

EXTENDED LEARNING INSTITUTE
NORTHERN VIRGINIA COMMUNITY COLLEGE

COURSE GUIDE

ENG 150
CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

ELI HOTLINE: (703) 323-3347
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Revised 1/00

ENG 150

COURSE OVERVIEW:

UNIT 1

**THE ROOTS OF CHILDREN'S LITERATURE:
DIDACTICISM AND ROMANTICISM:** Introductory
Letter, Readings, Study Questions, Videotape 1,
Exam 1

UNIT 2

FOCUS ON THE CHILDREN : Child Development
Readings, Study Questions, Child Development Exercise, Folk
Tale Readings, Videotape 2, Folk Tale Essay

UNIT 3

THE AUDIO/VISUAL WORLD: Readings on Illustration,
Study Questions, TV Reading, TV Exercise, Exam 2

UNIT 4

SELECTING GOOD BOOKS: Readings, Videotape 3,
Bibliography Assignment, Exam 3

THE ROOTS OF CHILDREN'S LITERATURE: DIDACTICISM AND ROMANTICISM

WEEKS 1-4

This month your work will focus on the following objectives:

1. Begin thinking about why children love the stories that they do.
2. Understand how the concept of special books for children has evolved historically.
3. Articulate the difference between "didactic" and "romantic" stories.
4. Explore a variety of picture books.

Unless otherwise noted, all page numbers refer to pages in this *COURSE GUIDE*.

Submit: Introductory Letter

Purpose

The purpose of the letter is to introduce yourself so that your instructor can get to know you individually, and to remember the importance that stories can have for children.

Directions

Find a book that you loved as a child. If you do not currently own it, go to the children's section at one of the county libraries. You may want to do some browsing, especially if you can't remember right away the books that you read as a child. Look through the picture books. Look at the fiction section for older children; you may find something whose title you had long forgotten. Was there a nonfiction subject that gripped you in elementary school? The library may well still have a few of the best nonfiction books on that subject.

When you have selected a book that you remember, check it out, read it, and answer these questions:

1. List the title of the book, the author, and the original publication date.
2. At about what age did you encounter this book? Did you read it to yourself, or did someone read it to you? Describe what you remember about the time and place of the reading.
3. Briefly describe the plot. What happens? (If the book is nonfiction, what is it about, and

what are the major subsections?)

4. Are the illustrations a significant factor in this book? If so, which ones did you remember best?
5. Do you think that the book has any special messages for children? This might be an explicit moral, or it might just be some lesson or value that is implied in the story or information.
6. Why do you think you liked the book? Was it relevant to your particular needs in some way?
7. Looking at the book now, are you surprised by anything? For instance, is it shorter or longer, harder or less difficult than you remembered? Is there some aspect of it that you see now that you didn't see then? (For instance, it may strike you now as sentimental, racist, optimistic, or surprisingly wise.)
8. Finally, add a sentence or two about why you are taking this course. For instance, are you a teacher? A parent? Are you interested in writing for children?

Write out the answers to these questions in the form of a letter.

Attach a cover sheet with the following information:

Name
 Student Number (Social Security Number)
 ATTN: ENG 150
 Section Number
 Home Campus
 Introductory Letter

Mail the letter to ELI along with a self-addressed legal-sized envelope, so that your instructor can return feedback to you. Use this address:

Extended Learning Institute
 ATTN: ENG 150
 Northern Virginia Community College
 8333 Little River Turnpike
 Annandale, VA 22003-3796

Grading

You will receive full credit when you submit your letter; I will not return a letter grade. This letter is worth 5% of your final grade.

Remember to keep a copy of everything you send. Also, wait at least 2 weeks before calling to

see if your assignment has been received.

Here is a sample:

Dear Dr. Sharpe:

The book that I selected is The Door in the Wall by Marguerite deAngeli. I must have read it to myself in about the fifth grade, or maybe the summer between 4th and 5th. I don't remember the first reading, but I know that I owned a copy and read it many times, usually in bed at night.

This book tells the story of a boy during the plague in the Middle Ages. With his father off at the Crusades and his mother serving the Queen he becomes sick, and is abandoned by the servants who fear the plague. But he has a different disease (probably polio) that cripples him but does not kill him. He is cared for by a monk, who teaches him many skills--swimming, carving, and patience. He ends up in a castle under siege, and performs heroically by limping out, disguised as a poor shepherd, and bringing help from a neighboring castle. His father and mother return in time to see him honored by the king for his bravery.

The pictures are not particularly important, but they are an aid to imagining life in the Middle Ages. They are mostly black-and-white line drawings with lots of detail about things like clothing and furniture.

This book very definitely has a lesson, which is related to the title. The story shows that even under great disadvantages, a person can accomplish important things. The title comes from a saying of the monk's, that if you follow a wall far enough, you will always come to a door.

I think I liked the book because I liked that message. The book is written so that it is easy to identify with the boy; for instance, on the first page he is shown rejecting cold lumpy porridge to eat. This simple scene makes the boy seem just like us, even though his time and place are so different.

I am surprised now by how much information about the Middle Ages is packed into the book. But I still like it very much, I still like the message, and to some extent I still identify with the boy. Some parts of the plot seem pretty unlikely to me now, but that didn't bother me when I was a child.

I have one child, a boy of seven, and I am taking courses toward a teaching certificate for elementary grades.

Sincerely,

Log on: Discussion Board

Please use the discussion board as a place to share and enrich the course, for yourself and others. This is our “class discussion.” It starts with a place to share introductory pages for those who wish to: you could post a shorter version of your introductory letter, telling fellow students how you got interested in children’s literature, or what work with children you have done.

Other discussion forums will focus on materials that you are thinking about in preparation for exams and papers. Share your ideas; respond to the ideas of others. I will be part of the discussion, too, offering my own views and sometimes recourses – places to go for more information. If you know of particularly useful web sites in connection with these topics, share the addresses with us. See you on the Forum!

Directions for logging on to the Discussion Board are on p. 7 of the Syllabus.

**Read: Chapter 1, pp. 4-15 (We will continue with “Children’s Needs” next month)
Chapter 3, pp. 41-61**

Complete: Study Questions

Purpose

The study questions serve as a study aid since there is no published study guide.

Directions

As you read each chapter turn to these study questions. The questions are the kind that might be discussed in a class. You do not have to send in answers, but if you would like to talk about one of them, to express an opinion, or to ask a question, please contact me. Some of the questions are answered in the text; some have no specific answers, but call for some thinking or a point of view. Any of the study questions could be used for an essay question on a later exam.

Remember, the fastest place to reach me is through my campus answering machine, at 323-3173, my campus e-mail, shars@nv.cc.va.us, or my ELI voicemail, 323-3713, 0836.

Grading

The completion of the study questions is not graded, but will help you prepare for the exams and expand your thinking on various topics.

Chapter 1 Study Questions

NOTE that your text contains many sidebars labeled "Viewpoint." These viewpoints contain pithy comments by writers of children's books, and by critics and psychologists who have written books and articles about children and books. Don't skip them; in many instances, they are the most thoughtful parts of the text. Note that the source of the quotation is always given. If you would like to find the whole book or essay and have trouble locating it, give me a call for help.

Each chapter ends with a bibliography called "Adult References and Book Selection Aids." You

do not have to study these bibliographies, but they are a valuable resource.

1. The authors claim that "television...has made children more sophisticated" (p. 7). What does "sophisticated" mean here? Can you see both positive and negative sides to sophistication?
2. The authors speak of "the candor" (p. 7) that is characteristic of contemporary children's books. As new subjects, they cite death, the disabled, child abuse, and books about ethnic minorities (see p. 8). From your reading about history in Chapter 3, which of these subjects would you say is really new? If the subjects are not new, has the treatment of them somehow changed? How?
3. Define "multiculturalism" as described in the "Viewpoint" on p. 8 by Hazel Rochman.
4. On page 7, the authors note that "Vast changes have taken place in our society and, as in the past, those changes have influenced children's books and are reflected in them." Think of some contemporary children's books that you think reflect some of the changes that have taken place. An example might be the large number of "realistic" stories for children of divorced parents.

