

## AML 2410: Issues in American Literature and Culture

### From Damsels in Distress to Dragon Slayers: Strong Female Characters in Children's and Young Adult Literature Class #10509, Spring 2019

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**Instructor Name:** Corinne Matthews  
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**Course meeting time:** MWF Period 6 (12:50-1:40)  
**Course website:** Canvas

**Office:** Turlington 4365  
**Office Hours:** MW 11:30-12:30  
**Location:** Matherly 0116

#### Course Description:

What makes a female character strong? What do Anne of Green Gables, Susan Pevensie, and Katniss Everdeen have in common? Each represents a stage in the development of the strong female character in children's and young adult literature. But what makes bow-wielding Susan Pevensie—ultimately barred from the magical land of Narnia for liking lipstick, nylons, and parties a little too much—so different from her more contemporary counterpart Katniss, the archer of *Hunger Games* fame? What do these characters show us about the cultures in which they first appear? In this class, we will investigate a number of depictions of female characters in children's and young adult literature as we try to answer these questions. As we follow the progression of the strong female character, we will read a number of texts from children's and young adult literature across a variety of genres, including realistic fiction, historical fiction, fantasy, science fiction, and horror.

In this course, we will investigate some of the first significant female characters children's literature in classic novels like *Anne of Green Gables* and *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*. Then, we will read literature influenced by second wave feminism—which has a tendency to overlook types of diversity beyond gender—with texts like *The Hero and the Crown*, *A Ring of Endless Light*, and *Ella Enchanted*. Next, we will look at the ways in which the strong female characters have become more diverse and with works by and about people of color, like *Her Stories: African American Folktales, Fairy Tales, and True Tales*; *Shadowshaper*; *Ms. Marvel*; *To All the Boys I've Loved Before*; and *The Hate U Give*. We will also read texts that feature LGBT characters like *Nimona* (which also deals with disability) and *Jane, Unlimited*. Finally, we will end the semester with *The Hunger Games* in order to compare Katniss Everdeen—who often serves as the contemporary poster girl of strong female characters—with all of her fictional counterparts whom we've encountered over the course of the semester.

#### General Education Objectives:

- This course confers General Education credit for either Composition (C) or Humanities (H). This course also fulfills 6,000 of the university's 24,000-word writing requirement (WR).
- *Composition courses* provide instruction in the methods and conventions of standard written English (grammar, punctuation, usage), as well as the techniques that produce effective texts. Composition courses are writing intensive. They require multiple drafts submitted to your instructor for feedback before final submission.

- Course content should include multiple forms of effective writing, different writing styles, approaches and formats, and methods to adapt writing to different audiences, purposes and contexts. Students should learn to organize complex arguments in writing using thesis statements, claims and evidence, and to analyze writing for errors in logic.
- The University *Writing Requirement (WR)* ensures students both maintain their fluency in writing and use writing as a tool to facilitate learning. To receive Writing Requirement credit, a student must receive a grade of C or higher and a satisfactory completion of the writing component of the course. This means that written assignments must meet minimum word requirements totaling 6000 words.

### General Education Learning Outcomes:

At the end of this course, students will be expected to have achieved the following learning outcomes in content, communication and critical thinking:

- **Content:** Students demonstrate competence in the terminology, concepts, theories and methodologies used within the academic discipline.
- **Communication:** Students communicate knowledge, ideas and reasoning clearly and effectively in written and oral forms appropriate to the discipline. Students will participate in class discussions throughout the semester to reflect on assigned readings.
- **Critical Thinking:** Students analyze information carefully and logically from multiple perspectives, using discipline-specific methods, and develop reasoned solutions to problems.

### Required Texts for Purchase:

You may purchase any edition of these texts.

Cashore, Kristin. *Jane, Unlimited*  
 Collins, Suzanne. *The Hunger Games*  
 L'Engle, Madeline. *A Ring of Endless Light*  
 Levine, Gail Carson. *Ella Enchanted*  
 Lewis, C.S. *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*  
 McKinley, Robin. *The Hero and the Crown*  
 Montgomery, L.M. *Anne of Green Gables*  
 Older, Daniel Jose. *Shadowshaper*  
 Stevenson, Noelle. *Nimona*  
 Thomas, Angie. *The Hate U Give*  
 Wilson, G. Willow. *Ms. Marvel Vol 1: No Normal*  
*To All the Boys I've Loved Before* (Netflix film 2018)

### Additional Texts:

Primary Texts:

Hamilton, Virginia. *Her Stories: African American Folktales, Fairy Tales, and True Tales*

Note: While I will provide a copy of an excerpt from this text, because it is a picture book and thus cannot be done justice by a digital scan, you may wish to purchase your own copy.

