

NCLC 475-004: Critical Approaches to Children's Media
Spring 2013
TUESDAYS 1:30 PM to 04:10 PM — Thompson Hall L004
Instructor: Kimberly Klinger (kklinger@masonlive.gmu.edu)
Office hours: TBD

Introduction:

In this class, we will examine the landscape of children's media from a critical media and cultural studies perspective. Through the communication circuit of production, text, audience we will explore the complexities of children's media, introducing students to the major debates surrounding the role of media in the lives and development of children. We will look at television shows, films, video, books, video games, and other media aimed at children, paying special attention to issues of gender, class, race, political economy, and globalization. However, the media will be supplementary; this class is heavily focused on critical theory. Thus, this course will require students to challenge themselves and step outside their comfort zones.

Required Texts:

Steinberg, Shirley R, ed. *Kinderculture: The Corporate Construction of Childhood*
Banet-Wiser, Sarah. *Kids Rule!: Nickelodeon and Consumer Citizenship*
Jenkins, Henry. *The Children's Culture Reader*.

In addition to these volumes, there will be readings available for download and printing; they are linked right here on this Wiki. Many of them are from a volume called *The International Handbook of Children, Media and Culture*, edited by Kirsten Drotner and Sonia Livingstone. If you can find it cheap/used, go ahead and get it - you may find it useful if you are interested in this topic beyond the class.

Requirements:

Attendance: It goes without saying that regular prepared attendance is expected of all participants. This is a seminar-style class; thus, your participation is absolutely essential to a productive semester. We only have 13 classes, so if you miss more than one class without good/documentated reason, your grade may be in jeopardy.

Your participation in class (along with your reading logs) will be worth 25% of your grade, so speak up or at least look like you're listening. See the section on "my policies" for more.

Reading logs: This class is reading, writing, and discussion based. There won't be multiple choice tests, so I need to know that you are keeping up with the weekly readings. As I said above, your participation is essential, so if you don't read, the class is a bust. To that end, I want you to post to this class Wiki every week some thoughts about that week's readings: your critical assessment of and response to the works; any terms or concepts that were new to you/you had to look up (if applicable); and **at least 3** (the more the better) interesting questions (total; these can span all the readings and will hopefully connect them) that we can use for class discussion. Questions that help to clarify the author's meaning are totally fine, but all

your questions can't be of that type. You must do this each week **BY MONDAY AT 9 PM** so that I can go over them before class. To do this, find the corresponding weekly folder in "Pages and Files". Click on it, then click the "new" button to the left, and choose "create a new page". Name it as your full name, and go! Look over others' pages before class so that our discussion is as rich as possible, but consider their work their intellectual property: meaning, NO COPYING. I understand that we're all reading the same things and will have similar summaries/questions, but you must do your own work. If you notice that many others have similar discussion questions to you, try to tweak yours a bit (add a sub-question, go a different direction, be more specific, etc). (worth 25% of your grade)

Facilitation: On the first day of class you will select a week on the syllabus; each week will have 2 students. Your primary task will be to help facilitate our discussion; thus, during that week, you will be my co-educators. So, the work that you do every week for your reading logs will basically be amplified on "your week".

Your job in this assignment is not necessarily to lecture. Instead, your goal is to facilitate a discussion in which all members of the class participate and come to a fuller understanding of the material (or at least a fuller understanding of the complexity of the readings). This means that you will come prepared (and have posted to the class Wiki) your summary, but more importantly, substantial questions (and/or a presentation, or media clips – the sky is the limit) for collective consideration. You will also bring up a particular children's cultural object to be discussed in relation to the readings. You should be prepared to show/tell us about the object via media clips or articles. Have fun. Be creative. Teach me! (worth 20% of your grade)

Living with children's television: This is a fairly straightforward 5-page paper: select one children's television program. First, it will be necessary to delve into the history of the program. When did it first air? Who is producing it? How long has it been on the air? Is it an arm of a toy company? One page max on this section.

