

Conflict, Social Justice, & Literature:
**“Weaponizing the Child: The Politics & Social Power
of Children’s Literature”**

<i>English 2250.04</i>	
Instructor: Colten Biro, <i>M.A. Eng., P.&L</i>	Office Hours: Mondays 2:15pm-4:15pm <i>(or by appt.)</i>
Preferred Communication: colten.biro@slu.edu [I respond within 24 hours; 48 hours on weekends.]	My Office: (Email me to set appt). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Adorjan Hall 209 ▪ Zoom Office Link
Our course meets: MWF: 1:10pm-2pm in Davis-Shaughnessy Hall 171	
Please see our Course Canvas Page for up-to-date assignments & calendar.	
Image: <i>A Child's World</i> (1886) by Sir John Everett Millais	



Course Description:

In the last couple of years, schools and libraries have become battlegrounds for “culture wars” and social movements with angry parents showing up at previously quiet school board meetings, with governors’ races suddenly concerned with classroom instruction, and with hundreds of books titles under threat of censure in local libraries across the U.S. (ALA 2022). *But is this really a new occurrence?* **No.** Children’s literature has always been a space of tension, advocacy, and societal change.

In this course, we will engage with a broad survey of publications designed for and consumed by children. Our exploration will begin in the early nineteenth century, spend most of its time in the “Golden Age of Children’s Literature” (1850-1920), and finally close with the “Golden Age of Comic Books” (1938-1956)—throughout this literary historical trek, we will consider the cultural and societal movements which influenced the publications for children, and we will examine those social changes advocated by that literature. Our study will be grounded in our reading of Dickens’s *Hard Times* (1854), Kingsley’s *The Water-Babies* (1863), excerpts from Lewis Carroll’s *Alice in Wonderland* (1865), Francis Hodgson Burnett’s *A Little Princess* (1905), and other works.

Course Objectives:

Students who complete this course will be able to:

- Generate engaged and responsive close readings of texts;
- Describe and analyze the various ways in which texts reflect and help shape wider cultural conditions;
- Construct clear spoken and written arguments that demonstrate an awareness of purpose and audience;
- Analyze and critique children's literature as complex and culturally responsive texts.

University Undergraduate Core Attributes & Student Learning Outcomes for the Course:

Ways of Thinking: Aesthetics, History, and Culture is one of 19 Core Components. The University Core SLO(s) that this component is designed to intentionally advance are listed below:
University Core Student Learning Outcomes The Core SLO(s) that this component is intentionally designed to advance are:
SLO 2: Integrate knowledge from multiple disciplines to address complex questions
SLO 3: Assess evidence and draw reasoned conclusions

Additionally, the Core Component-level Student Learning Outcomes are listed below:
Component-level Student Learning Outcomes Students who complete this course will be able to:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Demonstrate proficiency in qualitative methods of interpreting cultural products relevant to the period, area or theme of the course• Analyze primary sources appropriate to the discipline (e.g. literary artifacts, visual art, historical documents, performances, or other cultural products) in order to draw reasoned conclusions• Develop interpretive claims about how larger social contexts shape cultural products

Dignity, Ethics, and a Just Society is one of 19 Core Components. The University Core SLO(s) that this component is designed to intentionally advance are listed below:
University Core Student Learning Outcomes The Core SLO(s) that this component is intentionally designed to advance are:
SLO 1: Examine their actions and vocations in dialogue with the Catholic, Jesuit tradition
SLO 3: Assess evidence and draw reasoned conclusions
SLO 7: Evaluate the extent to which social systems influence equity and reflect innate human dignity

Additionally, the Core Component-level Student Learning Outcomes are listed below:
Component-level Student Learning Outcomes Students who complete this course will be able to:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Analyze the cultural-institutional conditions and causes of just and unjust social systems using such concepts as social location, relationships, power, privilege, and vulnerability• Apply such ethical concepts as human dignity, equity, well-being justice, and the common good to critically evaluate both existing social systems and proposals for social change• Envision and articulate systemic social changes and other ways to promote flourishing, well-being, equity, justice, and the dignity of the human person

Required Materials: [PHYSICAL COPIES REQUIRED—NO Electronic Versions]

Classic Fairy Tales Edited by Maria Tarter (Norton, 2nd Edition: 2017): ISBN: 9780393602975

Water-Babies: A Fairy Tale for a Land Baby by Charles Kingsley (Broadview 8th Edition) ISBN: 9781551117737

