M. A. Children's Literature Exam

This exam is based on a reading list that must be approved by the English Department Graduate Committee. The written examination may not be attempted sooner than one’s last semester of coursework, exclusive of thesis credits. Proposed reading lists must be submitted to the English Graduate Committee no later than October 15 for the spring exam, or March 15 for a fall exam.

Guidelines for Creating a Reading List

♦ Students should choose 6 books from each list of the two literature categories.
♦ Students have the option of replacing one book from each of the two literature categories with a book of their choice. They should submit a brief rationale for the inclusion of their title choice to the Coordinator of Children’s Literature when they submit their exam list.

Pre-1980 Children’s/YA Literature

• Carroll, Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland (1865)
• Alcott, Little Women, Parts I and II (1868, 1869)
• Twain, The Adventures of Tom Sawyer (1886)
• Sewell, Black Beauty (1877)
• Collodi, Pinocchio (1883) (warning: not the Disney version)
• Lang, The Blue Fairy Book (1889)
• Baum, The Wonderful Wizard of Oz (1900)
• Grahame, The Wind in the Willows (1907)
• Montgomery, Anne of Green Gables (1908)
• Burnett, The Secret Garden (1911)
• Milne, Winnie-the-Pooh (1926) (warning: not the Disney version)
• Tolkien, The Hobbit; or, There and Back Again (1937)
• White, Charlotte’s Web (1952)
• L’Engle, A Wrinkle in Time (1962)
• Fitzhugh, Harriet the Spy (1964)
• Hinton, The Outsiders (1967)
• Blume, Are You There, God? It’s Me, Margaret (1970)
• Cormier, The Chocolate War (1974)
• Taylor, Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry (1976)
Post-1980 Children’s/YA/“New Adult” Literature

- Garden, Annie on my Mind (1982)
- Dahl, Matilda (1988)
- Woodson, I Hadn’t Meant to Tell You This (1994)
- Rowling, Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone (1998)
- Myers, Monster (1999)
- Curtis, Bud, Not Buddy (1999)
- An Na, A Step from Heaven (2001)
- Zusak. The Book Thief (2005)
- Garcia, One Crazy Summer (2010)
- Sáenz, Dante and Aristotle Discover the Universe (2012)
- Thomas. The Hate U Give (2017)
- LaCour. We Are Okay (2017)

Background Theory and Concepts


Note: You are not responsible for reading all of the entries from Keywords. Instead, read the following 6 entries, and also choose 2 other entries. This material is expected to inform your critical discussion of texts on the MA exam.

- African American (chapter 2)
- Children’s Literature (chapter 9)
- Gender (chapter 18)
- Image (chapter 25)
- Theory (chapter 46)
- Young Adult (chapter 49)
Sample Children’s Literature Exam Questions

The four-hour exam includes two questions dealing with “Themes and Issues” and two questions relating to “Theory.” Students must answer one question from each category.

Themes and Issues

Themes and issues will change from one semester to the next, although the form of the questions may remain substantially the same. In some cases, two themes or issues may be offered within a single question, and students may choose the one that best suits their lists.

This part of the exam has two primary objectives. It invites students:

• To make connections between diverse eras, tracing important issues, themes, and genres over time.
• To engage with primary texts in relation to works of literary theory.

Other themes and issues may include gender roles, ethnicity and cultural background, the child’s relation to society, children versus adults, shifting cultural norms in regard to childhood, archetypes of childhood, class issues, the image of the family, etc. When narrower topics are offered, students will be given a choice of topics (possibly within one question) so that they can make the best use of their individual lists.

Sample Question:

Choose any three works on your list that represent three different genres and consider them in relation to the theme of “coming of age.” Possible genres to choose from might include fantasy, realism, historical fiction, poetry, and picture books. In your analysis, be attentive to how both content and genre impact on the author’s depiction of the theme of “coming of age.” What similarities and differences do you find among the writers you have chosen? To what extent is each writer’s treatment of the theme affected by her or his choice of genre?

Theory

The works of theory on the list will be the same for all students. The exam questions invite students to draw on theoretical works and approaches in their readings of the primary works on their individual lists.
In general, these questions will ask students to discuss no more than three works: one work of theory and two primary texts. The emphasis will be on analyzing and evaluating theoretical works along with primary texts.

**Sample Question:**
Under the keyword “Gender,” Erica Hateley summarizes Judith Butler’s argument about the performative nature of gender roles. According to this argument, ideas about gender roles are based in part on the performance of repetitive behaviors and cultural rituals that contribute to gendered representations. Hateley suggests that children’s literature often reflects such gendered performances. Please identify examples of gender performance in two texts from your list that you have not already used for this exam. Discuss how the characters (and by extension, the readers) learn about gender roles and expectations through repetitive behaviors and cultural rituals depicted in these texts. Do these texts portray the performance of gender roles in a rigid way, or do they encourage a more flexible approach? What cultural assumptions about masculinity, femininity, and/or androgyny are conveyed through the gendered performances in these texts?