Chapter 09 - Children & Teen Literatures

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Children & Teen Literatures

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Children’s Literature is formative. Think back on some of the books that you read as a child. Do you remember the first time you saw yourself reflected in the pages of a book? Was it in the illustrations or the text? Do you remember the first time a new thought or idea was presented to you when reading a book? Did you think, “I want to do that!” or “I’ve always felt that way, but never told anyone.” Stories operate on multiple intellectual and affective levels, simultaneously reinforcing our personal experiences while opening up new possibilities.

As we age, we leave the books of our youth behind, relegating them to be at best nostalgic and at worst irrelevant. The scholarship of children’s literature challenges this passive notion, presenting children’s literatures as a lens to view personal, cultural, and societal values. The materials in our library research level collections represent points of view, ideas, images and opinions across a wide range of age, race, religion, national origin, social status and political viewpoints. Through the retention and inclusion of controversial texts and illustrations, the collection provides an opportunity for the examination of historical and current trends in children’s literature that intersect with history, sociology, education, communication, art, English, psychology, anthropology, theatre, and the natural world.

The primary role of an academic children and young adult (YA) literature collection is distinct from public and school libraries. Due to the scholarly emphasis, our library retains and purchases materials on subjects that should not be included in public or school library collections such as holocaust denial, gender bias, and racial stereotyping.

Knowledge of the breadth and depth of children’s literature can raise awareness regarding the visionary, insightful, and ground breaking works that are housed alongside dated and offensive items. There is no question that silencing, marginalization, and disrespect are real experiences. Historical and contemporary context is essential to the appreciation and celebration of children’s literature authors and illustrators who reach beyond their place and time to offer children and young people a larger universe. The WWU Children’s Literature Interdisciplinary Collection (CLIC) supports students and faculty from a variety of disciplines providing texts and illustrations for evidential exploration, study, and revelation.

The Children’s Literature Interdisciplinary Collection (CLIC)

The Children’s Literature Interdisciplinary Collection (CLIC) was established in 2008 and is located on the 4th floor of Wilson Library. Building on WWUs extensive holdings (Western Washington University was originally established as a Normal School for teacher preparation) the intent of CLIC is to integrate and promote children’s literature across departments, disciplines, and programs.

Collection Subdivisions in the 4th floor area of CLIC:

1) New Books, Book Review Sources, & Government Information – Located off the Wilson 4 Central rotunda entrance to CLIC, these shelves display new books for general browsing. The items have a 21-day circulation limit
to ensure maximum availability. Adjacent to the New Books are current issues of exemplary periodicals that review children’s books: Horn Book, Book Links, and Book List. The lower shelves contain a sampling of government documents published by Washington State, Canada, and the United States Federal Government. NASA and the Federal Park Service, in particular, provide many materials for youth. When removed, these government materials go into the circulating collection.

2) **Picture Books** are located on the lower shelves, facing the New Books, and are arranged alphabetically by author last name. All the books in this area are fiction and begin with the Library of Congress classification of PZ7.

3) **New Canada Children’s Book Display** includes books by Canadian authors, illustrators and publishing houses. Purchase of these books is made possible by the WWU Canadian-American Studies Program.

4) **Poetry for children and teens (PoetryCHaT)** is located directly across from the picture books. The primary geographic scope of this collection is poetry published in the United States, but there is some inclusion of distinguished international poets. PoetryCHaT has a programming component that promotes the sharing, teaching, and celebration of poetry.

5) **Children’s Literature** is the largest section and spans the entire range of Library of Congress classifications. All PZ7 (fiction) books that are not picture books – early readers, chapter books, and YA novels – are shelved in this area. Nonfiction (history, science, nature), folklore, and children’s bibliographic indexes are located here. Note: American Library Association awards (Newbery, Caldecott, Coretta Scott King) are especially significant in the field of children’s literature. In CLIC, award books are interfiled throughout the collection subdivisions.