Chapter 3 Study Questions

1. In the opening paragraph (p. 53) the authors suggest that "pedantic or moralistic stories," which have formed so large a part of the history of children's books, are not good ones. Do you agree with this judgment? Why or why not?
2. What was a hornbook? Think about teaching a child to read with such an instrument. What would the difficulties be?
3. What was a chapbook? What sorts of stories did they contain?
4. Speaking of evangelical writing for children, Margaret Cutt says that "the point of view...was that of the parent" (Viewpoint, p. 52). Can you think of any modern books in which the point of view is that of the parent? Can you identify a book where the point of view is clearly that of a child? What is the difference?
5. Describe the different books to which the term "Mother Goose" has applied. See p. 46, 48 and 59.
6. The New England Primer used the alphabet as the foundation for a poem about the way to God. The verses of the poem, highly didactic and moralistic, were about matters of primary concern to adults at the time (See p. 46). Compare an alphabet book of today. Do the verses or words represent things of importance to adults, to children, or neither? Which type of book is more likely to convince children that reading is important?

View: Videotape One

You should have purchased one videotape along with your textbook and Course Guide. This tape contains 3 segments, each one just under an hour long. For now, your assignment is to watch only the first segment, "Romantic Stories and Didactic Stories." You can replay the tape as often as you want, you can stop it where you want, and you can make yourself comfortable while you listen. On the other hand, you can't IMMEDIATELY get an answer to a question or comment. However, if you leave a phone message or send me an e-mail, I will be glad to reply. Or you can write me a note if you prefer.

Before you start the tape, be sure you have paper ready for taking notes just as you would in a classroom.

You will be tested on material in the tape when you take Exam 1, and especially in the essay questions for Exam 1. A sample exam follows the study questions.

Complete: Study Questions for Videotape #1

Look over these study questions both before and after you watch the tape. You do not have to send in answers, but DO contact me if some area is unclear to you, or you would just like to make a comment. This material will be important when you take Exam 1.

1. Describe the characteristics of a didactic story.
2. What are some weaknesses of THE NEW ENGLAND PRIMER, as a tool for teaching children to read? What are some strengths?
3. Describe the characteristics of a romantic story.
4. What historical changes contributed to the emergence of the romantic story for children?
5. What psychological needs may be served by didactic stories? by romantic ones?
6. What type of story is Tom Sawyer? Why?
7. What didactic elements does Peter Rabbit have? what romantic ones?
8. Take the Sample Stories list which follows, to your library, and find at least two examples of each type of story. List the characteristics that put the book in its category.
9. Some modern stories are hard to place in either of these categories. Look carefully at one of the "hard to place" stories listed below. What view of children does it assume? What view of adults? Can you think of any historical or cultural influences of the late 20th century that are active in this book?

Sample Stories to Look For

This list is here in part because I wanted to explain some of these examples on the video, but I was prevented from doing so by the difficulty of getting copyright permissions. However, if you look at even a few of these readily available books, you should begin to get a sense of the difference. Many picture books, of course, are neither romantic nor didactic, and many combine the characteristics in interesting ways. I have tried to list here some that are fairly clear.

Didactic Stories

Almost any Berenstain Bears
 Mark Teague, Pigsty
 Dr. Seuss, Green Eggs and Ham
 The Lorax
 John Burningham, Mr. Gumpy's Motor Car
 Richard Scarry, Please and Thank You
 Caroline Binch, Gregory Cool
 Watty Piper, The Little Engine That Could
 Marjorie Flack, The Story About Ping
 Harry Allard, the Miss Nelson stories
 Miriam Cohen, stories about getting along in school
 Tomie dePaolo, Strega Nona
 Russell Hoban, Bedtime for Frances
 Donald Hall, Ox-Cart Man
 Paul Galdone, The Little Red Hen
The Three Little Pigs (any version)
 C. Collodi, Pinocchio
 Betty MacDonald, Mrs. Piggle Wiggle series

Romantic Stories

Peter Spier, Oh, Were They Ever Happy
 Mary Rayner, Mr and Mrs. Pig's Evening Out
 Munro Leaf, The Story of Ferdinand
 Hans Rey, Curious George
 James Stevenson, The Supreme Souvenir Factory
 John Yoeman, The Wild Washerwomen
 William Steig, Doctor DeSoto
 Brave Irene
 John Burningham, Avocado Baby
 Jon Scieszka, The Stinky Cheese Man
 David Wiesner, Tuesday
 Kenneth Grahame, The Wind in the Willows (older readers)

Hard to Place Stories

Judith Viorst, Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day
Ezra Jack Keats, Peter's Chair
Cynthia Rylant, The Relatives Came
Dr. Seuss, The Cat in the Hat
Maurice Sendak, Where the Wild Things Are

Log on: **Discussion Board**

Complete: **Practice Test**

Purpose

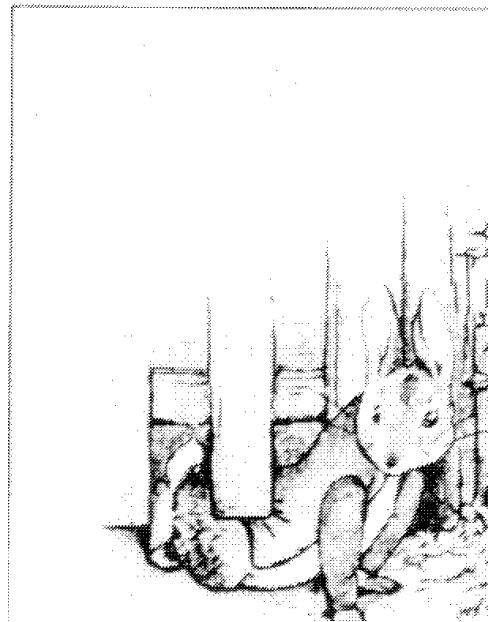
To help you review some of the key content in Chapters 1 and 3 and to show you the type of questions that will be on the exam.

Directions

Take the Practice Test after you have completed the assignments for Unit 1, but before you take Exam 1. You can use the practice test to test yourself on what you have learned. While taking the test, try not to use your text or notes. When you complete the test, compare your answers to those provided at the end of the practice test. Do not send your answers to ELI. If you have questions, call your instructor.

Grading

This assignment is not submitted for grading.



From Beatrix Potter, The Tale of Peter Rabbit, 1903.

PRACTICE TEST

Exam 1 will consist of ten multiple-choice questions and an essay. You will have a choice among the essay questions. The essay will ask you to apply the concepts of didacticism and/or romanticism to particular books. The book selections will have to come from you, so if you are completely new to the world of children's books, do a little exploring in a library before you take the exam. Be sure to study the sample essay questions below, and think about how you would answer them.

Multiple Choice Samples

1. The first English printer to publish works especially for children was:
 - a. Randolph Caldecott
 - b. Daniel Defoe
 - c. William Caxton
 - d. Jacques Rousseau

2. Robinson Crusoe is an adult book, but children liked it because:
 - a. it satisfies their hunger for competence
 - b. it is didactic
 - c. it has a giant and tiny people
 - d. it was set to music

3. The story of Goody Two Shoes is an example of:
 - a. didacticism
 - b. romanticism
 - c. early American Puritan literature
 - d. a fable

4. The 18th century philosopher Rousseau advocated:
 - a. sex education
 - b. greater freedom for children
 - c. corporal punishment
 - d. reading at any early age

5. Peter Rabbit is a great story for children because:
 - a. it teaches them to obey their mothers.
 - b. it teaches them the difference between boys and girls.
 - c. it teaches them that they can follow their own needs.
 - d. they can take the lesson they need from it.

Sample Essay Questions for Unit 1

1. Describe one story from the Berenstain Bears series. Explain what its didactic or romantic characteristics are, and why you think this is or is not a good book for children.

