

## **Literature for Adolescents**

**Spring 2011**

**Dr. Ann Rea**

**Tuesday Thursday 9:30-11:50 Biddle 222**

### **Syllabus and Course Description**

**anr12@pitt.edu**

**Office hours: TTh 12:30-3:00 and by appointment**

**Office – Biddle 223D**

**Phone ext. 7166**

Adolescence, the period that forms a bridge between childhood and adulthood, is a period of immense physical and psychological growth. While our society protects adolescents in many ways, by providing prolonged education, and by providing for their material needs in the home, it simultaneously exposes teenagers to pressures and stresses such as those experienced within families according to the part of society into which we are born. In addition, teenagers experience the commercial pressures of advertising and consumerism, counter-cultural influences such as gangs, and drugs, and the stresses produced by sexual and gender influences which promote certain kinds of behavior and ways of presenting one's physical appearance, with the anxieties associated with all of this. Literature can play a huge role in helping adolescents to handle these conflicting issues and help adolescents to make a path through these difficulties. I have chosen books that represent a diversity of experience and a range of social backgrounds, so that we will go beyond the usual "classics," while also reading some of those traditional titles. Adolescent literature also provides us with an opportunity to read engaging books and think about them in the context of an English course, and therefore to interpret and analyze what we read. While we might find ourselves reacting to the literature as if we were adolescents, at times, we must also work to maintain a critical perspective. We are no longer adolescents, and can think in a more sophisticated way about how culture shapes our ideas about what an adolescent is or does, and how reading can help adolescents negotiate the complex issues that they face. We will work to define what we mean by "adolescent literature" and how it differs from children's literature. We will examine the greater degree of responsibility and independence that the novels portray, and the passage from innocence to experience that the characters undergo.

We will spend a lot of class-time discussing the books that we read, so it is extremely important that everyone does the reading, spending enough time and care to be able to come to class ready to take part in an animated discussion. There will be regular, often unannounced, quizzes, as well as a mid-term and a final examination which will test your reading and your thinking about the books. In addition there will be two four-page papers. These papers must be completed on time. Class participation will form part of your grade for this course.

This class requires your **active** participation in a way in which your other classes may not. You must prepare for class by reading the assigned literature thoughtfully. There are a lot of texts on our reading list, although they are written for adolescents and so are not as difficult as literature written for adults. At the same time you need to give enough time to the reading. This will not be an "easy" class just because the texts were written for adolescents; you still need to read beyond the plot and think about the significance of what you are reading so you can come to class prepared to be involved in

an active discussion. When you read poetry, you will need to spend time re-reading and thinking about what you read. A quick “run-through” will not allow you to engage closely enough with the reading to understand it. This is not a lecture class, but one where you will engage with ideas and conversation. This can be lots of fun, but for it to function we need everyone to make the effort to be reflective about his or her part in it. If you tend to want to talk a lot you might need to check that you do not dominate the discussion. If you are shy and tend to leave the talking to others you might need to push yourself to speak. It is extremely important that we behave respectfully towards others in the discussions.

**Breakdown of Grading: each piece earns 20% of your grade**

Quizzes and Class Participation

Paper One

Mid-term Examination

Paper Two

Final examination

**The short papers and quizzes will give us a chance to work on both your writing and your interpretation and I will make suggestions to encourage you to think about them as writing exercises.**

**Required texts**

Louisa May Alcott, *Little Women*

Katherine Paterson, *Lyddie*

Katherine Paterson, *Bridge to Terabithia*

Jerry Spinelli, *Stargirl*

S. E. Hinton, *The Outsiders*

Philip Pullman, *The Golden Compass*

Sharon Flake, *The Skin I'm In*

Joyce Lee Wong, *Seeing Emily*

Walter Dean Myers, *Monster*

Nick Hornby, *Slam*

Jack Gantos, *Desire Lines*

**Policies and Rules**

Please ensure that your cell phone is turned OFF before class. That means that you will not check for “text” messages. I will ask you to leave if I see you “texting.”

