

ENGLISH 405: FICTION FOR ADOLESCENTS

Spring, 2014

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Office hours:	MTWR: 1:30 – 2:30 PM (except when canceled in class or by e-mail) & by appointment	We meet in:	G10 Woodburn
		We meet at:	10:30 AM MWF

REQUIRED TEXTS:

Alexie, Sherman. *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*. Little & Brown.
Bray, Libba. *The Diviners*. Little, Brown.
Chbosky, Stephen. *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*. Gallery Books.
Cormier, Robert. *The Chocolate War*. Ember.
Hartman, Rachel. *Seraphina*. Random House.
Hesse, Karen. *Out of the Dust*. Scholastic.
Myers, Walter Dean. *Monster*. Scholastic.
Roth, Veronica. *Divergent*. HarperCollins.
Stork, Francisco X. *Marcelo in the Real World*. Scholastic.
Yang, Gene. *American Born Chinese*. First Second Books.

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

The purpose of this course is to introduce you to adolescent fiction, a type of literature read mostly by pre-teens and teens. “YA lit,” as it is often called, has its own genres (for example, the problem novel) and its own special topics. Issues of concern to young adults, like eating disorders, drugs, peer pressure, parental control, rape or sexual abuse, death of a loved one, and so forth, typically preoccupy readers and writers of young adult lit. In English 405 we will sample representative YA lit and consider the distinctive range of issues—for example, “readicide,” school censorship—related to it.

English 405 is a “W” class and as such requires you to write intensively within the discipline of English literary studies, producing at least 20 pages of polished writing. Class assignments and evaluation policies will be designed to fulfill the “W” designation in a variety of writing genres, including that of the major literary research essay. Since this is a 400-level class, you will need to incorporate advanced research into your major projects; we will cancel class one day for a library seminar that will introduce you to research in the area of adolescent fiction and another day for individual conferences with me.

EXPECTED LEARNING OUTCOMES:

Expected learning outcomes for students in this section of English 405 include:

- Recognize and understand the genres, conventions, history and forms of adolescent fiction; identify the distinctive voices, themes, and assumptions of literary works designed for adolescent readers
- Develop positions on issues related to adolescent fiction, like censorship and what/how to teach young adults in secondary English classrooms
- Write about literature critically and analytically, demonstrating the ability to do advanced literary research and deploying appropriately various critical approaches
- Perform research to generate relevant evidence and expert knowledge, using processes specific to our discipline
- Develop and articulate ideas in class discussion; engage in critical thinking in this context and also in peer review of other students’ documents

REQUIREMENTS (percentages assume 1000 points total for semester):

1. **Everyday commitment to this class, defined by class attendance and class participation** (the latter comprising 10% of your grade). Our meeting together to learn together is important to me, and it should be to you. This class is not just about reading a lot of young adult novels—you could do that yourself on your own time. Nor is it designed so you can hear me lecturing about adolescents and their reading. Rather, it’s about our being a community of readers learning together through insight-sharing, questioning, dialoguing. **Thus:** you cannot earn an A in this class without actively participating in it. Though as a class participant you may be uninspired or unsure, I ask that you contribute regularly to class discussions by making an observation; asking a question; summarizing an insight you had as you completed the required reading for the day; responding to a question on “Round” days; volunteering to be the spokesperson for your discussion group on small-group discussion days. I have quantified the ideal of your commitment to class as follows:

Quantification of attendance: You are allowed up to six absences this semester, excused or unexcused. If you go over six, you will face a one-letter-grade deduction for each subsequent absence, like this: with 1-6 absences, your earned grade—let's say a *B*—yields a semester grade of *B*. However, with 7 absences, your earned grade of *B* drops to a semester grade of *C*; with 8 absences, to a *D*; with 9 absences, to an *F* for the semester.

Quantification of participation: You can earn up to 10% (100 points/1000) of your grade as follows:

- 100 points: you participate regularly, ideally at least once a day, minimally twice a week
- 50 points: you participate sporadically, perhaps offering one comment or insight every two weeks
- 0 points: you never speak or speak very rarely (once or twice in the entire semester)