2. Describe one of the romantic stories that you looked at. What are its specific romantic characteristics?
3. Your textbook stresses the importance of didacticism in early children's literature. Describe your own example of a contemporary didactic story. Is it somewhat different from the didacticism of 100 years ago, or is it quite similar?

Practice Test Answer Key

1. c
2. a
3. a
4. b
5. d

Complete: Exam 1

The ELI Policy and Procedures for examinations is listed in the *SYLLABUS* and the following is a summary:

Prepare for Exam

Call Testing Lab for its hours

Take Photo ID and Exam Pass to Testing Lab

Take Exam

If you are outside metropolitan Washington, incarcerated or handicapped, see the information in the ELI Policy and Procedure section and the Proctor Request form in the *SYLLABUS*.

Please do not let the exams stop you from completing the course. If you have great difficulty getting to a learning lab or are very concerned about taking exams, please call your instructor instead of giving up!

WHAT TO EXPECT: This exam will consist of 20 multiple-choice questions based on Chapters 1 and 3. It will also have one essay question. It is **10%** of your grade.

FOCUS ON THE CHILD

WEEKS 5-8

This month your work will focus on the following objectives:

1. Identify the most prominent child psychologists and describe major outlines of their theories.
2. List major characteristics for different ages.
3. Be familiar with theories of the origins of folk and fairy tales.
4. Compare similarities and differences among related tales.
5. Describe the psychological approach to folk tales of Bruno Bettelheim.

Read: "Understanding Children, " (came with the Syllabus)
 "Children's Needs," pp 15-20 in Chapter 1 of your text.

Complete: Study Questions

1. Explain in your own words why a knowledge of child development is helpful in selecting books for children.
2. Summarize in your own words the needs described by Abraham Maslow (Appendix A). Why are these needs described as a "hierarchy"? Note that these needs apply to ALL people, not just to children.
3. Erik Erikson (Appendix A again) divides childhood chronologically. Roughly where do his stages begin and end? When do children begin to develop what we would call a conscience? What is the main characteristic of children in the elementary school years? What sets adolescence apart?
4. Describe Piaget's stages of concrete operations and formal operations. What elements can be added to stories for children who have reached these stages?
5. At what ages would most children prefer flat characters (that is, characters with one moral dimension, like bad witches or good fairies) to realistic ones?
6. Look carefully at Kohlberg's description of moral development. Can you identify a story with a "good boy-nice girl" orientation? Or a legalistic orientation? Note that true moral thinking does not develop before adolescence, an age when many "children" begin reading adult books. See if you can explain to a friend what "true moral thinking" means in this context.
7. Paraphrase in your own words the Viewpoint by Jerome Bruner on p. 21 in your textbook.
8. On p. 16 of your textbook (in the top left hand corner) the author says that "children are forever seeking to maintain the precarious balance between personal happiness and social approval." Which side of this balance do didactic stories support? Which side do romantic stories support?

Submit: Child Development Exercise

For this exercise, I want you to do a very small research project.

Pick out a child whom you know well, as a teacher, parent or other relative. Make a checklist for yourself of some of the characteristics that this child is "supposed" to have, according to Piaget, Erikson, and Kohlberg. Use the chart on child development that is included in your Appendix. Then write a one to two-page essay (double spaced) describing particular actions or words of the child, showing that he/she does, or does not, in your view, fit the supposed characteristics of the age.

For instance, a child of seven is supposed to be in Erikson's stage of "industry vs inferiority." You might report that she recently said that she made a goal for her team, that she was upset about a poor grade on a test, or that she wants to practice something harder so she can win.

You won't be able to cover all of the characteristics listed in the chart, of course. Write about three of the characteristics that make most sense to you.

If you don't know any child well, you may as an alternative do a brief report on the work of a child psychologist not mentioned in the Appendix. Possibilities include Bruno Bettelheim, Anna Freud, Carol Gilligan, Robert Coles, Maria Montessori, and Selma Fraiberg. Essays by and about these psychologists can be found on the Internet, in library journals, and in books. You will find many good summaries of their work in child development textbooks, available in libraries. A summary of one article or chapter will be sufficient. Be sure to provide me with the bibliographic information about what you read.

Grading:

Your exercise will be graded for a clear and concrete understanding of the developmental concepts involved. You will need to communicate a few complex ideas in a short space. Be as concrete as possible: tell what the child actually says and does.

This exercise is worth **10%** of your grade.

Log on: Discussion Board**Read: Chapter 6, pp 166-192
Your own sampling of folk tales.**

Directions on reading folk tales:

You will need to go to a library. Some children's sections put folk and fairy tales in a separate location, so get oriented. There will be picture book editions of single tales, as well as collections for older readers. Pick the level of reading that you are most interested in. I'd like you to read at least three folk or fairy tales, and if possible, three different versions of the same tale.

Some suggestions: Different versions of Cinderella will be discussed on Videotape 2, below, and you might want to read them. There is a very old text by the Frenchman Charles Perrault that has several translations and many different sets of illustrations; there is the well-known Disney book, taken after the movie; and there is the Grimm Brothers story "Ashputtel." You may also find "The Egyptian Cinderella" as well as others from different cultures.

Other often-retold tales include "Little Red Riding Hood," "The Three Little Pigs," "The Three Billy Goats Gruff," and "Snow White." Or you might prefer to concentrate on tall tales: you could find different versions of Paul Bunyan, or Brer Rabbit. Or you could choose a selection

of creation tales, perhaps comparing a story from Africa, Native America, and China. Many collections are described in Chapter 6; just choose several tales that have a theme or character in common.

Complete: Study Questions on Reading

1. Make your own definition of a folk tale. Is the source more important, or the elements of the plot, or the kinds of characters?
2. Explain the theories of monogenesis and polygenesis (p. 167). How are folk tales carried from place to place? Do the children you know encounter folk tales mostly from adults who tell them, from books, or from movie/TV versions? Do you think the mode of encounter makes any difference?
3. What is a cumulative tale? Why is it a good choice for very young children?
4. Characterization in folk tales is often simple; most fairy tale characters are all good or all bad. Is this true in the tales that you read? At what age might children outgrow this kind of character?
5. Describe the characteristic introductions and conclusions of fairy tales.
6. Many fairy tales contain violent or cruel incidents, but most modern versions are "cleaned up," making gentler tales than those of the 19th century. Did the stories you read differ in their amount of violence? From what you know about children, do you think the more violent or the more gentle version is better? Why?
7. What are the special characteristics of African American folklore? In what ways do these stories express the needs and experience of a people in slavery? What elements might have been carried over from Africa?
8. Why is the tall tale particularly suited to America of 150 years ago?
9. The Grimm brothers actually collected their tales from middle-class people, and not from illiterate peasants, as is widely believed. They also edited, embellished and changed the tales in ways they thought proper; they took out explicit sexual material, and they sometimes added a didactic touch. They believed in hard work, discipline, honesty, and the submission of women. Do you find these middle-class values expressed in the tales that you read? Some of you will run into contemporary versions with contemporary messages added, like an explicit feminist tall tale with a female superhero, or the Three Little Pigs from the point of view of the wolf. The question here is whether these messages are ones that children should be concerned with.
10. Some fairy tales really did arise from working people, and through history, some of these people have been very poor indeed. It has been suggested that the incredible feasts in fairy tales are the wishful creations of people who are often hungry, and that the fabulous wealth of fairy tale kings and princesses reflects the idea of wealth that an impoverished peasant might have. Do you find these wishes present in the tales that you read?

11. What particular characters and plot elements did the tales you read have in common? Sometimes a character changes name but still represents a pattern or motif: a hero who overcomes impossible tasks, a wicked old woman, a magical beast, etc.

12. Describe the differences among your tales. Does one version seem more didactic or more romantic than another? Are the illustrations different? Is the style of the writing different? Are different values expressed? Is the solution achieved in the same way: through the hero's own efforts, through magical intervention, through luck?

