



Western Arts & Humanities

GSWS 9220: Who gets to be a girl?: Constructions of Race and Gender in Young Adult Literature

Tentative Outline

Instructor:

Email:

Office:

Phone:

Office Hours:

Class Time:

Office Location:

Location:

*Email is the best way to contact me. If you email me Monday through Friday between 9 am and 5 pm, I will respond within 24 hours; if you email me on the weekend, I will not respond until Monday after 9 am. Be sure to put your course number into the subject line and to use your UWO email to contact me.

*I reserve the right to ask students to mask while they are in my office.

Land Acknowledgement:

Western University is situated on the traditional territories of the Anishinaabeg, Haudenosaunee, Lunaapeewak and Attawandaron peoples, who have longstanding relationships to the land and region of southwestern Ontario and the City of London.

Course Description and Objectives

In this course, we will consider how normative and non-normative girlhood are represented in books by North American authors to try to answer the question: who gets to be a girl? We will study a variety of genres and texts written in the 19th, 20th, and 21st centuries. While we will prioritize young adult literature, we will also consider texts written for adults featuring girls.

Girls' literature, according to Ashley N. Reese, is "a book written about a girl for a girl reader." Historically, the primary purpose of girls' literature, particularly works published in North American and Great Britain, was to help prepare girl readers for womanhood. Texts such as Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women*, L.M. Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables*, Eleanor H. Porter's *Pollyanna* feature precocious adolescent girl protagonists whose journeys to become well-educated, well-mannered women are key to the novels' plots. As Reese asserts, much of girls' literature is "underpin[ned] by the female bildungsroman." Dawn Sardella-Ayres and Reese contend that girls' literature typically focuses on the protagonist's "trajectory of growth and development . . . [and] the socialization of the heroine into the roles of wife and mother remains central to girls' literature" (34). While Sardella-Ayres and Reese specifically refer to 19th- and early-20th century texts, their comments remain relevant to late-20th and early-21st century texts. Girls' literature, particularly that written for young adult (YA) girls, may no longer emphasize the importance of girls becoming wives and mothers, but it continues to prioritize the experiences of normative girls and to prioritize their journeys to becoming normative women. Girls who challenge the norm—that is, girls who are not white, cis-gendered, heterosexual, middle-class, and able-bodied—are underrepresented in young adult literature. As we read and discuss, we will attend to issues of race and sexuality, as Black,

Brown, and Indigenous girls and queer girls are often excluded from the definition of normative girlhood.

Throughout the term, we will consider a variety of issues that are of concern to scholars studying literature written for girls, young adult literature, and girlhood studies, including, but not limiting ourselves, to the following:

- What is girls' literature? How is it different from children's literature or young adult literature more broadly?
- What historical events influence the way girlhood is defined and represented in literature?
- How do novels written for girls and young women differ from those written for adult women?
- How are issues of sex, gender, and race represented and/or explored in books written for girls?
- Where do these works fit into the canon of children's' and young adult literature?
- What is normative girlhood? What is non-normative girlhood? What circumstances (including historical period, social class, and geographic region) affect how normative girlhood and non-normative girlhood are defined?
- How has the definition of girlhood changed to include girls who have been historically excluded from the definition?
- How is girlhood represented in literature? How has that representation changed since the mid-19th century till the early-21st century?

Course Delivery

Our class is scheduled to meet in person in.

Due to the pandemic, I reserve the right to meet virtually. Should we meet virtually, I will notify students at least 12 hours before begins, and we will meet "synchronously," via Zoom.

All course materials will be posted to our OWL site: <http://owl.uwo.ca>. Any changes will be indicated on the OWL site and discussed with the class.

If students need assistance, they can seek support on the [OWL Help page](#). Alternatively, they can contact the [Western Technology Services Helpdesk](#). They can be contacted by phone at 519-661-3800 or ext. 83800.

[Google Chrome](#) or [Mozilla Firefox](#) are the preferred browsers to optimally use OWL; update your browsers frequently. Students interested in evaluating their internet speed, please click [here](#).

Course Texts

Little Women, Louisa May Alcott

Anne of Green Gables, L.M. Montgomery

The Diary of Anne Frank, Anne Frank

If I Was Your Girl, Meredith Russo

Blood Water Paint, Joy McCullough

Pet, Akwaeke Emezi

Almost American Girl, Robin Ha

I'm Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter, Erika L. Sanchez

The Hate U Give, Angie Thomas

Other readings will be available through OWL.

*Please note: I have ordered specific copies through Western’s Bookstore. Except for *Little Women* and *Anne of Green Gables*, I have no preference which edition you use, so feel free to purchase these at Western’s bookstore or elsewhere. You may also use e-books.