2. **Ten reading quizzes (15% of semester grade)** Unannounced in-class checks to make sure you are keeping up with the reading will be completed ten times during the semester, one for each young adult novel we are reading. For each quiz, you will be asked to respond to at least one short answer question on the novel. Your lowest quiz grade will be dropped.
3. **Three short writes, 2-3 pages each (15% of semester grade)**. These learning exercises will unfold at the beginning of the semester as you explore what YA lit is, what its roles should be, and where to find the discourses surrounding YA lit. In an initial short write, you will profile yourself as a reader. Your second short write will summarize an article from *The ALAN Review* (Summer 2006) on using young adult literature in the secondary English classroom. Another will share your impressions of an important journal on young adult literature/reading and education.
4. **Two presentations to the class—first as a team member, then as an individual—using PowerPoint or Prezi (10% of semester grade)**. The first will be completed collaboratively during Week 4 and will introduce the class to a sub-genre of YA fiction (e.g. fantasy, science fiction, mystery, historical fiction). The second, which you will do on your own, will overview the life and achievements of a classic young adult author whose work we are not reading this semester. On an available day you have chosen (see syllabus schedule), you will present the life, work, achievement and impact of a YA author from the 19th, 20th, and/or 21st century. I'll distribute a formal assignment sheet for these presentations, along with a sign-up list. I'll lead off with the first presentations in each category.
5. **Annotated bibliography (20% of semester grade)**. For your big mid-semester project, you'll complete this *bibliography-with-commentary*, listing and describing works focused on a particular problem topic or theme common to adolescent literature. This bibliography must include ten young adult novels (you do not have to read them, but you do need to become familiar with their content), only **one** of which may be from our reading list, and **four scholarly journal articles on your chosen topic/theme** that you will print or photocopy and attach to the bibliography. Ideally, your work on the annotated bibliography will then lead you into a topic for your major literary research essay (see #5).
6. **A major literary research essay (30% of semester grade)** on two works from our semester reading list that address the problem topic or theme you chose for the annotated bibliography. In writing this essay, you should be doing advanced professional undergraduate writing and research. Your evaluation for this project will be distributed between the following: proposal (5%), rough draft peer review and participation in instructor conference (5%), actual essay (25%).

POLICIES, PROCEDURES AND BITS OF FRIENDLY ADVICE (arranged alphabetically):

Attendance: Come to class! This class will only be profitable to you if you make a serious, mature commitment to it. This means attending class regularly and bringing the text with you. In my classes, bad grades almost invariably correlate with a poor attendance record. Remember that you are allowed up to six absences this semester, excused or unexcused. If you go over six, you will face a one-letter-grade deduction for each subsequent absence.

Cell phone and pager courtesy: Be thoughtful. As a courtesy, please turn your cell phones and pagers off or use a silent signal while in class.

Disabilities: Let me know if you have special needs and I will respect them. If you are a person with a disability and anticipate needing any type of accommodation to participate in this class, please let me know. You should also make appropriate arrangements with Disability Services (293-6700).

Emergencies or health crises: Call Student Life. If you encounter an emergency situation or serious health problem in the course of the semester—and I sincerely hope you don't—you or your family should immediately contact the Office of Student Life in E. Moore Hall (293-5611). The Dean of Student Life will then communicate with me concerning your problem and authorize me to make any necessary arrangements for you to complete this course. *Note:* please

reserve the Dean's services for serious circumstances or emergencies; they will not help you with minor problems or everyday excuses.

Etiquette: *Let's maintain high standards of courtesy in the classroom.* Participating in non-class-related activities during class, and thus failing to respect me and the other students in the class, may result in your being marked absent from class without your being explicitly "called out" in class. Please:

- When you come to class, plan to arrive on time and stay the whole time. Please do not schedule medical, dental, psychological, or advising appointments during class. If you do, be aware that your arriving more than five minutes late or leaving early will be counted as half an absence.
- During class time, avoid holding side conversations. Quietly checking a point with a classmate is rarely a problem, but speaking out loud or whispering with another student or students for an extended period during class lectures or discussions is rude and unacceptable.
- During class time, do not text, type or read mysteriously on your laptop, read non-class-related materials or work on non-class projects.

Extra credit for attendance: *Cancel an absence by attending a reading and writing a two-page review.* Throughout the semester various creative writers will be giving readings of their fiction, poetry, etc., here on campus. The schedule of readings is included within the course schedule below. You may cancel an absence from class by attending a reading and writing a two-page double-spaced typed review of it in which you (a) describe what took place at the reading; (b) assess its value to and impact on you.

Incompletes: *Request an incomplete only in the case of an end-of-the-semester catastrophe.* WVU policy does not allow professors to give incompletes to students unless those students have satisfactorily completed almost all the work of the course and are prevented from finishing the course by some kind of personal catastrophe (for example, hospitalization, death of a parent). Only under these conditions, verified by the Dean of Student Life, will I grant you an "I."