Watch: Videotape 2

Complete: Study Questions on the Videotape

1. According to psychologist Bruno Bettelheim, what is the real subject of "Cinderella"?
2. How does Bettelheim explain the common appearance of wicked stepmothers in fairy tales?
3. What are some of the differences between the Perrault or Disney Cinderella, on the one hand, and the Grimm brothers "Ashputtel," on the other?
4. For what reasons does Bettelheim prefer the Grimms' story?
5. At least two of the students prefer the Disney version. What reasons do they give?
6. Linda doesn't think she would read "Cinderella" to a child. What reason does she give?
7. One student asks whether the fairy tales were written by men. What is the answer?
8. The group looked at some 19th century illustrations for "Little Red Riding Hood" by Gustave Dore. What comments are made? What comments would you make?
9. Should a parent or teacher discuss interpretations of fairy tales with a child?
10. What was your own favorite fairy tale, and why do you think you liked it?

Log on: Discussion Board

Submit: Essay On Folk Tales

For this assignment, select two of the folk tales that you read, to compare and contrast. (You may of course go back to the library and select some fresh tales at this point, if you think they will work better for you.) You should contrast the tales in these areas: the types of characters present (flat or realistic, male or female, strong or weak, animal or human, etc); the types of actions present (cumulative, heroic, magical, violent, psychologically meaningful, etc.); and the degree of didacticism present (Does the tale set out to teach certain values, and if so, what are they?) Finally, taking those three categories into consideration, evaluate the tales for their appropriateness for a certain age of child, whatever you choose.

For instance, your essay might have as its theme the idea that Disney's Cinderella is superior to Ashputtel for a five-year-old, on these grounds: the fairy godmother is a more

concrete character, which is comforting to a five; the little animal characters of Disney are appealing to a five; there are slapstick actions that fives like; there is less violence; and the Cinderella relies more on her own cleverness, which fits modern values better, and is suited to the emerging industry vs inferiority stage.

Remember that in writing a compare and contrast essay, it is usually better NOT to write all about one story, and then all about the other. Make a little outline, and line up your topics: how the characters compare, how the use of violence compares, how the lessons compare, or whatever. In each area, give specific and concrete examples from the stories that you read. Quotation is good.

Your essay should be between three and five pages, double spaced, and should include identification of your tales by title, author, illustrator, and date.

Grading:

This essay will be graded, like any English essay, on organization, clarity, and support of your reasons through specific examples. Accurate reading of the tales and of the needs of the child are also important. Secondly, grammar and spelling will be taken into consideration.

This essay is worth **10%** of your grade.

THE AUDIO/VISUAL WORLD

WEEKS 9-12

This month your work will focus on the following objectives:

1. Understand how good pictures can enhance and extend a text.
2. Identify the elements of pictures, so that you can see them more vividly and discuss them more easily.
3. Be familiar with some of the variety of television programming that is aimed at children.
4. Be able to criticize or praise programs for cogent reasons.
5. Be aware of the multiple messages of television -- how much is going on beside the overt plot and advertising.
6. Know what research is showing about the influence of television on children's behavior and beliefs.

Read: Chapter Five, pp. 115-122; and Viewpoints on pp 122, 133, and 136.
"A Gallery of Children's Book Illustration," pp 149-162.

Complete: Study Questions

Chapter 5

1. Look over the list of ingredients of illustration on pp 116-117. They include color, line, shape, texture, and composition. As you look through the picture gallery, select several pictures that particularly appeal to you, and identify the elements in it. Notice how different elements are important in different pictures.
2. Could any of the pictures in the "gallery" be frightening to a child? Can you remember a time when a picture was frightening to you? What strategies did you use to protect yourself? Did these same strategies work for frightening moments on television, or did you develop different ones?
3. Poor illustrations are often characterized by stiff lines, limited color variation, incoherent composition (the picture has no center of focus; your eye wanders around it aimlessly, trying to figure out what's important), or sometimes a lack of depth or textural variation. Try to find a book that has poor illustrations, and explain to your satisfaction why they are poor.
4. The use of the word "realistic" in connection with pictures causes much confusion. A graphic artist does not do what a camera does (although a good photographer does pay attention to some of the same things that an artist works on). Neither one of them reproduces the world the way it "is." Nevertheless, we do call some pictures more realistic than others. They have perspective, naturalistic coloring, correct relative sizes -- indeed, such pictures are useful at giving information about what things look like. But realistic pictures are seldom used for stories. Why not? Identify the "unrealistic" aspects of the pictures in the gallery.

5. Colors and color combinations can have emotional suggestions. Though the color reproduction in your text has muted the originals somewhat, you can see the difference between "hot" colors, like those in #22 (p. 157), and "cool" colors, like the blues and greens of #12 (p. 153). Where else does bright red show up? What functions does it have?

6. Find pictures in which the subjects are in motion. What different devices can an artist use to express movement?

7. Which is more important to children, action or color (see p. 120)? What else is very important to them?

Questions about material from Chapter 5 will appear on Exam 2.

Read: "Notes on Television and Children" which follows. Do this BEFORE you attempt to do the television assignment. The material in these notes will be tested in your next exam.

Notes On Television and Children

Consider these questions about the effects of television on children:

1. Does TV distort the child's world view, or understanding of reality?
2. Does violence on television influence the behavior of children?
3. Does watching television hinder school achievement?
4. Can television be used for educational ends? The great example here is of course Sesame Street, but researchers are divided as to whether its influence is a good one.
5. Does television socialize children toward "active consumer roles," to quote one researcher? That is, does it slowly create a citizen who understands his needs in terms of "products" designed to meet them? Does television in fact get us all to define our "needs" the way we do?

Sometimes I think that I am foolish to be offering a course in children's literature, meaning books, when the overpowering cultural experience of all children (and perhaps most adults) is television. This experience seems to be expanding; as I write this, in the summer of 1999, we now have an everyday show aimed at one-year-olds (*Teletubbies*, of course) and two twenty-four hour cable channels, both of them free with "basic" cable service, aimed exclusively at teenagers. A third children's cable channel, *Nickelodeon*, is supposed to offer after-school and weekend entertainment. One author has recently called *Nickelodeon* "a crass, strident, grossly overcommercialized travesty of a children's channel that portrays its young viewers, in programs, promos, and ads, as dumb-jerk, good-time-Charlie consumeroids -- the junior varsity of the *MTV* generation." (Ron Powers, "The Last Angry Mouse," in *The Beast, The Eunuch and the Glass-Eyed Child: Television in the '80s and Beyond*, Harcourt 1990). The offerings multiply, reaching more audience, younger and older.

By now, television is the chief form of literature of virtually every child in the United States. Various studies have indicated that most children, over their whole childhood, spend more hours watching television than going to school, let alone reading. A 1981 study by the Institute for Social Research in Ann Arbor, Michigan, found that children 6-8 watched an average 12.9 hours a week, compared to reading for about 50 minutes; for older children of 11-12, the TV

hours went up to 19.1 per week, while reading still averaged only an hour and a half. "Television, not print, is the children's literature of our times," says Kate Moody in a book called *Growing Up on Television*. She goes on, "Most of today's school children have not read the books that their teachers studied in 'children's literature' courses in college, nor do they know fairy tales and nursery rhymes as did former generations. They know TV programs better than books, and when they do read books they are mostly poorly written items about TV monsters, robots, etc. Their literature is electronic, and is written primarily in the language of pictures, not words."