**Note**: American Library Association medals and awards (Newbery, Caldecott, Coretta Scott King) are especially significant in the field of children’s literature. In CLIC, award books are interfiled throughout the collection subdivisions. These books can be a great place to start when exploring children’s literature!

**Special Collections** houses a number of valuable children’s literature collections. The Helene Whitson Toy & Movable book collection, Children and Teen Poetry (in coordination with PoetryCHaT), The Campus School Collection, Little Golden Books, and Early Readers & Primers. There are many treasures in special collections that can facilitate critical conversations around
historical perspectives and cultural values. Book design and illustration are fascinating and provocative areas to explore. Examples include: Max Und Moritz cautionary tales, Roberts Sabuda engineered books, Dick and Jane primers, rare poetry anthologies for young children, and items by regional authors and illustrators.

Center for Education, Equity and Diversity (CEED) and the Pacific Northwest Children’s Literature Clearinghouse are located within Woodring College of Education. CEED focuses on providing resources and programming related to equity, diversity, self-exploration and identity, inter-group relations, multicultural education, and civic engagement. The Clearinghouse maintains a circulating collection of current children and YA titles to support educators.

Locating Materials In CLIC

Library of Congress Classification

In the WWU Libraries, children and young adult literatures are classified using the Library of Congress classification system. This can be confusing for patrons who are familiar with the more traditional Dewey Decimal system, so often used in public and school libraries. When CLIC was established, the collection was re-classed in order to align with WWU library holdings. Synchronizing collections allows for intersections between subject areas. For example, the LC classification for Scandinavian folklore is PT7088-7089. Finding a folktale about trolls in the children’s literature collection means that you can use the same LC call number to locate more advanced academic texts that explore trolls in Scandinavian folklore housed in the general collection. A more sophisticated examination might involve a critical analysis of gender stereotyping, (illustration and text) within children’s books published in the 1950s. Using the academic LC classification system prompts this type of intersection between CLIC and the general library resources.

One unique LC classification is important to note – PZ7 is the LC call number for juvenile fiction (Juvenile belles lettres to be exact). In our collections, PZ7 is the call number for picture books and for all other fiction including easy readers, chapter books, and novels. In other words, when a OneSearch result includes PZ7 items in our library, these items will be all be children or YA materials.

Formats & Genres

Most of our children’s literatures are in a traditional print format. There are some animations of children’s books and children’s movies in the library media collection. The Helene Whitson Toy & Movable Book Collection, mentioned under Special Collections, is a great means of studying the craft of book art. See below for an overview of genres.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bilingual/ESL</th>
<th>Fiction</th>
<th>Folktales &amp; Fairytales</th>
<th>Foreign Language</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Graphic novels</td>
<td>Nonfiction</td>
<td>Poetry</td>
<td>Wordless Picture Books</td>
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Using OneSearch to Locate Children's Literature

Use the Advanced Search function in OneSearch to locate items. You can use any subject term, author name, or format in the top search box. Then, type in “juvenile materials” in the second box. This will limit your search to items found in our children and young adult literature collections.

Children's and YA literature has a long tradition of acknowledging outstanding authors and illustrators. Combining an award name (Newbery, Caldecott, Pura Belpre, etc.) with “juvenile materials” will result in a list of books owned by our library that have received a particular award. For a complete list of ALA Children’s Media Awards go to the CLIC Libguide.

The Curriculum Collection

The Western Libraries does not have extensive curriculum materials. Most curriculum is housed within subject departments around campus, providing for flexibility and currency. Our holdings are divided into Elementary and Secondary Education. Using the terms “elementary curriculum” or “secondary curriculum” in combination with “juvenile materials” as illustrated above will limit the OneSearch results to curriculum materials. The general library has extensive holdings on elementary and secondary curricular design, lesson plans, historical criticism, and theory.

Intensive English Program/TESOL Collection

Located next to the Elementary and Secondary curriculum, this collection provides a wide range of reading for international students who are learning English as a second (or third/fourth) language.

