

English 2330: Introduction to Children's Literature

Professor Jessica Straley

Fall 2016

Tues/Thurs 10:45am-12:05pm



Many of the best-known and best-loved works of literature are children's stories. *The Grimms' Fairy Tales*, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, *Peter Pan*, *The Wizard of Oz*, *The Tale of Peter Rabbit*, and *Where the Wild Things Are* have been read and enjoyed by generations of children who, through these books, have been introduced to the pleasures of reading, the values and conflicts in the broader world around them, and the liberating powers of their own imaginations. This course will explore the classics of the genre, including the texts mentioned and pictured above, as well as lesser-known titles in order to show students how the genre developed historically from the 1600s to the 21st century, how it formulates its lessons for young readers, and how it leaves open spaces for the child's desire and agency. Under the surface of this seemingly simple genre, we will find a complicated web of assumptions about childhood, claims about culture, and critical inquiries into what children want and how they learn. In addition to texts for children, we will investigate children's book illustration, children's films, merchandising, and websites targeting children. Throughout the semester, we will see that an examination of children's literature is an examination of culture more generally, and we will engage with questions about literacy, school, nature, animals, class, race, gender, and media.