Still, parts of the federal government seem to want children's offerings expanded. The Children's Television Act of 1990 was supposed to increase the amount of "educational" children's programming, though its effect appears mostly to be an increase of programming aimed at children, but not particularly educational. The FCC, or Federal Communications Commission, which gives licenses to broadcasters and imposes a few limits on them, doesn't have very clear definitions of "educational," and no wonder: television itself is a medium that has proved extremely effective at "teaching" us to buy, to watch more television, and to adopt a host of other values, but not at all effective at teaching us to think consciously about abstract topics -- what we used to mean by "learning." Even back in 1971, the Surgeon General's Report on Television, administered by the National Institute of Mental Health, had this to say about the effects of television:

"Almost all evidence testifies to television's role as a formidable educator whose effects are both pervasive and cumulative. Television can no longer be considered as a casual part of daily life, as an electronic toy. Research findings have long since destroyed the illusion that television is merely innocuous entertainment. While the learning it provides is mainly incidental, rather than direct and formal, it is a significant part of the total acculturation process."

It remains for us to try to decide whether we agree with Kate Moody, the Surgeon General and others in deploring the influence of television, or whether we regard television as a neutral or even positive force in children's lives. These are not simply academic questions; as a society, we are engaged in various debates about the uses of public airwaves, and many of these debates center specifically on children. As a teacher or parent, you will want to make your voice heard. You will also need to try to influence the children whom you know as individuals.

All children are confused, at first, by television. What is it? Who are the people in the box, and what is their relationship to us? Mr. Rogers is one of the few producers who has tried to deal with this problem and to explain to young viewers what's going on, but he freely admits that you can't always do this. In a recent book (*Dear Mr. Rogers*, Penguin Books 1996) he includes several examples of this confusion. A child waits enthusiastically for a repair man to remove the back of a TV set, and then expresses disappointment that it isn't full of tiny people. A father writes about a discussion with his three-year-old, in which the child asks whether Mr. Rogers "poops." On a tour of the TV studio, a perky four-year-old gazed up at Mr. Rogers in amazement, and demanded, "How did you get out?" And even after Mr. Rogers' best explanation, the child only asked, "How will you get back in?"

Of course, very young children have always been "confused" by fiction. Ask a three or four year old whether it's possible to visit Cinderella, and you will sometimes hear ingenious answers. You could, but she lives too far away. Yes, but she can't play today. Only by late four or five are children able to tell us that a character is make-believe. And there is no problem here: children always do figure out what fiction is, and most continue to understand that it can be valuable even though it is not "real." But the same learning process doesn't always take place around television, and certainly not so quickly. Consider that at five children start learning to

write, but most never learn to make TV shows. (Some fortunate school systems can use local cable channels, and this is probably valuable for understanding how television works.)

Television seems to foster misunderstandings in at least some viewers. One curious finding is that heavy viewers are LESS able to distinguish between advertising and program content than light viewers; heavy viewers seem to be more mesmerized, less discerning. Children are confused by the interaction of actors and muppets, by the versions of "school" offered by a show like *The Magic School Bus* or the version of teen life offered by sitcoms. Television frequently misinforms us about history, about the kind of effort needed for accomplishment, about the joy of buying, about the material wealth of other people. But most alarmingly, heavy TV viewers become confused about violence. Most television violence, whether performed with live actors or presented as cartoon, has no aftereffect beyond a second or two. One *ER* nurse reported a boy who was brought in with a bullet wound, who expressed astonishment that it HURT.

Violence on television has been at the center of concern and reasearch efforts. The first serious hypothesis that was levied against children's television, beginning in the 60's, was the possibility that television was leading to more aggressive behavior in children. Though this is a difficult area to explore experimentally and it is hard to prove particular assertions, the preponderance of the evidence is a resounding yes, television violence does affect behavior. **In the Appendix, you will find a document taken from the ERIC Clearinghouse** which is a summary of many research findings. The summary was made in 1993; you may find more information appearing in newspapers and journals at any time. I would draw your attention particularly to the three "Concerns" listed toward the end of the article; aggressive behavior is not the only negative outcome of violence seen on television.

A second serious charge against television has been that it presents material at a pace that makes it impossible for young children to develop the longer attention spans necessary for school and for tasks like reading and math. When you watch your programs, you will be asked to jot down how many sequences you are watching. How often does the scene or set of characters change? In a typical half hour of *Sesame Street*, a child is subjected to forty or fifty different sequences. The designers of the program say that this is necessary to hold children's attention, but some child psychologists are dubious about the results. Watching this quick stuff, one gets used to it; a teacher who merely talks, minute after minute, is boring by comparison. Children who are heavy TV watchers on average do more poorly in school, no matter what they watch. Moreover, children who watch a lot of television have MORE trouble understanding plots and commercials, are less articulate, have less imagination, have more trouble sitting still, and are more likely to encounter disciplinary problems at school.

But what about the educational benefits of television, especially of the programming on public television? Many studies have shown that *Sesame Street*, for instance, does teach the alphabet and increase vocabulary -- but this effect is strongest in homes that are heavily impacted by poverty, or where English is a second language. In English-speaking homes with ample adult care, the academic advantage of *Sesame Street* is negligible or absent.

And there are possible disadvantages, even to our beloved Street. Like all television, what *Sesame Street* teaches, above all, is how to watch television. Learning the alphabet, it turns out, is not particularly difficult; learning to focus the attention, to move the eyes across a page, to form pictures in your own mind out of black marks on a page -- these things are more difficult than the alphabet, and MUCH more difficult if you are used to television.

Preschool and elementary students can benefit from what is sometimes called a "culture of literacy." They need to see other people reading, people who seem to enjoy it, who report favorably about it, and who get information from reading. They need to have stories read to them

in an atmosphere of security and mutual enjoyment. One of the peculiar things about nearly all television, including *Sesame Street*, is that no one is seen reading. Occasionally a "fairy tale" will start with a picture of a big old book, but it quickly moves away from this picture; books are too still to make good television, which needs movement. The story immediately becomes a play, an oral rendition, with all the changes from literary or "written" language to spoken language. So children who are watching television never become familiar with the somewhat different patterns of language that writing uses. One observer, Barbara Mates ("Who Reads On Sesame Street?" *Education Digest* April 96) has noted that *Sesame Street* is a strange urban environment in which there are almost no written words, at all -- no street signs, no advertisements, no newspapers or menus or even graffiti. How could reading be important, if there are no written words around?

The program *Reading Rainbow* has tried to really bring reading to television, and it is often pointed to as an example of how television can support reading. Books that are featured get an instant sales boost. But there are not many programs that read actual stories in this way (and you might note that the half hour is largely taken up with other things that offer more visual stimulation than the story). By its very nature, television goes fast. Reading does not go fast. (Are you feeling impatient at this moment?) And more importantly, thinking does not go fast. In order to think, the mind needs a respite from stimulation -- something that happens constantly as you pause in your reading, but that television never offers.

Two pioneers in the study of television, Jerome L. and Dorothy G. Singer, had this to say about the pace of television, over 15 years ago:

"A special property of American television certainly, and perhaps increasingly of television produced in other nations, is the rapid pace of presentation of material with constant intercutting, interruption, and shifts in sound levels. Our commercial television is primarily designed to keep the viewers' attention on the screen. This is accomplished quite skillfully by producers who know to shift sequences rapidly, zoom in and zoom out, and suddenly introduce new settings, loud music, new characters, and a variety of special effects. Foreigners not used to American television, watching the brief segments, the constant interruptions by brief rapid-fire commercials, and the quick changes of pace even within plot sequences, as well as the heavy emphasis on physical action, report that it is disorganizing and often arouses anger or almost physical distress. But American children have grown up with this pattern of quick-paced stimulus presentation, and this must indeed be a new kind of experience never before a part of the perceptual environment of the child in civilization." (Jerome L. and Dorothy G. Singer, "Psychologists Look at Television," *American Psychologist*, July 1983).

Some children's programs, notably *Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood*, make a real attempt to move at a pace that is appropriate for young children. Most adults dislike watching Mr. Rogers, because of the pace. And once children have been exposed to the high-speed diet of other shows, they usually abandon Mr. Rogers.