Late Work: *Best on time, better late than never.* You should plan on turning your assignments in on time, but I will accept late work with the understanding that, for every paper submitted after the due date, an increasingly large number of points will be subtracted from the assessed grade. Each **business** day late means the subtraction of one assessment level (e.g. B+ to B, B to B-) until the late work has lost its value and earned an F. In my classes, "on time" denotes work that, at its best, is submitted in class on the day it is due, at worst, submitted to my mailbox or office by the end of the day it is due. Thus a paper is considered on time if it is put in my mailbox before the English office closes (4:45 PM) or under my office door before Colson closes (~ 9 PM Monday through Thursday; 5 PM Friday).

Plagiarism: *Don't take the lazy way out.* Talking over your ideas and getting comments on your writing from friends are NOT examples of plagiarism. Copying or paraphrasing a friend's work is. So is taking someone else's published or unpublished words—on the internet or in hard copy form—and calling them your own; a synonym is academic dishonesty. When plagiarism amounts to an attempt to deceive, it has dire consequences, as spelled out in University regulations (see:

http://catalog.wvu.edu/undergraduate/coursecredittermsclassification/#Integrity_and_Dishonesty)

Social justice: *Let's maintain high standards of respect in the classroom.* West Virginia University is committed to social justice. I share that commitment and expect to foster a nurturing learning environment based on open communication, mutual respect, and non-discrimination. Our University does not discriminate on the basis of race, sex, age, disability, veteran status, religion, sexual orientation, color, or national origin; neither should we. Any suggestions on how to further social justice are welcome.

Standards for evaluating student work: The semester grading scale is based on 1000 points, based on a corollary (divided by 10) 100 point scale used for assessing each individual work.

A+ = 985 – 1000 points	A = 915 – 984 points	A- = 895 – 914 points	
B+ = 885 – 894 points	B = 815 – 884 points	B- = 795 – 814 points	
C+ = 785 – 794 points	C = 715 – 784 points	C- = 695 – 714 points	
D+ = 685 – 694 points	D = 615 – 684 points	D- = 595 – 614 points	F = 0 – 594 points

- A Superior work** demonstrates originality, initiative, insight and sophistication that go beyond the requirements. Work at this level consistently shows a clear thesis, an extremely well-developed analysis, a well-supported argument and impressive control of style and mechanics. If required, research is abundant, productive and exceptionally well-documented. The overall quality is excellent.
- B In strong work**, the writing succeeds in meeting its goals in terms of a clear thesis, critical analysis, and strong

development. The level of insight is good, and writing demonstrates solid control of style and mechanics. One of these areas might benefit from additional work, but the overall quality is fine. If required, research is solid and well-documented.

- C Satisfactory work** meets the basic requirements of the assignment, yet the essay would benefit from either a stronger thesis, more robust analysis, an extension of ideas, or improved writing style/mechanics (or possibly some combination of these). If required, research is satisfactory and adequately documented.
- D Weak work** does not fully meet the basic requirements. Analyses are brief and underdeveloped. The writing generally requires extensive revisions to address problems with the thesis, development, and/or writing style and mechanics. Research, if required, is flimsy and poorly documented.
- F Failing work** exhibits pervasive problems with thesis and development, or pervasive problems with writing style/mechanics that interfere with meaning and a reader's understanding. Unacceptable work is often incomplete. A paper or exam will also earn an F if it does not represent the writer's own original work. If required, research and documentation are minimal.

DAY BY DAY

[ALL CAPS denote work due; AP = author presentation available today]

Unit 1: Definitions of and Contexts for Adolescent Literature

[In which you write your reader profile, we define young adult literature, and we consider the potential roles of young adult literature in the secondary school classroom and library]

Week 1: January 8 – 10

W: Introductions | Short Write #1 assigned

F: *Part-Time Indian* to conclusion of "Grandmother Gives Me," page 73

Week 2: January 13 – 17

M: *Part-Time Indian* to end of "And a Partridge," page 151

Unit 2: Genres

[In which we consider some of the sub-genres of young adult fiction]

W: Finish *Part time Indian*

F: *Perks of Being a Wallflower* to page 53 | Realism/The problem novel | SHORT WRITE #1 DUE

Week 3: January 20 – 24

M: NO SCHOOL: HAPPY BIRTHDAY, DR. KING! (Read *Perks* to page 106)

W: Read *Perks* to page 155

F: *Perks* to the end

Week 4: January 27 – 31

M: *American Born Chinese* to end of page 84 ("Tze-Yo-Tzuh buried")

W: *American Born Chinese* to end of 156 ("Boom!") | SHORT WRITE #2 DUE

Special event: Thursday, January 30 Karen Osborn Reading Gold Ballroom, 7:30-9:00 p.m.