Locating Scholarship

As with any discipline, children and YA literature scholarship varies widely and contains numerous subdivisions and genres. For example, if you are studying folktales and fairytales there are highly specialized reference tools, databases, and search strategies for exploring the origin, illustration, composition, societal impact, retelling and revision of these narratives. Folktales exist throughout the world, unconstrained by political boundaries. Indeed, folklore is a field of study unto itself. You may find yourself using sources specific to children and YA literature alongside sources in other disciplines and in the general library collection.

Date of publication is important when using the collections. As mentioned previously, CLIC is a research collection and some of the materials are not only dated in terms of information content (rocket science) but may contain offensive text or illustrations. The benefit of a broad spectrum is the ability to examine texts over time periods and eras. For example, when studying WWII, limiting your search to children’s books published between 1939 and 1945 provides a window into education and recreational reading for youth during this time period. How is a nation at war reflected in the literature for children and young adults? And don’t forget to look at the illustrations!
The Libguide for children’s literature provides suggestions and strategies to explore subject areas within children and YA literature including Folktales & Fairytales, Diversity, Graphic Novels, and disAbility.

Book reviews play a significant role in the field of children’s literature and function as a means of conversation between experts and may provide valuable information about content, impact, and context. Online interviews with authors and illustrators are common. When using a database to locate book reviews, type in the title, author, or illustrator along with journal title. The best periodical reviews are in The Horn Book, Book Links, Reading Teacher, Multicultural Review, and School Library Journal – available in print or full-text online via the Western Libraries. School Library Journal has an outstanding online presence and is worth searching independently. Some excellent review sources that are published exclusively online: The Voice of Youth Advocates, VOYA and The Bulletin of the Center for Children’s Books.

The most important resource for locating scholarship on children and YA literature are the library databases. Academic Search Complete, ERIC, and MLA will contain peer-reviewed articles.

- Academic Search Complete - Academic Search Complete is a scholarly, multi-disciplinary database, with more than 10,000 journals, with more than 5,500 full-text periodicals, including more than 4,600 peer-reviewed journals.

- ERIC is the largest education database in the world providing indexing and abstracts of all types of materials including journal articles, government documents, books, dissertations, and unpublished materials such as curriculum guides, research reports and conference papers in education and related topics in the social sciences.

- MLA (Modern Language Association) Bibliography via EBSCO covers literature, languages, linguistics, folklore, journalism, communications, film, media, and theater and indexes journal articles, books and book chapters, dissertations, and bibliographies from 1926 to the current year.

- Children’s Literature Comprehensive Database contains full-text reviews to thousands of children’s books with many links to web pages featuring individual authors or illustrators.

- ICDL - International Children’s Digital Library - The mission of the International Children’s Digital Library Foundation (ICDL Foundation) is to support the world’s children in becoming effective members of the global community - who exhibit tolerance and respect for diverse cultures, languages and ideas -- by making the best in children’s literature available online free of charge.

Assessment

The ACRL Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education outlines six frames (or core concepts) that are central to information literacy. Each frame includes a set of knowledge practices and a set of dispositions. When assessing children’s and YA literature in the context of LIBR201, Scholarship as Conversation is the recommended frame. The field of children’s literature is continually evolving, existing within the context of oral and written stories. Narrative is by definition conversation. While this frame may not be a primary focus of a particular LIBR201 course, the knowledge practices and dispositions are valuable in developing curricular content.

Scholarship as Conversation

Communities of scholars, researchers, or professionals engage in sustained discourse with new insights and discoveries occurring over time as a result of varied perspectives and interpretations.

Research in scholarly and professional fields is a discursive practice in which ideas are formulated, debated, and weighed against one another over extended periods of time. Instead of seeking discrete answers to complex problems, experts understand that a given issue may be characterized by several competing perspectives as part of an ongoing conversation in which information users and creators come together and negotiate meaning. Experts understand that, while some topics have established answers through this process, a query may not have a single uncontested answer. Experts
are therefore inclined to seek out many perspectives, not merely the ones with which they are familiar. These perspectives might be in their own discipline or profession or may be in other fields. While novice learners and experts at all levels can take part in the conversation, established power and authority structures may influence their ability to participate and can privilege certain voices and information. Developing familiarity with the sources of evidence, methods, and modes of discourse in the field assists novice learners to enter the conversation. New forms of scholarly and research conversations provide more avenues in which a wide variety of individuals may have a voice in the conversation. Providing attribution to relevant previous research is also an obligation of participation in the conversation. It enables the conversation to move forward and strengthens one’s voice in the conversation.