You might think that as people get older, the segments of television prepared for them would become longer. This is not the case on the current teen channels, *MTV* and *VH1*. The music videos on these channels last about four minutes, with constant intercutting to new scenes and changes of camera angle and range. And according to some viewers, the channels create an odd effect that is common in much of television: there are no beginnings and endings. Of course, a particular video ends and another begins, but the transition from one to another is smooth and rapid, or punctuated by "coming-up-next" devices that keep the viewer fixed to the sofa. The whole sequence has no beginning and ending, just as a sitcom is continuous; there's always another episode coming up later. Even when a show does a finale and stops production, there are often reruns. So that in all of television generally and on *MTV* especially, the sense of history is lost: the idea that things happen in a meaningful sequence, and that what comes before is a cause of what comes after. On sitcoms there can be no character development, because the programs

can be watched in any sequence. When *VH-1* mixes videos from different decades, the effect is the same, the erasing of history.

But perhaps most of all, what the teen channels do is to create a fantasy world in which no adults are present; a world in which teens and near-teens appear to be doing everything, to be in charge. This is understandably a nearly universal teen fantasy, to get away from the power (and so often the disapproval) of adults. The world of music videos addresses desires for sex and love, but most of all for freedom. Look at the imagery in the videos, and think about what kinds of basic needs those images suggest. But of course there is no real satisfaction of needs possible, on the screen; instead, as one writer says, "We are trapped by the constant hope that the next video will finally satisfy..." (E. Ann Kaplan, *Rocking Around the Clock*, Methuen 1987, p. 4). *MTV* glorifies the advertisers' message, all the time: the things that matter on *MTV* are (what else?) visual things: slender or voluptuous bodies, clothes, hair, settings, celebrity, coolness, mannerisms. Some of these things are inevitably interesting to young people. Now we have them without plot, and without end.

Of course, teenagers and younger children, too, also watch sitcoms, which have characteristics of their own. Sitcoms are deeply conservative; they inhabit a strange TV world in which there is no change. Children don't get older, parents never divorce or marry, character doesn't develop, people don't move, parents who had jobs don't lose them, parents who don't have jobs don't get them. And here, too, the emphasis is on the same visual information: clothes are important, terrific haircuts are important, people live in gorgeous houses with no upkeep problems, and celebrity matters a great deal. On *MTV*, at least it's perfectly apparent that we are watching an imaginary world. The sitcom, however, always pretends to be realistic, and this I find quite alarming. If you are working with a grade school child, I hope you will probe him or her for their estimate of the realism of these programs. And that you will try, just a little, every time you watch a program with a child, to point out some of the discrepancies.

What is it that TV can do well? It can certainly babysit; it can keep toddlers from being bothersome better than any other toy, and mothers or caregivers in their homes are often isolated; our children are not raised, by and large, in a community where they can pass securely from adult to adult. Mothers at home need television.

It strikes me, too, that television can do music pretty well. This is one of the charms of *Barney*; the music is fairly constant, and uses simple melodies that children can understand and sing. Do young children actually sing along with the TV set? Maybe, but for the most part, I doubt it. Television viewing induces a passive attitude, while you are watching it. But perhaps children sing the songs later.

How is TV doing with stereotyping? Better than it used to, right? Remember the old *I LOVE LUCY* days, or are you too young for that? For myself, I see a frightful new stereotype, which I call "Bumbling Dad." In program after program, Dad seems to be sort of well meaning but goofy, helpless, unskilled, stupid. I cannot think that this steady diet is good for either boys or girls. Again, see what the kids think, if you can.

And what about advertising? I'm of various minds about advertising. Sometimes advertising is the most beautiful, the most musical, the most witty, the most imaginative part of television. The greatest creative talents of our culture can, if they're so inclined, make a great deal of money in advertising. And we are, after all, a capitalist society; fundamentally, we make our living buying and selling, and if we have a good time doing it, isn't that grand?

You will have to decide what you think about this. Serious proposals have been made to ban all advertising aimed at children, on the grounds that children cannot understand that the message has been created with the sole purpose of selling stuff, and that the stuff may not be like what is pictured. Advertisements for toys routinely misrepresent the size of the toy. They often present grotesquely stereotyped versions of male and female bodies, in various dolls. They push a

diet of sugar and salt, substances which are mildly addictive. And, fundamentally, advertising aimed at children undermines family life, because its premise is that the child will nag the parent to buy things; no attempt is made to convince the parent that the thing is a worthy product. The parent must either resist the child's requests, which are repeatedly reinforced by the TV set, or give in and buy a product in which the parent has no faith. Neither parent/child relationship is very good.

As a teacher or parent, you have the job of interpreting and perhaps limiting television for the children you work with. Some parents attempt an absolute ban on television. I think that this is likely to fail; like it or not, television is the central cultural fact of the world in which your children are growing up, and they need to understand the people and times in which they live. They need to learn to limit television, and to handle it. Parents should watch television with their children, at least some of the time, and talk about what they are seeing, as you would with a story. Teachers can initiate discussion of television, helping children to understand that real violence is different from TV violence, that real families are different from TV families, that real time is different from TV time. For older children, teachers should occasionally watch the shows that the kids are talking about. Maybe the show will have some good points; maybe it's funny or exciting; and having accepted that, maybe the teacher can ask about how television and reality are different. The discussion will be difficult. Television is antithetical to thought. But keep trying, because we **All** need to think about television, in order to keep from being its victim.

Complete: Television Exercise

For this exercise, you are to answer specific questions about two different kinds of children's television programs. Before you start, you should watch a variety of children's shows, if you are not already somewhat familiar with them. Check with your local listings or a favorite child for possibilities. You may interpret "children's shows" somewhat loosely; you may analyze anything that children are watching. Recently, for instance, *"The X-files"* has been a favorite with the early teen set, though it is not billed as a children's show.

You may answer right on the question sheet to send in, or use your own paper if you need more space. Remember to include a cover sheet as described in Week 1.

Program One

For this set of questions, choose a show that **USES SOME VIOLENCE**. You may want to videotape the program so that you can watch it more than once. You always see more the second and third time around, even if -- or especially if -- you are bored.

Examples: *Mighty Morphin Power Rangers*, *Animaniacs*, *The Daffy Duck Show*, *Pinky and the Brain*, *Goosebumps*, *Jumanji*, *Superman*, *Spiderman*, *Gargoyles*, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer...*

The show may have cartoons or live actors, or a combination.

Program Two

For this set of questions, choose a show that **DOES NOT USE VIOLENCE**, as a general rule. It might be a show on a PBS channel or it might be a more or less "educational" show from a commercial channel. It should be a program that children often watch.

Suggestions: *Sesame Street*, *Mr. Rogers Neighborhood*, *Bill Nye the Science Guy*, *The Magic School Bus*, *Arthur*, *My So-Called Life*, *National Geographic*, *The Simpsons*, *Saved by the Bell...*
Check your local listings; the possibilities are endless.

Grading

You will be graded on the completeness, clarity and thoughtfulness of your answers. This exercise is worth **10%** Of your grade.

ENG 150
CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

I. Program One – Violence

1. Is the violence used as a hook? That is, is a clip of the violence used before the opening or in the first seconds, to involve the viewer in the watching?

2. How long are the scenes of violence? What proportion of the whole program would you say that they fill?

3. How "graphic" is the violence? That is, how much close-up detail do we get, and how realistic is it?

4. Is the violence "glorified" by the use of music, costumes, scenery, color, or other devices that you notice? Describe.

Or is the violence funny? If so, what devices of music or sound effects or visual jokes contribute to humor?

5. Who commits the violence? Are these characters considered to be good, heroic, villains, or a mixture? Describe them.

6. Is the violence accidental (like a car smashing into a tree) or is it purposefully committed, or a mixture? Are weapons used? Explain.

7. What are the consequences of the violence? How long do these consequences appear to last? (Consequences might include punishment or victory for the perpetrator, or harm to the victim, or grief or fear for bystanders.)

8. Are alternatives to violence ever considered?

9. What commercials accompany this show? Do the ads continue the theme of violence in any way? Do the ads portray a difference between boys and girls with respect to aggressive behavior?