Munsch, Robert. *The Paper Bag Princess*

### Critical Texts:

Altman, Ann E. "Welding Brass Tits on the Armor: An Examination of the Quest Metaphor in Robin McKinley's *The Hero and the Crown*"  
Bernstein, Robin. "Let Black Kids Just be Kids"  
Gubar, Marah. "Empathy is Not Enough"  
Newgarden, Mark and Paul Karasik, "How to Read Nancy"  
Reid-Walsh, Jacqueline. "Girlhood," *Keywords in Children's Literature*  
Schlegl, Kara Eva. "Why the 'Strong Female Character' Needs to Die"  
Valint, Alexandra. "Queer Your Own Adventure"

### Grade Distribution:

5 Responses (500 words each)	25%
Critical Article Analysis (700 words)	15%
Creative Assignment and Explanation (500 word explanation)	10%
Annotated Bibliography (500 words minimum)	15%
Final Paper (1800 words)	25%
Attendance and Participation	10%

### Assignment Descriptions:

#### Critical Response Papers (500 words each)

You will write *five* response papers in response to our readings. Response papers are designed to ready you for class discussion and to explore ideas you could develop further in your longer paper. They are due the day indicated on the syllabus (remember, you signed up to be in either Group A or Group B). Whatever day you turn it in, a response paper *must always address the reading for that day*. In your response paper, you should not repeat previous class discussions or provide a summary of the reading. Instead, your response should begin to analyze the reading assigned for that class session, selecting an issue or theme or question you feel to be significant and analyzing how it functions in the text. Use close reading to support the analysis you do in your response. Because these papers are relatively short, you won't be able to look at the *entire* text, and your focus should be relatively narrow. I recommend that you select a word, phrase, image, two-page spread (if a comic), or short quotation from the reading to initiate your response. If you would like help narrowing down appropriate topics for a response paper, feel free to come to my office hours or send me an e-mail running an idea by me. I do not accept late response papers.

#### Critical Article Analysis (700 words)

For this essay, you will find an academic article related to one of the texts we have read this semester and write an essay in response to the author's argument. You must provide a brief summary of the argument, as well as a detailed analysis of its effectiveness and validity. Don't forget a Works Cited page in MLA format. Please also upload a copy of the article you are analyzing.

#### Creative Assignment and Explanation (500 words)

For this assignment you have two options.

Option A: Create your own strong female character. You have many choices as to how you present your character creation—you could draw her, describe her, or even pull a photo from somewhere that you think represents her. Then, you'll need to write a description and analysis of your

character. What makes her a strong female character? How does she relate to the other strong female characters we've learned about in this course? How did creating your own strong female character change how you perceive what makes female characters strong? The analysis must be at least 500 words.

Option B: Choose a strong female character who we aren't already discussing in class from a text you would like to investigate further. She can be from a book, film, tv show, or other form of media—the sky is the limit here, though I would like you to limit your choices to fictional characters. Then, write an explanation and analysis of this character. What makes her a strong female character? Or, conversely, is she not as strong as you thought? How does she relate to the other female characters we've learned about in this course? How does this strong female character affect how you perceive what makes female characters strong? The analysis must be at least 500 words.

When you turn this assignment in, you'll have an opportunity at the beginning of class to share your findings with your classmates. You may turn this assignment in at any point during the semester, with the last possible due date of **Friday, April 19**.

### **Annotated Bibliography (500 words minimum)**

In this assignment, you will explore **AT LEAST** five sources that will be useful in establishing context for your final research paper. You will both summarize the source and also, more importantly, critically examine the strengths and weaknesses of the text and explicate the ways the source will support your overall argument. Each annotation will be at least 100 words **NOT INCLUDING** an MLA-formatted citation.

### **Final paper (1800 words)**

In this essay, you will use the skills we have built throughout the course and in our previous essays. Your paper should have a strong, clear, and creative argument about a text of your choosing, and should consult three critical sources. This should not be a regurgitation of the issues, ideas, and themes we have discussed in class, but should instead be a result of your own critical thinking and understanding of the text.