Hard Times by Charles Dickens (Norton, 4th Edition: 2017) ISBN: 9780393284386

A Little Princess by Francis Hodgson Burnett (Penguin/Random House 2nd Edition) ISBN: 9780142437018

Evaluation & Grading:

Formative Assignments: <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Bi-weekly one-page reflections▪ Canvas discussion boards▪ In-class activities/group activities▪ **Reading/viewing quizzes**	45%
Two Short Research-Reflection Papers: <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Material Studies/Children’s Publishing Paper (3-5pgs)2. Social Movement Paper (3-5pgs)	20%
Final Analytical Paper: (5-7 pages) <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ This thesis-driven paper will directly engage both a work of children’s literature from our class and a social movement.	25%
Participation:	10%
TOTAL	100%

Converted Grading Scale

A	93-100	C+	77-79
A-	90-92	C	73-76
B+	87-89	C-	70-72
B	83-86	D	63-69
B-	80-82	F	62 or below

University GPA System (Office of the Registrar)

A	4.00	C+	2.30
A-	3.70	C	2.00
B+	3.30	C-	1.70
B	3.00	D	1.00
B-	2.70	F	0.00

Activities Overview:

While more detailed assignment directions and prompts can be found on our course Canvas site, below is a general overview of the type of work which will be assigned throughout the semester.

Note: See separate “Course Schedule” document on Canvas for the up-to-date schedule of all readings, viewings, and due dates. You should expect reading/viewing for each class meeting, AND at least one assignment due each week (due by Midnight on FRIDAYS).

Formative Assignments: 45% (Expect at least one assignment each week)

At least once a week, you can expect something to be due for our course. These smaller, formative assignments offer opportunities to reflect, explore, and prepare for our in-class discourse and for our assigned viewings and readings. These are meant to be “low-stakes” assignments: if you make a good-faith effort to complete them according to the specifications, these are easy points to earn. More importantly, they are crucial for developing ideas and practicing the critical engagement for the more summative and higher-stakes essays—so be sure to take them seriously. A few examples of the types of assignments within this category:

- Bi-weekly, one-page reflections to be submitted via Canvas. These reflections will prompt you to reflect on the course content by asking a question or directing you to consider some aspect of the reading/viewing/discussion. *These should be directed and argumentative*, making some sort of claim and thoroughly supporting the claim with textual evidence AND direct reference (and citation).
- Canvas Discussion Boards. These activities will require you to post a ~150-word response to some sort of question/prompt, and then reply (~100-wd) to at least 2 of your peers.
- In-Class Activities/Group Activities. Several times throughout the semester, I will divide the class into smaller groups to consider and prepare responses to different prompts and questions. This type of activity will be completed in-class, and I give you points for having contributed to your group’s conversation and presentation.
- ***Reading/Viewing Quizzes***. *Generally speaking, I am not usually a fan of reading/viewing quizzes, but should I find general class preparation lacking then there may be reading/viewing quizzes to motivate students. I also reserve the right to quiz/assess content from my lectures or from our in-class discussions.*

Two Short Research-Reflection Papers: 10% each (20% total): (3-5 pgs length)

During the course, you will compose two short papers each approximately 3-5 pages in length. Both papers will require (at least) two research sources as they invite you to engage critically with the *materialia* of childhood including the growing publication market for children and the social movements that influence or were influenced by children’s literature. While these papers have their own detailed prompts which I will review with you closer to their due dates, for now it is worth stating that both papers will provide you a list of possible topics from which to choose.

These papers will 1) be polished essays that make a thesis-claim; they will 2) follow MLA conventions including having a Works Cited; and they will 3) introduce you to sources and research avenues for your final paper. My intention is that one of these two papers will provide you the research sources/material for your final paper; these two papers (in addition to the bi-weekly reflections) will also provide you an understanding of my expectations for your writing and for final project.

Final Analytical Paper: 25% of your final grade (5-7 pgs length)

Your major paper for the course will draw together a close, critical reading of one of the central texts from our course and your research on either a social movement or some aspect of period-*materialia*/publication history. You will create and argue a thesis using your research and the resources, lectures, and terminology from our course to develop your argument. I am expecting a polished essay that makes and defends a clear (arguable) thesis and uses close textual evidence and attention to detail to support its claims.

As part of this assignment, before the paper is due, you will be asked to submit an argumentative outline which includes your thesis as well as a map of your essay’s evidence. While I will walk you

through a detailed prompt for the assignment (which will be found on Canvas), this paper will again follow MLA conventions, demonstrate polish, and demonstrate a complex understanding of children’s literature as culturally responsive texts.