Then, watch at least three episodes of the programming focusing upon the images present, the themes presented, the characterizations, the presentation of violence, love, courtship, morals, etc. What kinds of images are children seeing? How are males and females presented? How is race presented? Sexuality? Who is powerful? Is it funny? Is it disturbing? Is it "good" for kids? Why or why not? Use the class readings to help you navigate the images you are seeing and, of course, cite them if necessary; no need to use outside sources. A hard copy is due **APRIL 2**; bring it to class to both turn in and discuss. (worth 15% of your grade)

Experiential learning: This should be fun: do a mini-focus group. Watch, play with, or read one cultural product with a small group of children, ages 5-9 or so (any younger and it may be tough to get good answers). You will then discuss the cultural product with the children, and write about your findings in a small paper (5 pages), which we will then discuss in class in more detail. You can do this in pairs, but the two of you should then turn in a paper that is slightly longer (6 pages). No need to cite sources here, but I do want a separate sheet listing your questions for the kids. Start by asking them what is going on in the show – who are the characters, what are the plot points – or toy – what is the toy's name, what is its job – and then go deeper.

We want to get at what the kids are learning from the product – are they picking up the larger cultural connotations? Yes, no, how? Are they having fun and engaging in fantasy? How? Do they relate to the characters? What are they learning? Be creative! Storytelling is always helpful; maybe have the kids come up with their own stories about the product. I have a feeling that could be really illuminating. Some helpful techniques include: using visual retrieval aids for recall, asking 'wh' questions (who/what/when/where/why) rather than yes/no questions, and open-ended rather than closed questions, and explaining that 'I don't know' is an acceptable reply (to reduce response biases). A hard copy is due **APRIL 23**; bring it to class to both turn in and discuss. (worth 15% of your grade)

Final paper: You will choose a children's media/cultural product – a text, a tv show, a game – and analyze it for 7-8 pages. Use the theoretical models that we've discussed in class; take a cultural studies approach as outlined in the first week. Tell me about the product, how it operates within a larger context of US society/media ownership, raise a question, grapple with representation, present debates about it...say something thoughtful. There are really very little parameters here, so you will want to start thinking about your topic at the midpoint of the semester and coming to me for guidance. Email your paper to me by **MAY 12 at 10 pm**. (worth 25% of your grade)

Schedule of Assignments:

January 22: Introductions, syllabus, requirements, policies, choosing facilitation dates.

January 29: Cultural Studies 101 (concepts and keywords)

Buckingham, David, "Children and Media: A Cultural Studies Approach" in *The International Handbook of Children, Media and Culture*

Start working on Gill Chapter 2 if you can

BACKGROUND: Adorno and Horkheimer, Hall (in folder); Barthes

(<http://xroads.virginia.edu/~DRBR/myth.html>); Althusser

(<http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/althusser/1970/ideology.htm>)

February 5: The concept of childhood, denaturalized

Jenkins, Henry. "Childhood Innocence and Other Modern Myths" in *The Children's Culture Reader*

"Kinderculture: Mediating, Simulacralizing, and Pathologizing the New Childhood" in *Kinderculture*

OPTIONAL: Interview with Maurice Sendak: "I refuse to cater to the bullshit of innocence." http://www.believmag.com/issues/201211/?read=interview_sendak

The Secret Garden, Roald Dahl

February 12: Gender

Gill, Rosalind. *Gender and the Media*, chapters 1 and 2

Film clip: "Waking Sleeping Beauty" trailer

Disney Princesses

February 19: Gender, part 2

"Girls Rule! Gender, Feminism, and Nickelodeon" in *Kids Rule!*
Rotundo, E. Anthony. "Boy Culture" in *The Children's Culture Reader*
GI Joe vs Barbie, Pink vs Blue

February 26: Sexuality

Jenkins, Henry. "Producing Erotic Children" in *The Children's Culture Reader*
Giroux, Henry A. "Stealing Innocence: The Politics of Child Beauty Pageants" in *The Children's Culture Reader*
Walkerdine, Valerie. "Popular Culture and the Eroticization of Little Girls" in *The Children's Culture Reader*
Bratz, Toddlers and Tiaras