### **Course Policies:**

1. You must complete all *assignments* to receive credit for this course.
2. *Attendance:* Attendance is mandatory and will be taken daily. You may miss up to three classes without penalty. After three unexcused absences, you will lose 3% off your final grade for each additional unexcused absence. **If you miss two full weeks of class (6 unexcused absences), you will automatically fail the course.** Arriving late to class three times will count as one absence. Absences will be excused only in accordance with UF policy. Acceptable reasons include illness, religious holidays, military obligation, and those absences covered by UF's twelve-day rule (<https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/attendance.aspx>). Should you miss a class for any reason, you are responsible for informing yourself as to what was covered in class and for making up all assignments. Students are responsible for all work covered in class, all announcements, and all changes to the syllabus made in class.
3. *Paper Format & Submission:* All papers should be formatted per MLA standards (TNR 12, double-spaced, one-inch margins, MLA header, and MLA citations) and submitted to the

assignment on Canvas as a .doc or .docx file. Please note that failure of technology is not an excuse, so plan your time accordingly.

**Note: You must complete *all assignments* to receive credit for this course.**

4. *Late Papers/Assignments*: Papers that are submitted late will lose ten percent off their final grade for each day that they are late. After three days, I will not accept late papers. Brief Responses will not be accepted late.
5. *Paper Maintenance Responsibilities*. Keep duplicate copies of all work submitted in this course. Save all returned, graded work until the semester is over.
6. *Academic Honesty and Definition of Plagiarism*. Plagiarism violates the Student Honor Code and requires reporting to the Dean of Students. All students must abide by the Student Honor Code: <https://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/process/student-conduct-honor-code/>.
7. Students with *disabilities* who are requesting accommodations should first register with the Disability Resource Center (352-392-8565, [www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/](http://www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/)), which will provide appropriate documentation to give the instructor.
8. For information on UF Grading policies, see:  
<https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/grades.aspx>
9. *Grade Appeals*. In 1000- and 2000-level courses, students may appeal a final grade by filling out a form available from Carla Blount, Program Assistant, in the Department office (4008 TUR). Grade appeals may result in a higher, unchanged, or lower final grade.
10. *Course Evaluations*. Toward the end of the semester, you will receive email messages asking you to go online and evaluate this course: <https://evaluations.ufl.edu/evals/Default.aspx>
11. Students who face difficulties completing the course or who are in need of counseling or urgent help may call the on-campus Counseling and Wellness Center (352) 392-1575, or contact them online: <http://www.counseling.ufl.edu/cwc/Default.aspx>
12. Your policy on *classroom behavior and netiquette*:
13. *UF's policy on Harassment*: UF provides an educational and working environment that is free from sex discrimination and sexual harassment for its students, staff, and faculty:  
<http://hr.ufl.edu/manager-resources/recruitment-staffing/institutional-equity-diversity/resources/harassment/>
14. *Policy on environmental sustainability*. Whenever possible, I will use paper-sparing electronic media to distribute our course materials. Consider purchasing electronic editions of assigned texts when they are available, or used copies of print texts. If you do not elect to keep your print books, consider sharing them with others after the semester ends. (For example, you could donate them to the Alachua County [Friends of the Library](#) annual book sale.)

### Course Schedule:

Please note that this schedule is a guide and may change. *Always check Canvas!*

Wk	Day	Reading/Viewing Material	Due
1	M 1/7	Syllabus and Course Overview <i>The Paper Bag Princess</i> (In class)	
	W 1/9	Jacqueline Reid-Walsh, "Girlhood," <i>Keywords in Children's Literature</i> . Available <a href="#">here</a> .	
	F 1/11	Montgomery, <i>Anne of Green Gables</i> , Ch. 1-9	
	S 1/13	Optional Event: Mock Caldecott @ Gainesville Public Library, Headquarters Branch 2-5pm	
2	M 1/14	Montgomery, <i>Anne of Green Gables</i> , Ch. 10-19 Response Paper Group Assignments	
	W 1/16	Montgomery, <i>Anne of Green Gables</i> , Ch. 20-29 Paragraph Workshop	Draft Paragraph From Response 1
	F 1/18	Montgomery, <i>Anne of Green Gables</i> , Ch. 30-38	Response 1 (Both Groups)
3	M 1/21	<b>No Class: Martin Luther King, Jr. Day</b>	
	W 1/23	Lewis, <i>The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe</i> , Ch. 1-6	
	F 1/25	Lewis, <i>The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe</i> , Ch. 7-12	
4	M 1/28	Lewis, <i>The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe</i> , Ch. 13-17	Response 2 (Group A)
	W 1/30	McKinley, <i>The Hero and the Crown</i> , Ch. 1-9	
	F 2/1	McKinley, <i>The Hero and the Crown</i> , Ch. 10-17	
5	M 2/4	McKinley, <i>The Hero and the Crown</i> , Ch. 18-25	Response 2 (Group B)
	W 2/6	Ann E. Altman, "Welding Brass Tits on the Armor: An Examination of the Quest Metaphor in Robin McKinley's <i>The Hero and the Crown</i> " (On Canvas)	