10. What is your own assessment of the violence in this program? Is it your gut feeling that this program could be harmful to children, or not? Which of the three "areas of concern" is more relevant here -- that child viewers might become less sensitive to the pain of others, that they might become more aggressive themselves, or that they might become more fearful? Would you warn parents against this show, praise it as something worth watching, or do you feel neutral about it? Do you have any further observations not covered by these questions?

II. Program Two – No Violence

1. Count the number of scene shifts in a ten minute segment (you'll have to tape the show and watch it over to count this). A "scene shift" means that the viewer is moved from one physical location to another, or a logical segment -- like counting to ten -- is finished. What number do you come up with? Does the show have a jumpy, excited quality?
2. How many separate advertisements and promotions for other programs appear in 30 minutes?
3. Does this program present any sort of misinformation about its setting? (For instance, you might describe here the ways that Sesame Street is not like a city, a school on the show is not like a real school, a house differs from a real house, etc. Use your imagination. Some very common pieces of misinformation are that there is no trash, everyone is handsome or beautiful, the temperature is neither too hot nor too cold, no one ever reads, there is little traffic...)
4. Does anyone on this program learn anything, and if so, how long does it take to learn it?
5. Does the program have a didactic message, something that the producers wanted to get across as the "meaning" of the episode? What is this message? Is it appropriate and understandable to the age of the audience? Is it a cliché, or is it really thoughtful?

6. Was there anything in this program that you think might be useful or helpful to at least some children? Be specific.

Final Comment:

Add here your own free comments about television and children. Do you think television is as bad as I do? Do you remember happy experiences with television as a child? What reactions to television have you seen in the children that you know?

Complete: Practice For Exam 2

Sample Multiple Choice Questions

1. Children prefer pictures that:
 - a. are colorful
 - b. are full of action
 - c. have lots of detail
 - d. all of the above

2. The theory of monogenesis states that:
 - a. similar tales contain the same dream elements
 - b. similar tales originated in one geographical area
 - c. similar tales express the genius of a particular place
 - d. similar tales were collected by the brothers Grimm

3. A search for personal identity is usually characteristic of age:
 - a. 3-5
 - b. 6-8
 - c. 10-12
 - d. over 12

4. The psychologist Bruno Bettelheim has suggested that:
 - a. fairy tales are too frightening for children
 - b. fairy tales confuse children, who think they are real
 - c. fairy tales contain symbols of children's inner conflicts
 - d. fairy tales are best during the period of concrete operations

5. Most research on children and television has focused on:
 - a. the effects of its pacing
 - b. the effects of violence
 - c. learning through television
 - d. confusion of reality and fantasy

6. *Sesame Street* has been found to be:
 - a. an unqualified success at preparing children for kindergarten
 - b. successful in helping ESL children learn English
 - c. a success in teaching children to read
 - d. all of the above

Answers to practice test:

1. d
2. b
3. d
4. c
5. b

6. b

Take: Exam 2

Exam 2 will consist of 20 multiple-choice questions on child development, folk tales, illustration, and on television. You will also be asked to write an essay on either illustration or television. Be sure you are familiar with at least four different programs that you can use as examples.

Exam 2 is worth **20%** of your grade.

SELECTING GOOD BOOKS

WEEKS 13-16

This month your work will focus on the following objectives:

1. Learn to use the bibliographies provided in your text.
2. Learn to find book reviews.
3. Be able to select and evaluate books for a particular child or group of children.
4. Be able to explain the basis of your selection.
5. Be aware of the needs of different children in a complex society.

Read: Chapter 2, pp. 24-35
Additional chapters as described

Before you begin this unit, select an individual child or a group of children with whom you are familiar, for your "audience." You are going to explore several avenues toward book selection for this group.

First, read Chapter 2, then read the most appropriate chapter from your text, from this list (you may, of course, read more than one chapter if you wish):

Chapter 4 "Books for the Very Young"
 Chapter 7 "Fables, Myths and Epics"
 Chapter 8 "Modern Fantasy"
 Chapter 9 "Poetry"
 Chapter 10 "Modern Fiction"
 Chapter 11 "Historical Fiction"
 Chapter 12 "Biography"
 Chapter 13 "Informational Books"

There will be no chapter-by-chapter questions on these chapters. Each of them is in effect an extended bibliography--a review of some of the best books to date in a given subject area. As you read, think about selection for your particular child or group. Try to get hold of books that sound good, and read them for yourself. You may not always agree with what the text has to say about them.

"The best children's writers say things to a five-year-old that a fifty-year-old can also respect."

Betsy Hearne

View: Videotape 3

This tape is a discussion of books for "middle age" readers, in fourth and fifth grades. It should help you in preparing your bibliography. Two of the participants are classroom teachers. Watch how they connect the children's needs with the stories they select.

Complete: Study Questions for Videotape 3

Note: The following books are mentioned in the course of this wide-ranging discussion of books for fourth and fifth graders. You are NOT required to read these books, but I've listed most of them here, in the approximate order in which they are mentioned, in case you want to find them.

Astrid Lindgren, *Pippi Longstocking*
 Louisa May Alcott, *Little Women*
 Sid Fleischman, *The Whipping Boy*
 Robert O'Brien, *Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH*
 Scott O'Dell, *Island of the Blue Dolphins*
 William Armstrong, *Souder*
 Meindert DeJong, *The House of Sixty Fathers*
 Katherine Paterson, *The Great Gilly Hopkins*
 Zilpha Keatley Snyder, *The Egypt Game*
 Lois Lowry, *Number the Stars*
 Robert Louis Stevenson, *Treasure Island*
 Roald Dahl, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*
 Elizabeth George Speare, *The Sign of the Beaver*
 Walter Dean Myers, *Somewhere in the Darkness*
 Francesca Lia Block, *Weetzie Bat*
 Gary Paulsen, *Hatchet*
 Dogsong
 Karen Cushman, *Catherine Called Birdy*
 The Midwife's Apprentice
 Judy Blume, *Blubber*

Study Questions

1. What are some of the characteristics of 4th and 5th graders mentioned by the participants?
2. One of the great cultural influences of the 90's is an interest in ethnic identity, in sometimes confusing ways: we celebrate differences, but we fear stereotyping. What are some good reasons to use stories with diverse characters? What are some reasons against it?
 What does Toni mean by the term "cultural niche"?

Has Toni's teaching experience led her to avoid stories about places that her students come from, or to seek them out?

3. The group discusses the role of authority figures in books for this age group. Can these figures have mixed good and bad characteristics? What is the criticism of *Blubber* in this respect?
4. Do fourth and fifth graders tolerate didactic stories, or not?
5. In what ways is *Little Women* "a dinosaur," as Marty calls it?
6. Do you get the impression that the students in these classrooms are free of traditional sex roles, or not?
7. The participants mention various kinds of junk books, or stories that are not particularly respected: *Sabrina the Teenage Witch*, *Goosebumps*, comic books like *Superman*. What examples of your own can you think of? What are the characteristics of these books that make them junky? What should we say to kids about them, if anything?
8. What content in books does Marty think parents might find offensive? Do you agree with him that this content should be avoided? What was your reaction to the *Weetzie Bat* reading?
9. Summarize the characteristics of a good book, as given by each participant.

Submit: Annotated Bibliography

Purpose

Your goal in this assignment is to produce a list of 10 good books for the child or children that you have selected, and two poor ones, giving concrete reasons for your suggestions. (See the samples that follow.)

Directions

At the top of your bibliography, write out a description of the child or group of children for whom the books are intended. Comment on their emotional and intellectual stages, and any special characteristics of the group, e.g. recent immigrants, or children from non-nuclear families.

Select books that seem to you to be of good quality, and that would be enjoyed by your target child or children. You will be graded on the number and concreteness of the reasons that you give for choosing the book- not on my agreement with you. Remember to use the guidelines suggested on Tape 3.

