genre, we will study works from the 18th century to the present, with added concentration on works of today:

Robinson Crusoe, by Daniel Defoe

The Lamplighter, by Maria Susanna Cummins

Little Women, by Louisa May Alcott

Ragged Dick, by Horatio Alger, Jr.

A Tree Grows in Brooklyn, by Betty Smith

Sweet Whispers, Brother Rush, by Virginia Hamilton

The Bumblebee Flies Anyway, by Robert Cormier

The Giver, by Lois Lowry

Catherine, Called Birdy, by Karen Cushman

Necessary Roughness, by Marie G. Lee

A Girl Named Disaster, by Nancy Farmer

Tentative Course Calendar, Subject to Change

January

- 11 Introduction to the course and to young adult history and lit.
- 13 Introduction to RCrusoe: race, religion, masculinity .
- 18 Martin Luther King Day, no school
- 20 Robinson Crusoe (should be completed for today) **Response.**
- 25 The Lamplighter: Domestic Fiction and ideal femininity.
- 27 The Lamplighter **Response.**

February

- 1 The Lamplighter
- 3 Complete The Lamplighter -- The Dime Novel **Response.**
  
- 8 Little Women: the Female didactic Bildungsroman
- 10 Little Women **Response**
- 12 Lincoln's Birthday, no school
- 15 Little Women, completed; introduce Alger **Response.**
- 17 Ragged Dick: the male didactic Bildungsroman
- 22 Ragged Dick **Response.**
- 24 Young Adult literature from 1900-1940; **Group Presentations**

March

- 1 A Tree Grows in Brooklyn: The Bildungsroman comes of age; **Response**
- 3 A Tree Grows in Brooklyn
- 8 A Tree Grows in Brooklyn **Response**
- 10 Current Young Adult Literature; **Group Presentations; Paper 1 due.**
- 15-19 Spring Break, no school
- 22 Sweet Whispers, Brother Rush: Breaking racial/cultural taboos
- 24 Sweet Whispers, Brother Rush **Response.**
- 29 The Bumblebee Flies Anyway: A "Problem" Novel? **Response.**
- 31 The Bumblebee Flies Anyway; **Paper 2 presentations.**

April

- 5 The Giver: Fantasy as social healing **Response**
- 7 The Giver; **Paper 2 presentations.**
- 12 Catherine, Called Birdy: Historical fiction in epistolary form **Response.**
- 14 Catherine, Called Birdy; **Paper 2 presentations.**
- 19 Necessary Roughness: Multicultural American literature **Response.**
- 21 Necessary Roughness; **Paper 2 presentations.**
- 26 A Girl Named Disaster: World literature in English **Response.**
- 28 A Girl Named Disaster; **Paper 2 presentations. Final Paper due.**

May

- 3 Final Exam

**Course Policies and Requirements:** In order to succeed in this course, you must effectively complete each of the following:

1. Once a week you must write and turn in a one to two-page reading response answering a question or two which you had about the text read for that class. More about this later.
2. Daily you will be expected to be active in class discussion. Make sure you read the material for each class day.
3. You will also write two 10-12 page papers, one due at midterm and one due by the final class session. The first paper will give you the opportunity to critically analyze one of the texts on the course reading list. The second paper will allow you to look beyond books read for class, examine a "sub-genre" of young adult literature of one period, and give a 5-7 min. presentation.
4. In groups, you will also give a 15-20 minute presentation in which you take a specific critical approach to a current piece of young adult literature. You will be expected to hand in your presentation in written form along with other materials used.
5. You will also take a final exam which will allow you to synthesize information gained from the literature, its genre expectations, and its cultural and historical contexts.

In addition to the above requirements, students enrolled in the course for graduate credit will submit a final 12-15 page term paper focusing on a particular theme, genre, and/or critical issue and incorporating a selection of works not included on the syllabus. These students will be asked to submit a prospectus and bibliography for this paper by midterm. The topic for this paper may overlap with or expand upon your second paper or your group presentation. **Note: No late work will be accepted unless I have approved extensions before the date the work is due.**

**Grades:** Grades for this course will be determined as follows:

Weekly Responses	20%
Paper 1	15%
Paper 2 and Presentation	15%
Class Participation	20%
Group Presentation	15%
Final Exam	15%

**Plagiarism Statement:** "Any teacher who discovers an act of plagiarism -- the appropriation or imitation of the language, ideas, and/or thoughts of another author, and representation of them as one's original work -- has the right and the responsibility to impose upon the guilty student an appropriate penalty, up to and including immediate assignment of a grade of "F" for the course."

**If you have a documented disability and wish to receive academic accommodations, please contact the Coordinator of the Office of Disability Services (581-6583) as soon as possible.**