	F 2/8	Stevenson, <i>Nimona</i> , Ch. 1-6 Newgarden and Karasik, "How to Read Nancy" (On Canvas)	
6	M 2/11	Stevenson, <i>Nimona</i> , Ch. 7-9	
	W 2/13	Stevenson, <i>Nimona</i> , Ch. 10-Epilogue	Response 3 (Group A)
	F 2/15	Levine, <i>Ella Enchanted</i> , Ch. 1-11	
7	M 2/18	Levine, <i>Ella Enchanted</i> , Ch. 12-22	
	W 2/20	Levine, <i>Ella Enchanted</i> , Ch. 23-Epilogue	Response 3 (Group B)
	F 2/22	Hamilton, <i>Her Stories: African American Folktales, Fairy Tales, and True Tales</i> . "Her Fairy Tales" (On Canvas)	Choose article for analysis
8	M 2/25	Older, <i>Shadowshaper</i> , Ch. 1-Ch. 16	
	W 2/27	Older, <i>Shadowshaper</i> , Ch. 17-Ch. 29	
	F 3/1	Older, <i>Shadowshaper</i> Ch. 30-Epilogue	Critical Article Analysis
9	M 3/4	<b>No Class: Spring Break</b>	
	W 3/6	<b>No Class: Spring Break</b>	
	F 3/8	<b>No Class: Spring Break</b>	
10	M 3/11	Wilson, <i>Ms. Marvel: No Normal</i> , Issues 1-3	
	W 3/13	Wilson, <i>Ms. Marvel: No Normal</i> , Issues 4-5	Response 4 (Group A)
	F 3/15	<b>No Class</b> (Instructor at conference) Note: You may wish to get ahead on next week's reading, which is a bit hefty.	
11	M 3/18	L'Engle, <i>A Ring of Endless Light</i> , Ch. 1-4	
	W 3/20	L'Engle, <i>A Ring of Endless Light</i> , Ch. 5-8	
	F 3/22	L'Engle, <i>A Ring of Endless Light</i> , Ch. 9-12	Response 4 (Group B)
12	M 3/25	<i>To All the Boys I've Loved Before</i> (film)	
	W 3/27	<i>To All the Boys I've Loved Before</i> (film)	Response 5 (Group A)

	F 3/29	Thomas, <i>The Hate U Give</i> , Ch. 1-6 Robin Bernstein, "Let Black Kids Just be Kids," <i>New York Times</i> . Available <a href="#">here</a> .	Response 5 (Group B)
13	M 4/1	Thomas, <i>The Hate U Give</i> , Ch. 7-12	
	W 4/3	Thomas, <i>The Hate U Give</i> , Ch. 8-19	
	F 4/5	Thomas, <i>The Hate U Give</i> , Ch. 20-25 Marah Gubar, "Empathy is Not Enough." Available <a href="#">here</a> .	Annotated Bibliography
14	M 4/8	Cashore, <i>Jane, Unlimited</i> , "Tu Reviens" – "The Missing Masterpiece"	
	W 4/10	Cashore, <i>Jane, Unlimited</i> , "Lies Without Borders" – "In Which Someone Loses a Soul and Charlotte Finds One"	
	F 4/12	Cashore, <i>Jane, Unlimited</i> , "Jane, Unlimited" – "The Strayhound the Girl, and the Painting" Alexandra Valint, "Queer Your Own Adventure." Available <a href="#">here</a> .	
15	M 4/15	Collins, <i>The Hunger Games</i> , Part 1 Thesis Statement Workshop	Draft Thesis Statement
	W 4/17	Collins, <i>The Hunger Games</i> , Part 2	
	F 4/19	Collins, <i>The Hunger Games</i> , Part 3 Linda Holmes, "What Really Makes Katniss Stand Out? Peeta, Her Movie Girlfriend." Available <a href="#">here</a> .	Last Day for Creative Assignment
16	M 4/22	Peer Review Workshop	Draft of Final Paper for Peer Review
	W 4/24	Kara Eva Schlegl, "Why the 'Strong Female Character' Needs to Die." Available <a href="#">here</a> .	Final Paper
	F 4/26	<b>No Class: Reading Day</b>	