March 5: Race

"Consuming Race on Nickelodeon" in *Kids Rule!*
Goldin, Shari. "Unlearning Black and White: Race, Media, and the Classroom" in *The Children's Culture Reader*
"Media Messages About Race, Class, and Gender",
http://www.childrennow.org/index.php/learn/media_messages_about_race_class_gender
http://www.childrennow.org/index.php/learn/media_messages_about_race_class_gender
Dora the Explorer

March 12: SPRING BREAK! NO CLASS

March 19: Race, part 2

de Brunhoff, Jean, *Babar*
Kohl, Herbert R., "Shall We Burn Babar?"
Artz, Lee. "Monarches, Monsters, and Multiculturalism: Disney's Menu for Global Hierarchy"
OPTIONAL: "A New Coronation for the King of Elephants",
<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/11/14/business/media/babar-king-of-elephants-celebrates-80th-anniversary.html? r=0>
<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/11/14/business/media/babar-king-of-elephants-celebrates-80th-anniversary.html? r=0>

March 26: Media ownership/political economy/globalization

"Is Disney Good For Your Kids? How Corporate Media Shape Youth Identity in the Digital Age" in *Kinderculture*
Film (in-class): "Mickey Mouse Monopoly" by the Media Education Foundation

April 2: Media ownership/political economy/globalization, part 2

"We, the People of Nickelodeon': Theorizing Empowerment and Consumer Citizenship in *Kids Rule!*
Wasko, Janet. "The Commodification of Youth Culture" in *The International Handbook of Children, Media and Culture*
Living with children's television assignment due; share assignments

April 9: Toys and technology

Seiter, Ellen. "Children's Desires/Mothers' Dilemmas: The Social Contexts of Consumption" in *The Children's Culture Reader*

Fleming, Dan. "Managing Monsters: Videogames and the 'Mediatization' of the Toy" in *The International Handbook of Children, Media and Culture*

April 16: Play/reality

Messenger Davis, Maire. "Reality and Fantasy in Media: Can Children Tell the Difference and How Do We Know" in *The International Handbook of Children, Media and Culture*

Gee, James Paul. "Learning Theory, Video Games, and Popular Culture" in *The International Handbook of Children, Media and Culture*

Rand, Erica. "Older Heads on Younger Bodies" in *The Children's Culture Reader*
Toy ads

April 23: Educational/"good" media

Kohl, Herbert R. "A Plea for Radical Children's Literature"

Glanzer, Perry L. "Harry Potter's Provocative Moral World: Is There a Place for Good and Evil in Moral Education?"

Wartella, Ellen and Gary E. Knell. "Raising a World-Wise Child and the Power of Media: The Impact of Television on Children's Intercultural Knowledge"

Levin, Robert A. and Laurie Moses Hines. "Educational Television, Fred Rogers, and the History of Education"

Experiential learning assignment due; share assignments

April 30: Disciplining our kids: fun, food, and obesity

"McDonalds, Power, and Children" in *Kinderculture*

James, Allison. "Confections, Concoctions, and Conceptions" in *The Children's Culture Reader*

Cookie Monster

May 12: FINAL PAPERS DUE BY 10 PM to kklinger@masonlive.gmu.edu

My policies:

Etiquette: Laptops will of course be allowed in class; I personally must use one for note-taking, so I understand. I will trust you, then, to be actively taking notes, referring to PDFs, and even looking up things of interest to further our discussion instead of Facebooking and Twittering. If I see you are doing so, I will call you out embarrassingly. There is no sitting in the back and not paying attention in a small seminar class, y'all.

Cell phones are a different story. They are **STRICTLY PROHIBITED**. They must be off – not even set to silent as vibrating is just as distracting – and placed in your bags. We will take a 10-15-minute break in the middle of each class, so you'll be able to check those all-important texts then. **NO EXCEPTIONS**. I'll put mine away, too.

Attendance/late work: As mentioned above, you must be in class for this to be a success. I will be taking attendance and making notes of your participation levels,

which count for a rather large 25% of your grade. Don't sweat it if you're sick though – stay home! Do the readings, and post your reading log before the next meeting so I know your brain is still with us. You won't lose any points. But if you miss another class for no reason...you will lose points. You keep missing? Don't count on a good grade. If you have a chronic medical condition, or other personal issue that may affect your ability to work, let me know up front and bring documentation. I am happy to be flexible in these cases; I'm not a monster, I promise. But you must tell me sooner rather than later – meaning, within the first 2 weeks of class.

