

Asst. Prof. Katherine Wakely-Mulroney
kmulroney@ntu.edu.sg

Wednesdays, 13:30-16:20
HSS Seminar Room 4

HL2042, Semester 1 AY2026-2027

Children's Literature: *Texts, Theories, Contexts*



DESCRIPTION

This course explores shifting attitudes towards childhood, children's literature, and their attendant critical and theoretical discourses from the nineteenth century to the present. From Lewis Carroll's *Alice* books, which heralded a new "Golden Age" of children's literature, to twentieth- and twenty-first-century novels, picture books, comic songs, and anime, students will consider a variety of different texts and the notions of childhood they reflect and generate. What linguistic and narrative strategies do adult writers, illustrators, and filmmakers draw on in their attempts to speak to, and for, young audiences? What assumptions do we, as adults, bring to our encounters with children's texts? Using Philip Nel and Lissa Paul's *Keywords for Children's Literature* (2011), students will develop the critical vocabulary necessary to discuss children's fiction, poetry, and film in its aesthetic, ideological, and historical contexts. Students will also cultivate a strong theoretical framework for the study of children's literature by engaging with field-defining scholarship.



REQUIRED TEXTS

- ▶ Frances Hodgson Burnett, *The Secret Garden*. London: Penguin Classics, 2013.
- ▶ Guojing, *The Only Child*. New York: Schwartz & Wade Books, 2015.
- ▶ Jihyeon Lee, *Door*. San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2018.
- ▶ Roald Dahl, *Matilda*. New York: Puffin Books, 2007.
- ▶ Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass*. London: Penguin Classics, 2008.

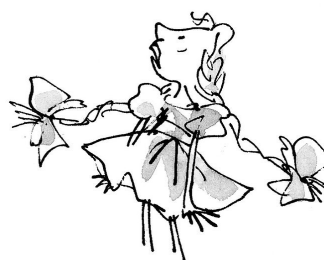
HOW DO I ACCESS THE ASSIGNED READINGS?

The Required Readings are available to purchase in the NTU Bookstore. Many of our primary texts (such as the *Alice* books) are freely available online. The picture books from Weeks 5 and 6 are available in the Library Outpost. Readings by A. A. Milne and Shel Silverstein will be posted on NTULearn

Most of the secondary readings are taken from *Keywords for Children's Literature*, eds. Philip Nel and Lissa Paul (New York: New York University Press, 2011), available as an ebook via NTU Library. All other assigned secondary readings are available via NTULearn.

ASSESSMENTS

- ▶ Participation: 10%
- ▶ Critical Reflection: 15%
- ▶ Term Paper: 25%
- ▶ Final Exam: 50%



Please refer to the Assessments Handout on NTULearn for further details concerning the assessments.

DEADLINES, LATE PENALTIES, AND ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Please review the Assessments Handout on NTULearn, which includes information concerning the deadlines and expectations for each assignment. Please refer to the Assessments Handout for the course policy on the use of AI tools.

SCHEDULE

1. AUG. 12TH - INTRODUCTION

PRIMARY READING (NTULearn > Content > Week 1):

- ▶ Robert Louis Stevenson, "To Any Reader," *A Child's Garden of Verses* (1885)

2. AUG. 19TH - READING CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

PRIMARY READING:

- ▶ Chapters 1-13 of Frances Hodgson Burnett, *The Secret Garden* (1911)

SECONDARY READING:

- ▶ Beverly Lyon Clark, "Audience," *Keywords* (14-17)
- ▶ Karen Sanchez Eppler, "Childhood," *Keywords* (35-41)
- ▶ Peter Hunt, "Children's Literature," *Keywords* (42-47)



3. AUG. 26TH - THE NATURAL WORLD

PRIMARY READING:

- ▶ Chapters 14-27 of Frances Hodgson Burnett, *The Secret Garden* (1911)

SECONDARY READING:

- ▶ Peter Hollindale, "Nature," *Keywords* (161-164)

4. SEPT. 2ND - CHILDREN'S POETRY

PRIMARY READING (NTULearn > Content > Week 4):

- ▶ Selections from A. A. Milne, *When We Were Very Young* (1924), *Now We Are Six* (1927)
- ▶ Selections from Shel Silverstein, *Where the Sidewalk Ends* (1974), *A Light in the Attic* (1981)

SECONDARY READING (NTULearn > Content > Week 4):

- ▶ Katherine Wakely-Mulroney and Louise Joy, "Introduction," *The Aesthetics of Children's Poetry* (2017)

5. SEPT. 9TH - PICTURE BOOK WORKSHOP

NOTE: There is no assigned primary reading this week. We will explore the following texts together in class:

- ▶ Chris Van Allsburg, *The Mysteries of Harris Burdick* (1984)
- ▶ Shaun Tan, *The Red Tree* (2001)
- ▶ Jennifer Uman, Valerio Vidali, and Alix Barzelay, *Jemmy Button* (2012)
- ▶ Robert Macfarlane and Jackie Morris, *The Lost Words* (2017)

SECONDARY READING (NTULearn > Content > Week 5):

- ▶ William Moebius, "Picture Book," *Keywords* (169-173)
- ▶ Maria Nikolajeva and Carole Scott, "The Dynamics of Picturebook Communication." *Children's Literature in Education* 31.4 (2000)
- ▶ Shaun Tan, "Picture Books: Who Are They For?"
- ▶ Clementine Beauvais, "What's in 'the Gap'? A Glance Down the Central Concept of Picturebook Theory." *Barnelitteraert Forskningstidsskrift | Nordic Journal of ChildLit Aesthetics* 6.1 (2015)



6. SEPT. 16TH - PICTURES WITHOUT WORDS

PRIMARY READING:

- ▶ Guojing, *The Only Child* (2015)
- ▶ Jihyeon Lee, *Door* (2018)

SECONDARY READING (NTULearn > Content > Week 6):

- ▶ Emma Bosch, “Wordless Picturebooks,” *The Routledge Companion to Picturebooks* (2017)

7. SEPT. 23RD - IN CONVERSATION WITH PRISCILLA TEY

Readings TBD

RECESS WEEK

8. OCT. 7TH - CHILDREN AND ANIMALS

In-class screening of *My Neighbor Totoro* (Studio Ghibli, 1988)

9. OCT. 14TH - THE GIFTED CHILD

PRIMARY READING:

- ▶ Roald Dahl, *Matilda* (1988)

SECONDARY READING:

- ▶ Elizabeth Bullen, “Class,” *Keywords* (48-52)
- ▶ Lissa Paul, “Literacy,” *Keywords* (141-145)



10. OCT. 21ST - DOWN THE RABBIT HOLE

PRIMARY READING:

- ▶ Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865); *Through the Looking-Glass* (1872)

SECONDARY READING:

- ▶ Angela Sorby, “Golden Age” (96-99)

11. OCT. 28TH - ALICE WORKSHOP

PRIMARY READING:

- ▶ Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865); *Through the Looking-Glass* (1872)

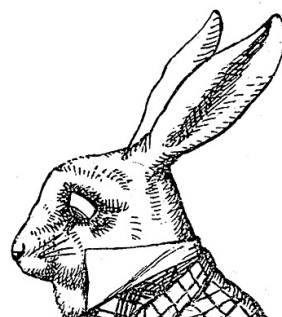
12. NOV. 4TH - ESSAY WRITING WEEK

No assigned readings

13. NOV. 11TH - ALICE IN POPULAR CULTURE / EXAM REVIEW

SECONDARY READING:

- ▶ Richard Flynn, “Culture,” *Keywords* (62-66)
- ▶ June Cummings, “Marketing,” *Keywords* (146-50)



RECOMMENDED SECONDARY SOURCES

JOURNALS

- ▶ *Children's Literature*
- ▶ *Children's Literature Association Quarterly*
- ▶ *International Research Society for Children's Literature*
- ▶ *The Lion and the Unicorn*

KEY BOOKS AND ESSAYS

- ▶ Beauvais, Clémentine and Maria Nikolajeva. *The Edinburgh Companion to Children's Literature*. Edinburgh University Press, 2017.
- ▶ Gubar, Marah. "On Not Defining Children's Literature." *PMLA* 126.1 (2011): 209-216.
- ▶ Gubar, Marah. "Risky Business: Talking about Children in Children's Literature Criticism." *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* 38.4 (2013): 450-457.
- ▶ Grenby, M. O. and Andrea Immel, eds. *The Cambridge Companion to Children's Literature*. Cambridge University Press, 2009.
- ▶ Grenby, M. O. *Children's Literature*. Edinburgh University Press, 2008.
- ▶ Westman, Karin E. "Beyond Periodization: Children's Literature, Genre, and Remediating History." *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* 38.4 (2013): 464-469.
- ▶ Hahn, Daniel, ed. *The Oxford Companion to Children's Literature*. Oxford University Press, 2015.
- ▶ Hollindale, Peter. *Signs of Childness in Children's Books*. Thimble Press, 1997.
- ▶ Natov, Romi. *The Poetics of Childhood*. Routledge, 2003.
- ▶ Nodelman, Perry. *The Hidden Adult. Defining Children's Literature*. Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008.
- ▶ Pinsent, Pat. *Children's Literature*. Macmillan, 2016.
- ▶ Rose, Jacqueline. *The Case of Peter Pan: The Impossibility of Children's Fiction*. Macmillan, 1984.
- ▶ Wall, Barbara. *The Narrator's Voice. The Dilemma of Children's Fiction*. Macmillan, 1991.