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

Developing a children’s literature reading list allows one to focus on individual interests and concerns, while encountering a range of diverse and challenging works of literature. Students should consult the list of recommended works on the following pages; however, they may also propose no more than two texts not on this list. All lists should include at least four women writers, four writers of color, and two books published within the last fifteen years. Selection of texts should follow the guidelines below:

**Fables, Traditional Fairy Tales, and Literary Fairy Tales**

Read all the following texts in this category:

- **Aesop’s Fables:**
  - “The Bat, the Birds, and the Beasts”
  - “The Fox and the Grapes”
  - “The Goose with the Golden Eggs”
  - “The Lion in Love” (any edition).

- **Grimm, from the 1857 Edition:**
  - “Little Red Cap”
  - “Briar Rose”
  - “Hansel and Gretel”
  - “Thumbkin”.

- **Perrault:**
  - “Little Red Riding Hood”
  - “Sleeping Beauty” (any edition).
• Anderson:
  o “The Little Match Girl”
  o “The Little Mermaid” (any edition).

**MEDIEVAL**
Read all the following texts in this category (available online):

Selections from *Babees Book*:

- “The ABC of Aristotle”
- “The Little Children’s Little Book”
- “How the Good Wife Taught Her Daughter”
- “How the Wise Man Taught His Son” (any edition).

**THE PURITANS AND DIDACTIC LITERATURE**
Read all the following texts in this category (available online):

From *New England Primer*: “In Adam’s Fall [an alphabet poem]” (read both 1777 and 1843 editions)

Bunyan, from *The Pilgrim’s Progress*: The First Part, Sections I and II (1678)

Edgeworth, from *Early Lessons*: “The Purple Jar” (1801-1802)

Watts, from Divine and Moral Songs for Children:

- “Against Idleness and Mischief”
- “Examples of Early Piety”
- “Against Quarreling and Fighting”
- “Against Lying” (1715).

**CLASSICS: 19th—Early 20th Century**
Choose four texts include at least one from each of the following two categories:

**AMERICAN AND CANADIAN**

- Alcott, *Little Women* (1868-69)
- Alger, *Ragged Dick* (1868)
- Baum, *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (1900)
- Burnett, *The Secret Garden* (1911)
- Montgomery, *Anne of Green Gables* (1908)
- Porter, *Freckles* (1904)
- Twain, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876)
Webster, *Daddy-Long-Legs* (1912)  

**BRITISH**

Barrie, *Peter and Wendy* (1911)  
Carroll, *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* (1865)  
Grahame, *The Wind in the Willows* (1907)  
Hughes, *Tom Brown’s Schooldays* (1857)  
Kipling, *Kim* (1901)  
MacDonald, *The Princess and the Goblin* (1872)  
Milne, *Winnie-the-Pooh* (1926)  
Molesworth, *The Tapestry Room* (1879)  
Nesbit, *Five Children and It* (1902)  
Stevenson, *Treasure Island* (1883).

**CONTEMPORARY REALISM (20TH–21ST CENTURY)**

Choose four texts from:

Cleary, *Ramona the Pest* (1968)  
Daly, *Seventeenth Summer* (1942)  
Fitzhugh, *Harriet the Spy* (1964)  
George, *Julie of the Wolves* (1972)  
Johnson, *Toning the Sweep* (1993)  
Salinger, *Catcher in the Rye* (1951)  

**FANTASY (20TH–21ST CENTURY)**

Choose four texts from:

Hoban, *The Mouse and his Child* (1967)
Lewis, *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* (1950)
Norton, *The Borrowers* (1952)
Tolkien, *The Hobbit* (1937)
Tolkien, *There and Back Again* (1937)
White, *Charlotte’s Web* (1952)

**Historical Fiction**

Choose four texts from:

Forbes, *Johnny Tremain* (1943)
O’Dell, *Island of the Blue Dolphins* (1960)
Spiegelman, *MAUS* [vol. 1] (1973)

**Picture Books**

Choose two books from:

Ga’g, *Millions of Cats* (1928)
Potter, *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* (1902)
Sendak, Where the Wild Things Are (1963)  
Seuss, The Cat in the Hat (1957)  
Raschka, Arlene Sardine (2002)  
Van Allsburg, Bad Day at Riverbend (1996)  

POETRY
Choose two poets from:

Belloc:
- “Charles Augustus Fortescue”
- “Henry King”
- “Jim, Who ran away from his Nurse, and was eaten by a Lion”
- “Matilda”
- “The Microbe.”