For *Little Women*, please use the WW Norton and Company edition, edited by Anne K. Phillips and Gregory Eiselein, ISBN: 978-0-393-97614-4.

For *Anne of Green Gables*, please use Broadview edition edited by Cecily Devereaux, ISBN: 9781551113623.

Work of the Seminar

Engagement	10%
Reading Circle Presentation	10%
A-Level Assignment	20%
B-Level Assignment	25%
C-Level Assignment	35%

Engagement (10%)

This is a seminar and is, thus, focused on discussion. While I may briefly lecture and turn the class over to individuals/groups for presentations throughout the term, the bulk of each class will be spent discussing the readings, both primary and secondary.

You are expected to actively participate in each class. “Actively participate” means to be engaged with the discussion and the materials and to participate, thoughtfully, in the discussion. Please get in touch with me at any point if you feel the virtual nature of this course is making your participation difficult.

Reading Circle Presentation (10%, various due dates)

For this project, you will read a novel for young adults that features a girl protagonist. This is also a chance to expand your reading and discussion outside of our regular class meetings. Think of this as a book club for our class. You and your group will read an additional assigned text and then you will present the book to class, explaining why you think the book should or should not have been included in our readings. You and your group are not teaching the text; rather, you’re presenting the text to the class, briefly summarizing the text’s plot, describing key characters and events, and then presenting your thoughts on how the book addresses the key questions of our course. The purpose is to broaden our exposure books that fall under our course theme. This process will also expose you to some of the ways teachers select texts.

Remainder of Seminar Work (80%, various due dates)

The rest of the work is, in part, up to you. Use your work in this seminar to support your own goals and intellectual development. Do you want to produce an essay you can revise toward publication in a scholarly journal? Do you want to prepare to teach a course related to our seminar topic? Would you like more practice in digital forms of scholarship, public speaking, or pedagogy? On our OWL site, I have posted a “menu” of assignments, organized by the labor they require: “A-Level assignments,” in my estimation, require the least labor, while “C-Level Assignments” require the most. Each student is required to complete one assignment from each column. I have mapped out a few potential tracks through these assignments, but you need not follow them. If you have a particular sort of work in mind that does not appear on the menu (a website, a podcast, an Instagram

page, for example), please let me know. My only requirement is that you disperse your work among all three columns and that you focus on normative and non-normative girlhood in YA literature, either as represented in the texts we read together or in material not included on our syllabus.

By September 15th, submit to me, by email, a one-page proposal (composed in Word or Google Docs) outlining the work you will complete and a schedule for its completion. You do not yet need to know the content of your work, only the form it will take. For example, you can propose writing a conference paper, but you do not need to know the topic of the paper. Include a rationale for why you have selected the assignments you have. I will review your proposals and return them in one week, meeting with students individually as I deem necessary, ensuring you have the resources and examples you need to complete your chosen assignments.

Written Assignments

All texts on the syllabus are available for use in any assignment, but no text may be substantively employed in more than one assignment. Please use MLA formatting to document your research. I highly recommend you meet with me to discuss your plan for each assignment before you begin working on them

Professionalism & Privacy:

Western Students are expected to follow the [Student Code of Conduct](#). Additionally, the following expectations apply to this course:

- Students are expected to follow online etiquette expectations provided on OWL.
- All course materials created by the instructor are copyrighted and cannot be sold/shared.
- All course materials created by graduate students (i.e., presentations, handouts, discussion questions, etc.) are the intellectual property of the student creating the materials and cannot be sold/shared.
- Recordings are not permitted (audio or video) without the instructor's or the students' explicit permission.
- Permitted recordings are only to be used for class and are not to be distributed.
- All recorded sessions, if any, will remain within the course site or unlisted if streamed.
- If we must meet by Zoom, students should feel free to keep their cameras on or off as they choose, with the exception of presentations. When you are giving a presentation, please turn your camera on.

Course Policies

Submitting Assignments: All assignments are due in-class on the date stated on the class schedule. You are expected to submit an electronic version to OWL. All papers should be submitted as .doc or .docx files.

Attendance Policy: The very nature of this course requires that you attend regularly to do well. You are expected to come to class each week. Should you need to be absent, notify me as soon as you know you will be away.

Working from Home: The pandemic has changed the way we conceive of workspaces and home spaces. As we are all working from home, I understand that you (and that I) may be interrupted by pets, parents, partners, and/or children, etc. As a group, we will be tolerant and understanding of such interruptions. Should you need to step away from the virtual class to deal with something going on at home, please feel free to do so, leaving a comment in the chat if you are able. While I anticipate that we will be able to meet in person for the semester, I have included this if we must meet virtually.