Participation: 10% of your final grade

We will be engaging with complex works of literature in this class—the surprising richness of these texts and films emerges most fully when a number of minds contribute their impressions and insights to the discussions. Completing the assigned readings/viewings before class, participating actively in our in-class discussions, asking questions, and pushing the discourse further, etc... **These are essential practices (and expectations) of our course**—not only for your own intellectual, interpersonal, and neurological development but also for those of the rest of the class.

Twice during the semester (at midterms and just before finals), I’ll enter a participation grade based on the following:

90-100%	A- to A+	Contributes regularly and thoughtfully, and attends class as expected
80-89%	B- to B+	Contributes fairly often and well, and attends class as expected
70-79%	C- to C+	Contributes rarely or without much thought but attends class
48-55%	D	Rarely contributes, and does not attend class as expected
0-47%	F	Has critical deficiencies in participation and attendance

Related to Participation → *Laptops, Cell Phones, & NOTES (On My)*

Research has shown that learning is negatively affected when people are dividing their attention between what’s going on in class and what’s appearing on a device such as a cell phone or a laptop. For that reason—and because so much of our course will rely upon listening and contributing to discussions—you **will not be allowed the use of devices during our class unless specifically requested by the instructor.** Instead, I ask that you attend every class with some sort of writing utensil and binder/notebook.

It is my expectation that you take notes during lectures as well as during our discussions.

These notes will be critical tools to support your success on your summative assignments, including your papers. It is important (and my expectation) that your responses and papers will include terms and concepts covered within our discussions and lectures. As such, it is important that you listen and take notes, so that you include that material in your assignments.

Attendance, Lateness, & Deadlines:

Attendance & Lateness:

You may have **three unexcused absences** over the course of the semester. Starting with your fourth absence, your final course average will be lowered by 3 points for each new absence. So, if you have five unexcused absences, you lose 6 points from your final average (In that case, if your average were an 84, it would then become a 78). **More than the equivalent of 3 weeks of absences (over 9 absences) will be considered grounds for an F in the course, even if some absences are excused.**

Do not arrive late to class. If you cannot arrive on time, please consider taking a different section.

Three late arrivals (excluding emergencies, about which I am the final judge) will be counted as one unexcused absence against your total.

Deadlines:

For each day that an assignment is late, it receives a 10-percent penalty. That means that an assignment that earns an 86% becomes a 76% if it's turned in a day late. Two days late, it becomes a 66%, and so on. Therefore, it is so important for you to contact me ahead of time if you are experiencing any unforeseen or unavoidable circumstances—I am committed to being flexible, as long as I am told in advance or as soon as possible about events.

Deadline NOTE: Smaller assignments such as discussions are specifically designed to be formative for our engagement with texts and are essential preparation for our in-class discussions. As such, these will NOT be accepted late. If there is a mitigating circumstance such as a health or personal emergency, I am willing to offer an alternative assignment on a case-by-case basis. It is the student's responsibility to ask for such an accommodation, and it is ultimately my discretion whether to offer an alternative/make-up assessment.

Flexible Deadlines & Responsible Communication: Within college and life there are a lot of competing pressures and demands upon you, both scholarly and personal. As such, I am committed to being flexible with deadlines if there is a conflict (e.g. a wedding in the family, or a “stacking” of major assignments in multiple classes, or if you have been sick the week before a major assignment), **BUT you must** 1) contact me reasonably ahead of the due date, 2) propose a possible alternative date by which you will complete the assignment, 3) be respectful in your email as extensions/adjustments are at my sole discretion. (Please note: *if you miss a flexible deadline, the assignment will still be counted late according to policy described above*).

COVID, Unforeseen Circumstances, and You:

Your best bet is always communication—the sooner you let me know something is happening, the sooner we can adjust so that you will not fall behind. **It is your responsibility, not mine, to communicate your unique situation (see #3 in SLU's COVID attendance policy):**

3. **Students are responsible for notifying their instructor of an absence as far in advance as possible; when advance notification is not possible, students are responsible for notifying each instructor as soon after the absence as possible.** Consistent with the University Attendance Policy, **students also are responsible for all material covered in class and must work with the instructor to complete any required work.** In situations where students must be absent for an extended period of time due to COVID-19 isolation or quarantine, they also must work with the instructor to determine the best way to maintain progress in the course as they are able based on their health situation.