As you are choosing books, you will also find some that are intended for your age group, but that seem to you to be of lesser quality. Include two of these at the end of your list, explaining why you would not offer them to children.

As you evaluate books, consider the following:

1. Does the book present a character with a problem that your child or age group will identify with?
2. What adult values/concerns does the book reflect? Are these appropriate for the child, or will they get in the way?
3. Is your list sensitive to the race/gender/handicaps of all the children, especially if you are selecting for a group? Remember, a head-on engagement with issues of prejudice is probably not necessary for very young children, and may send exactly the wrong message, introducing a theme that they never knew existed.
4. If your list is for a school group, is there anything here that a parent or school board might object to? If so, how would you defend the book?
5. Do children in these books solve problems on their own?
6. Is the book too obviously didactic?
7. Is the illustration appropriate to the text, and well done?
8. Is there some humor on your list?
9. Has the book won any prizes or been well reviewed?

Write out the author, title and date of publication for each book. Then write a brief description of the book, with your reasons for choosing it. Keep your commentary short; remember, you have to do ten.

Grading

This assignment is **25%** of your final grade.

You will be graded on the appropriateness and the concreteness of the reasons for choosing (or rejecting) the book.

Remember to keep a copy of everything you send. Also, wait at least 2 weeks before calling to see if your assignment has been received.

Here are some samples from bibliographies submitted in the past:

1. I did not choose a target age group for my bibliography. Instead, I chose books I thought would be good for children of many different ages. I also chose these books because they are topics that mean a great deal to me: individuality, nature, and the preservation of the environment. These are topics I think that all children should be subjected to at an early age.

SLEEPY RIVER. This book is about nature. It shows an Indian-American mother and child on a canoe ride at night. The child observes what's going on around him in nature. What the animals are doing, and the stars in the sky. This is a good book for children to teach him a little about nature and how to appreciate it.

(Note: This is not a strong beginning. There are a few books that work with a broad age range, but they have very special characteristics that the student has not defined. She has also chosen three different topics without giving a reason why children should be exposed to these topics. Indeed, at least two of them seem rather adult, to me, though I would be happy to listen to reasons for them. The particular book is not well described, either. Notice that although the paragraph SAYS it is a good book, it gives no description or example of what is good about it.)

2. My target audience is a first-grade class of 28 students. The students come from a wide variety of ethnic, economic and social backgrounds. They are divided into four reading groups based on capability; however, the range of literacy is far greater than might be indicated by just four levels. Included in this class are three students categorized as LD self-contained.

As can be expected, the students' interests vary widely. All of the students enjoy books and love to have stories read aloud to them. In fact, this is the best way that I have found to fill time during the day. Having good literature at your fingertips can really prove to be a valuable asset.

(Note: This audience description is better than the first, but still has weaknesses. The student is so impressed by the variety in his class, which is undoubtedly real, that he forgets that when he chooses a book for the whole group, he must, necessarily, strive to find similarities. What is he looking for, in these "good" books? He never really says. In his book descriptions, he made it clear that he looked for books with lots of action, large and interesting pictures, and, often, heroic characters who overcome difficulties. So he did fairly well on the assignment as a whole.)

3. My theme is retold folktales gathered from different ethnic backgrounds. My target group is ages 6 to 9. Within this age group the children are ready to expand their horizons outside of the close family nucleus. They are receptive to learning about other cultures and the way other people conduct their lives and families. I think it helps them to see their own families.

At this age the children still feel very much controlled by adults in various positions of authority. In this light, they cannot help but enjoy tales that allow the smaller and weaker character to prevail, as is often the theme in folklore.

Children of this age are very forgiving and quickly empathize with a character who has stumbled into one peccadillo after another. They also like to be mildly frightened and to have their imaginary boundaries enlarged.

This age group is fixated on rules and regulations. They like their perimeters firmly established with firm punishments for any infraction. Folktales punish wrongdoers.

In most cases a sense of humor has been developed by age six.

SIR WHONG AND THE GOLDEN PIG, retold by Oki S. Han

This is an ancient Korean tale about a dishonest stranger who manages to deceive an old and honored man of the village who is revered for his wisdom and generosity. The stranger gave Sir Whong a fake golden pig as collateral for a large loan. He spends the loan wastefully and delights in his treachery. But, perhaps Sir Whong wasn't as easy to fool as the stranger thought.

This book is beautifully illustrated with details of old Korean village life.

I think this book is appropriate for the target age group because it subtly reinforces the lesson that good cannot come from a dishonest act. I especially like that the message is put forth in a humorous, light-hearted way.

(Note: This student has given clear, appropriate criteria for her choices. She doesn't really need to leave us in suspense about the plot of SIR WHONG, because she is not trying to sell the book, but this is a minor point. This student received an A.)

Complete: Exam 3

WHAT TO EXPECT: The Final Exam will consist of an essay in which you compare and evaluate 3 books on a similar topic. It is **10%** of your final grade.

Since this course will be useful only if it changes the way teachers and parents select and use books for children, the final exam will focus on selection. You must choose three different books or stories (one may be a TV show or videotape) that have something in common: they are written for the same age group, deal with similar subject matter, belong to the same genre. The more they have in common, the better your exam will be.

For the on-campus final exam, you will write an essay comparing and contrasting the 3 stories, and rating them as to best and worst (or good and better, or bad and worse...) You may bring the books with you and use them as you write the exam. You may also want to bring notes about the points of comparison and difference, and things you like and dislike. When you arrive, you will find that the exam includes some specific questions about the stories. So don't try to write the whole essay before you come for the exam.

The questions will direct you back over the major content areas of the course, toward the historical context of your stories, the child's level of development, the illustrations, and possible activities in connection with the books. So you should probably review the major points in connection with each of these areas.

Suggestions for book combinations for final exam:

Versions of one fairy tale: "*Cinderella*" by Walt Disney (or, the movie); "*Cinderella*" by Charles Perrault; "*Ashenputtel*" by the Brothers Grimm

Early Readers: *Minarik*, *Little Bear*; Dr. Seuss, *The Cat in the Hat*; *The New England Primer*

Stories about machines: "*Transformers*" (TV show); *The Little Engine That Could*; Burton, *Mike Mulligan and his Steam Shovel*

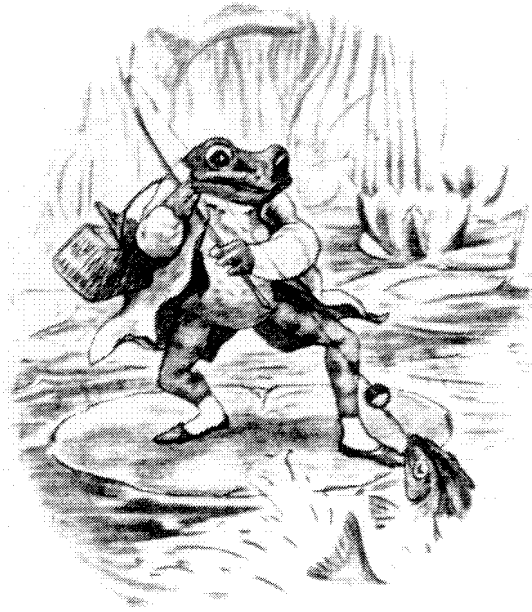
Fantasies: *The Wizard of Oz* (book or movie); Dahl, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*; Lindgren, *Pippi Longstocking*

Books about death: White, *Charlotte's Web*; Babbitt, *Tuck Everlasting*; Paterson, *Bridge to Terabithia*

Many combinations are possible. Use the bibliographies in your textbook for further suggestions.

Due: You may take this exam whenever you are ready; however, you must take it by the end of your enrollment period to complete the course.

Congratulations! Your official final grade will be sent to you by the College in a few weeks.



Illus. by Beatrix Potter from *The Tale of Jeremy Fisher*.

APPENDIX A

This material was mailed to you along with the course Syllabus.

APPENDIX B

The ERIC document that follows is for use in Weeks 9-12, the AudioVisual World.