Cameras and Microphones: Please feel free to have your camera on or off as you choose or as is necessary to accommodate your internet speed/bandwidth. If you are able, please do have your camera on for your presentation. If you chose to use a static picture of yourself or an image, you are expected to choose one that appropriate for an academic/professional setting. To minimize background noise, please keep your microphone off unless you are speaking. Use the hand raised feature when you want to speak. You should feel free to use an appropriate virtual background and to use a nickname on Zoom. If you choose to use a nickname, please email me so that I learn your nickname and mark your attendance based on your nickname.

Owl/Sakai: The use of OWL/Sakai is necessary for successful completion of this course. This includes accessing readings as stipulated in the course outline, downloading instructions and guidelines for assignments, and submitting assignments OWL. All course information, including assignments, will be posted on the course website.

Statement on Academic Offences: Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following Web site: http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_grad.pdf.

All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism-detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and [Turnitin.com](http://www.turnitin.com).

Statement on Artificial Intelligence: The use of AI (including programs like Chat GPT) to aid in any assignments for GSWS 9920 is strictly prohibited. All work must be your own.

Enrollment Restrictions: Enrollment in this course is restricted to graduate students in the Gender, Sexuality, and Women's Studies Department and the English Studies Department as well as any student that has obtained special permission to enroll in this course from the course instructor as well as the Graduate Chair (or equivalent) from the student's home program.

Graduate Course Health and Wellness: As part of a successful graduate student experience at Western, we encourage students to make their health and wellness a priority. Western provides several on campus health-related services to help you achieve optimum health and engage in healthy living while pursuing your graduate degree. For example, to support physical activity, all students, as part of their registration, receive membership in Western's Campus Recreation Centre. Numerous cultural events are offered throughout the year. For example, please check out the Faculty of Music web page <http://www.music.uwo.ca/>, and our own McIntosh Gallery <http://www.mcintoshgallery.ca/>. Information regarding health- and wellness-related services available to students may be found at <http://www.health.uwo.ca/>.

Students seeking help regarding mental health concerns are advised to speak to someone they feel comfortable confiding in, such as their faculty supervisor, their program director (graduate chair), or other relevant administrators in their unit.

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to Mental Health Support at <https://www.uwo.ca/health/psych/index.html> for a complete list of options about how to obtain

help.

Accessible Education Western (AEW): Western is committed to achieving barrier-free accessibility for all its members, including graduate students. As part of this commitment, Western provides a variety of services devoted to promoting, advocating, and accommodating persons with disabilities in their respective graduate program. Graduate students with disabilities (for example, chronic illnesses, mental health conditions, mobility impairments) are strongly encouraged to register with Accessible Education Western (AEW), a confidential service designed to support graduate and undergraduate students through their academic program. With the appropriate documentation, the student will work with both AEW and their graduate programs (normally their Graduate Chair and/or Course instructor) to ensure that appropriate academic accommodations to program requirements are arranged. These accommodations include individual counselling, alternative formatted literature, accessible campus transportation, learning strategy instruction, writing exams and assistive technology instruction.

Readings and Assignments

Sept. 7	First Day of Class Louisa May Alcott, <i>Little Women</i> , Book 1
Sept. 14	Louisa May Alcott, <i>Little Women</i> , Book 2 Due: Work Proposal by Sept. 15 th @Midnight *All assignments must be submitted to OWL.
Sept. 21	L.M. Montgomery, <i>Anne of Green Gables</i>
Sept. 28	Meighen Forum @ Stratford Festival, “Examining Female Friendships”
Oct. 5	Excerpts from <i>Floyd’s Flowers</i> Du Bois, “Of the Meaning of Progress,” from <i>The Souls of Black Folk</i> Fannie Barrier Williams, “The Colored Girl”
Oct. 12	Zitkala-Sa, “Impressions of an Indian Childhood,” “School Days of an Indian Girl” Due: A-Level Assignment by Oct. 13 th @ Midnight
Oct. 19	Anne Frank, <i>The Diary of Anne Frank</i>
Oct. 27	Meredith Russo, <i>If I Was Your Girl</i>
Nov. 2	Reading Week, No Class
Nov. 9	Joy McCullough, <i>Blood Water Paint</i> Due: B-Level Assignment by Nov. 10 th @ Midnight
Nov. 16	Akwaeke Emezi, <i>Pet</i>
Nov. 23	Robin Ha, <i>Almost American Girl</i>
Nov. 30	Erika L. Sanchez, <i>I’m Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter</i>

Dec. 7 Angie Thomas, *The Hate U Give*

*We will determine the due date of the C-level assignments as a class.