As for late work, I will decide what to do on a case-by-case basis, but be prepared to lose a letter grade for every day you are late on an assignment. Extensions will only be granted in cases of medical or other emergency (meaning, it better be legit; no panicking 2 days before and asking for more time).

Plagiarism: According to the University catalog, plagiarism includes the following:

- * Presenting as one's own the words, the work, or the opinions of someone else without proper acknowledgment
- * Borrowing the sequence of ideas, the arrangement of material, or the pattern of thought of someone else without proper acknowledgment.

Don't even try it. I can Google everything and catch you; you can cite your sources so as to avoid this kind of thing. In addition to direct quotations, you must also provide an in-text citation and an entry in your list of works cited for paraphrases and summaries of opinions or factual information not formerly known to you. If you decide to use another person's ideas you must either quote the idea verbatim or completely rephrase the ideas in your own words and voice – and then cite them.

Writing guidelines: You may use any recognized citation style (MLA, APA, Chicago) you choose, as long as you are consistent, cite every source (I can't say this enough), and attach a complete bibliography. Papers must be double-spaced, with 1-inch margins and an 11-12 point font size. I know all about moving margins and enlarging font sizes. Don't bother, especially with that final paper, which is submitted via email.

On-Line Writing Guide:

<http://classweb.gmu.edu/nccwg/>

This guide will help you achieve success as a writer during your learning experience in New Century College and beyond. Integrative Studies courses involve learning and writing from multiple perspectives and disciplines and negotiating knowledge boundaries. Your ultimate goal as a New Century College student is to use writing to make meaning of the knowledge you are acquiring, but also to integrate and connect what you are learning across disciplinary boundaries. Use this resource to aid you in achieving this goal.

Acceptable Secondary Sources: As upper-level students, you will be expected to use a majority of academic (i.e. peer reviewed) sources when writing your term paper. Students are very much allowed, but not at all limited, to use course readings and

other sources referenced in lectures in their own papers. Additional sources and relevant journals that are recommended by the instructor are also acceptable. However, students are strongly encouraged to track down those resources that are best suited to their specific area of interest or inquiry, rather than rely too heavily on those provided in class. Media texts (books, comics, television episodes, films, videogames, websites, etc.) can be used and referenced as needed, but should always be treated as artifacts of study and analyzed accordingly.

For cutting edge information, news, announcements, etc., popular press articles are of course acceptable. But these should be used to supplement or update rather than replace peer reviewed sources, and should never be used to explain a theoretical concept. They should also come from credible, verifiable sources, who have the credentials (whatever these may be) to back up their claims. Online sources are fine, as long as you can determine who wrote the content and for what purpose, and are prepared to defend the author's credibility and expertise if questioned. For example, if you're looking for parents' reactions to the Harry Potter phenomenon, an online forum where fathers, mothers and other caregivers discuss the Harry Potter books and films is an excellent source of "expertise."

However, I REFUSE to accept Wikipedia, Sparknotes, or the like as sources, whether primary or secondary. They are not for use in university settings. Plus, even they cite sources; use them if needed.

University Policies:

Disability Services: If you are a student with a disability and you need academic accommodations, please see me and contact the Office of Disability Resources at 703.993.2474. All academic accommodations must be arranged through that office.

Honor Code: George Mason University has an Honor Code, which requires all members of this community to maintain the highest standards of academic honesty and integrity. Cheating, plagiarism, lying, and stealing are all prohibited. All violations of the Honor Code will be reported to the Honor Committee. See above!

Enrollment Statement: Students are responsible for verifying their enrollment in this class. Schedule adjustments should be made by the deadlines published in the Schedule of Classes. (Deadlines each semester are published in the Schedule of Classes available from the Registrar's Website: registrar.gmu.edu.)

Last Day to Add or Drop (with no tuition penalty): Tuesday 29 January

Last Day to Drop (with 67% tuition penalty): Friday 22 February