COVID, Unforeseen Circumstances, and the Instructor:

Your health and safety as well as mine are paramount in these strange times. In the event of exposure or positive COVID test (or COVID-related symptoms), I will be following SLU and CDC guidelines regarding quarantine. Should that happen—assuming I am healthy enough still to teach remotely—we will temporarily shift the modality to Zoom and continue through our course with as little interruption as possible... In the event of an illness that either incapacitates me or causes a substantial interruption to our course, it is possible that another instructor will step in to teach for either a brief time or for the remainder of the semester. If such an event were to occur, the Department of English or I would keep you informed of all development in a timely fashion.

Etiquette & Professionalism:

What is the value of a college education? For years, a university education has signaled that a graduate is able **to communicate effectively, to handle themselves professionally, and to present themselves respectfully and intelligently.** Unfortunately, in the midst of COVID and hybrid modalities some of that has been devalued—though hopefully not lost. Recently, I have found that students are lacking some of the executive function and polish which comes from a university education, so I've decided within my classroom to place an emphasis on three important aspects of professional etiquette that are essential skills/habits for succeeding in life outside of college.

1. Communicate Effectively:

Seriously, be proactive and clear with communication—it's the key to success in any workplace. My preferred manner of communication is email, and I encourage you to email me if you have any questions at all about our course. That said, always remember to have an appropriate subject-line, a clear and navigable email, and an appropriate tone. It is also important that you respond within a reasonable amount of time to emails, and that you “confirm” if there is a question directed to you (such as confirming an appointment time). Communication is essential to your success in our course and in life, but it is also something that takes intentionality and effort.

2. Handle Yourself Professionally:

Half of any job is simply “showing up,” but that assumption goes further than just being physically within a space; it means being present intellectually and engaging with the work. Your job within our course is to be a student, so participation is not optional—it is essential to your success. Ask questions, seek clarification, add your own unique perspective, engage with the material, struggle with questions, take risks... These are activities which help you better enter the intellectual sphere, and they also help you better enter your eventual professions in the future.

3. Present Yourself Respectfully & Intelligently:

Being respectful costs very little but pays immense dividends in terms of people's willingness to take you seriously. It is my expectation that everyone will be respectful to one another in the classroom, and this goes further than just when you are directly talking with one another. My expectation is that we will “save the presupposition” (borrowing from St. Ignatius) and assume that the other person has something to contribute. To show that you value others, I also expect that you listen to your peers—and intelligibly engage with what they say (rather than simply “waiting your turn” to speak). Engaging with others' ideas requires intellectual dexterity—and it can be hard—but doing so reflects upon your own professional pose and polish.

University-Level Syllabus Statements

Academic Integrity

https://www.slu.edu/provost/faculty-affairs/teaching-resources-for-faculty/course-syllabus-information/syllabus-statements/syllabus-stmt_academic-integrity.docx

Disability Accommodations

https://www.slu.edu/provost/faculty-affairs/teaching-resources-for-faculty/course-syllabus-information/syllabus-statements/syllabus-stmt_disability-accommodations.docx

Title IX

https://www.slu.edu/provost/faculty-affairs/teaching-resources-for-faculty/course-syllabus-information/syllabus-statements/syllabus-stmt_title-ix.docx

Face Masks (until further notice)

https://www.slu.edu/provost/faculty-affairs/teaching-resources-for-faculty/course-syllabus-information/syllabus-statements/2022-syllabus-stmt_face-masks.docx

In-Person Class Attendance and Participation (until further notice)

https://www.slu.edu/provost/faculty-affairs/teaching-resources-for-faculty/course-syllabus-information/syllabus-statements/2022-syllabus-stmt_in-class-attendance-and-participation.docx

English Department Syllabus Statements

Assessment & Submission of Work

The Saint Louis University Department of English is committed to excellent and innovative educational practices. In order to maintain quality academic offerings and to conform to relevant accreditation requirements, we regularly assess our courses and programs for evidence of student learning outcomes achievement. For this purpose, we keep on file representative examples of student work from all courses and programs such as: assignments, papers, exams, multimedia presentations, portfolios, and results from student surveys, focus groups, and reflective exercises. Thus, copies of your work for this course—including exams, presentations, submitted papers or other assignments—may be kept on file for institutional research, assessment and accreditation purposes. All samples of student work will be anonymized before they are used in assessment exercises. If you prefer that the Department of English does not keep your work on file, you need to communicate your decision in writing to your instructor.

Department of English: Social Justice Statement

Instructors are encouraged to link to the Department's land acknowledgment and social justice statement, available on the [English Department homepage](#).