Dahl, from Revolting Rhymes:
- “Cinderella”
- “Goldilocks and the Three Bears”
- “Jack and the Bean Stalk”
- “Little Red Riding Hood and the Wolf”
- “The Three Little Pigs.”

Lear:
- “Calico Pie”
- “Incidents in the Life of my Uncle Arly”
- “The Jumblies”
- “The Owl and the Pussycat”
- “The Table and the Chair.”

Milne:
- “At the Zoo”
- “Vespers”
- “If I Were King”
- “The King’s Breakfast”
- “Rice Pudding.”

Stevenson:
THEORY
You must read all of the following works, but may include others in addition.

- Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment*: Chapter One
- Nodelman, *Words About Pictures*: Chapter Two
- Plotz, *Romanticism and the Vocation of Childhood*: Chapter One
- Trites, *Disturbing the Universe*: Chapter One
- Rose, *The Case of Peter Pan, or The Impossibility of Children’s Literature*: Chapter One
- Zipes, *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion*: Chapter One.

This list of critical and theoretical readings is designed merely to generate relevant questions for the exam. It does not represent “all the theory you need to know.” The list of theoretical works will be changed periodically.

Sample Reading List Children’s Literature

FABLES, TRADITIONAL FAIRY TALES, AND LITERARY FAIRY TALES

Aesop’s Fables:

“The Bat, the Birds, and the Beasts”
“The Fox and the Grapes”
“The Goose with the Golden Eggs”
“The Lion in Love.”

Grimm, from the 1857 Edition:

“Little Red Cap”
“Briar Rose”
“Hansel and Gretel”
“Thumbkin.”
Perrault:
“Little Red Riding Hood”
“Sleeping Beauty.”

Anderson
“The Little Match Girl”
“The Little Mermaid.”

MEDIEVAL
Selections from Babees Book:
“The ABC of Aristotle”
“The Little Children’s Little Book”
“How the Good Wife Taught Her Daughter”
“How the Wise Man Taught His Son.”

THE PURITANS AND DIDACTIC LITERATURE
New England Primer
John Bunyan, Pilgrim’s Progress: The First Part, Sections I and II
Isaac Watts, from Divine Songs:
  o “Against Idleness and Mischief”
  o “Examples of Early Piety”
  o “Against Quarreling and Fighting”
  o “Against Lying.”

CLASSICS: 19th—EARLY 20th CENTURY
Carroll, Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland (1865)
MacDonald, The Princess and the Goblin (1872)
Alcott, Little Women (1868-69)
Twain, The Adventures of Tom Sawyer (1876).

CONTEMPORARY REALISM (20th—21st CENTURY)
An Na, A Step from Heaven (2001)
Anderson, Speak (1999)

FANTASY (20th—21st CENTURY)
Block, Weetzie Bat (1989)
Dahl, James and the Giant Peach (1961)
Hamilton, Sweet Whispers, Brother Rush (1983)

**HISTORICAL FICTION**
Curtis, Bud, Not Buddy (1999)
Park, A Single Shard (2001)
Paulsen, Soldier’s Heart: A Novel of the Civil War (1998)
Taylor, Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry (1976).

**PICTURE BOOKS**
Sendak, Where the Wild Things Are (1963)

**POETRY**
Milne:
- “At the Zoo”
- “Vespers”
- “If I Were King”
- “The King’s Breakfast”
- “Rice Pudding.”

Stevenson:
- “Foreign lands”
- “My Kingdom”
- “Picture-Books in Winter”
- “Pirate Story”
- “The Unseen Playmate.”

**THEORY**
Judith Plotz, Romanticism and the Vocation of Childhood: Chapter One: “One Shape, One Feature, and One Size”: “Romanticism and the Quintessential Child” (1-40).
Trites, Disturbing the Universe: Chapter One
Jacqueline Rose, The Case of Peter Pan, or The Impossibility of Children’s Fiction: Introduction (1-11), Chapter One: “Peter Pan and Freud” (12-41).

Roberta Trites, Disturbing the Universe: Power and Representation in Adolescent literature: Chapter One: “Do I Dare Disturb the Universe?: Adolescent Literature in the Postmodern Era” (1-20).


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:*
Discuss two literary works on your list in relation to Chapter One of Judith Plotz’s *Romanticism and the Vocation of Childhood*. Be sure to discuss both Plotz’s definition of romantic childhood and her general argument in the chapter before moving on to your analysis of the primary works. In your analysis, consider to what extent the child protagonists in your work embody elements of romantic childhood (as defined by Plotz) and to what extent they depart from it. In conclusion, compare the portrait of romantic childhood in both literary texts. How do images of romantic childhood contribute to the overall significance of these two primary literary works?