**Attendance is required. More than three absences and you risk having your grade lowered.** If you need to schedule appointments make sure that they do not take place during class time. Be punctual at the beginning of class, and do not make plans to leave before class ends: to do otherwise will result in an absence being recorded.

**Plagiarism** is an extremely serious offence and will not be excused. Be sure that you see the distinction between peer revision in which you help each other to revise your work, and the kind of help with writing which involves someone else doing work for you. To present the language or ideas of others as if they are your own is plagiarism.

If you have a disability for which need to request accommodation you should contact the Learning Resource Center, G16, Owen Library, (814)269-7109 as early as possible in the

semester. The coordinator will verify your disability and define the necessary accommodation to be made.

**Thursday 6<sup>th</sup> January**

Introduction

**Tuesday, 11<sup>th</sup> January**

Read Alcott, *Little Women*, to the end of Chapter 15

**Thursday, 13<sup>th</sup> January**

Read Alcott, *Little Women*, to the end of Chapter 21

**Tuesday, 18<sup>th</sup> January**

Read Alcott, *Little Women*, to the end of Chapter 33

**Thursday, 18<sup>th</sup> January**

Read Alcott, *Little Women*, to the end of Chapter 40

**Tuesday, 25<sup>th</sup> January**

Finish *Little Women*

**Thursday, 27<sup>th</sup> January**

Read Katherine Paterson, *Lyddie* to the end of Chapter 10

**Tuesday, 1<sup>st</sup> February**

Finish Katherine Paterson, *Lyddie*

**Thursday, 3<sup>rd</sup> February**

Read Katherine Paterson, *Bridge to Terabithia*

**Tuesday, 8<sup>th</sup> February**

Read Jerry Spinelli, *Stargirl* to the end of Chapter 19

**Thursday, 10<sup>th</sup> February**

Finish Jerry Spinelli, *Stargirl*

**Tuesday, 15<sup>th</sup> February**

Read S. E. Hinton, *The Outsiders*

**Thursday, 17<sup>th</sup> February**

**Paper One due in class**

Read Joyce Lee Wong, *Seeing Emily* to page 41, the end of the “Golden Palace” section  
Think about the images and metaphors and how they work

**Tuesday, 22<sup>nd</sup> February**

Finish Joyce Lee Wong, *Seeing Emily*

**Thursday, 24<sup>th</sup> February**  
**Review session for Mid-term**

**Tuesday, 1<sup>st</sup> March**  
**Mid-term examination**

**Thursday, 3<sup>rd</sup> March**  
**Poetry – readings (to be announced) from a packet which I will distribute**

**Tuesday, 8<sup>th</sup> and Thursday 10<sup>th</sup> March**  
**NO CLASSES – SPRING BREAK**

**Tuesday, 15<sup>th</sup> March**  
Read Sharon Flake, *The Skin I'm In*

**Thursday, 17<sup>th</sup> March**  
**Poetry**

**Tuesday, 22<sup>nd</sup> March**  
Read Walter Dean Myers, *Monster* to page 151

**Thursday, 24<sup>th</sup> March**  
Finish Walter Dean Myers, *Monster*

**Tuesday, 29<sup>h</sup> March**  
Read Nick Hornby, *Slam* to the end of Chapter 8 (page 143)

**Thursday, 31<sup>st</sup> March**  
Finish Nick Hornby, *Slam*

**Thursday 7<sup>th</sup> April**  
Read Philip Pullman, *The Golden Compass*, to the end of Chapter 7, page 129

**Tuesday, 12<sup>th</sup> April**  
Read Philip Pullman, *The Golden Compass*, page numbers to be announced

**Thursday, 14<sup>th</sup> April**  
Finish Philip Pullman, *The Golden Compass*

**Tuesday, 19<sup>th</sup> April**  
Read Jack Gantos, *Desire Lines*

**Thursday, 21<sup>st</sup> April**  
**Last Day of Classes – Review session for Final Examination**  
**Paper 2 due in class**