F: *American Born Chinese* to end of novel

Unit 3: History of Young Adult Fiction

[In which we trace the development of young adult literature from the nineteenth century to the present]

Week 5: February 3-7

M: *The Chocolate War*, chapters 1-8 | History of adolescent fiction

W: **NO CLASS IN CLASSROOM: Library research session in Room 136, Downtown Library** | *The Chocolate War*, chapters 9-15

F: *The Chocolate War*, chapters 16-24 | History of adolescent fiction | SHORT WRITE #3 DUE | ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY ASSIGNED

Week 6: February 10 – 14

M: *The Chocolate War*, chapters 25-32 | History of adolescent fiction

Unit 4: Critical Approaches to Adolescent Fiction

[In which we consider reader-response theory as an ideal approach for secondary English classrooms and review key interpretive approaches for university classrooms: formal, historical, psychological, gender, etc]

W: *The Chocolate War*, chapters 33-end | historical interpretation

Special event: Thursday, February 13 Mark Brazaitis Reading Robinson Reading Room, 7:30-9:00 p.m.

F: *Out of the Dust* to page 76 | formalist interpretation

Week 7 (February 17 – 21)

M: *Out of the Dust* to page 149 | reader response interpretation

W: *Out of the Dust* to the end | gender interpretation (femininity)

F: *The Diviners* to end of chapter “Passing Stranger” | historical interpretation again

Week 8 (February 24 – 28)

M: *The Diviners* to end of “Smoke and Mirrors” | gender interpretation (masculinity)

W: *The Diviners* to end of “House on the Hill”

F: *The Diviners* to end of “A Heavenly Star” | psychological interp. ANNOTATED BIB DUE

Week 9: March 3 – 7

M: *The Diviners* to end of “Death no Longer” | genre interpretation

W: *The Diviners* to end of “Cross my heart” | NO CLASS IN CLASSROOM | Catch up on your reading or get a head start on *Divergent*!

F: *The Diviners* to the end

Week 10: HAPPY SPRING BREAK! (Read *Divergent*)

Unit 5: Issues in Adolescent Fiction Classrooms

[In which we form our own opinions about various issues related to young adult literature and learning]

Issue 1: Influence of Technology and Popular Culture

Week 11: March 17 – 21

M: *Divergent* chapters x - x | MAJOR ESSAY PROJECT ASSIGNED

W: *Divergent* chapters 1-10

F: *Divergent* chapters 11 - 18

Week 12: March 24 – 28

M: *Divergent* chapters 17 - 28 | PROPOSAL FOR MAJOR ESSAY DUE

W: *Divergent* chapters 29 - end

F: *Marcelo in the Real World* chapters 1 - 8

Issue 2: Young Adult Lit versus The Classics

Week 13: March 31 – April 4

M: *Marcelo* chapters 9 - 16

W: *Marcelo* chapters 17 - 22

F: *Marcelo* chapters 23 - end

Issue 3: “Accountability” versus “Readicide”

Week 14: April 7 – 11

M: *Seraphina* chapters 1 - 6

W: *Seraphina* chapters 7 - 13 | SPEED-CONFERENCE MAJOR ESSAYS IN CLASS WITH PEERS

F: *Seraphina* chapters 14 - 19

Issue 4: Censorship in Classrooms and Libraries

Week 15: April 14 – 18

M: *Seraphina* chapters 20 - 29 | CONFERENCES WITH ME ON FINAL PAPERS

W: *Seraphina* chapters 30 – end

Special event: Thursday, April 17 Calliope Reading 130 Colson Hall, 7:30-9:00 p.m.

F: NO CLASS IN CLASSROOM—Friday before Easter recess | Catch up with *Seraphina* or begin *Monster*

Week 16: April 21 – 25

M: *Monster* to end of notes page 98

W: *Monster* to photo page 198

Special event: Thursday, April 24 MFA Reading Rhododendron Room, Mountainlair,

F: *Monster* to end | All work due, including major essay and any other work for credit

Week 17: April 28 – May 9 FINALS WEEK—No final in 405: your major essay project will serve as your final

ENGLISH 405 STUDENT INFORMATION SHEET & CLASS CONTRACT

Name _____ **Student ID** _____

Campus address _____

MIX e-mail _____ **Campus phone** _____

Other e-mail address if relevant _____

Major _____ **Year in college** _____

Previous college-level English courses taken _____

Class Contract

My signature below signifies my agreement that I have read and understood the English 405 syllabus, and I agree to abide by all its rules and regulations.

Signed:

Your name

Date

Attendance information (instructor use only):