Knowledge Practices

Learners who are developing their information literate abilities:

- Summarize the changes in scholarly perspective over time on a particular topic within a specific discipline;
- Recognize that a given scholarly work may not represent the only or even the majority perspective on the issue.

Dispositions

Learners who are developing their information literate abilities:

- Recognize they are often entering into an ongoing scholarly conversation and not a finished conversation;
- Seek out conversations taking place in their research area;
- See themselves as contributors to scholarship rather than only consumers of it;
- Recognize that scholarly conversations take place in various venues;
- Suspend judgment on the value of a particular piece of scholarship until the larger context for the scholarly conversation is better understood;
- Understand the responsibility that comes with entering the conversation through participatory channels;
- Value user-generated content and evaluate contributions made by others;
- Recognize that systems privilege authorities and that not having a fluency in the language and process of a discipline disempowers their ability to participate and engage.

Chapter Conclusion: Why is this important to you?

Students and faculty are often surprised to learn that the Western Libraries include children and young adult book collections. Why would anyone in higher education be interested in reading kid’s books? What do the stories of youth have to do with adult pursuits?

If one agrees with the premise that the narratives we learned and loved in our childhood are formative, then the study and understanding of children’s literature is anything but nostalgic or irrelevant. In the groundbreaking book, *Critical Multicultural Analysis of Children’s Literature*, Masha Rudman states, “The metaphors of mirrors, windows, and doors permeate the scholarly dialogue of ‘multicultural children’s literature’ as using literature to provide ways to affirm and gain entry into one’s own culture and the culture of others” (pg. xiii). A current dialogue among scholars involves an examination of representations of children of color, varying socio-economic status, and international ethnicities within the published works of children and young adult literature. Where are the books that reflect all of our persona yet varied experiences? What are the consequences of limited, biased, and simplistic viewpoints? Whether we place a baseball or a
book about endangered pandas into the hands of our children, our actions reflect our values and priorities as parents, caretakers, and educators.

Finally, children and young adult literature is delightful. Consider the popularity of Captain Jack Sparrow, Grimm’s Fairytales, or the resurgence of the Marvel franchise. Language translations, taboo subjects, and social justice are just a few of the trending areas within this complex and multi-faceted field of study. Whether for pleasure reading or research projects – take advantage of these rich collections.

References


An Addendum: American Library Association Youth Media Awards

Reminder: American Library Association medals and awards (Newbery, Caldecott, Coretta Scott King) are especially significant in the field of children’s literature. In CLIC, award books are interfiled throughout the collection subdivisions. These books can be a great place to start when exploring children’s literature!

The Andrew Carnegie Medal for Excellence in Children’s Video, supported by the Carnegie Corporation of New York, was awarded for the first time in 1991 to honor outstanding video productions for children released during the previous year.

The Coretta Scott King Book Awards are given annually to outstanding African American authors and illustrators of books for children and young adults that demonstrate an appreciation of African American culture and universal human values.

The Newbery Medal is awarded annually by the American Library Association for the most distinguished American children’s book published the previous year.

The Michael I. Printz Award annually honors the best book written for teens, based entirely on its literary merit.

The Pura Belpre Award, established in 1996, is presented to a Latino/Latina writer and illustrator whose work best portrays, affirms, and celebrates the Latino cultural experience in an outstanding work of literature for children and youth.

The Robert F. Sibert Informational Book Award, established by the Association for Library Service to Children in 2001 is awarded annually to the author(s) and illustrator(s) of the most distinguished informational book published in the United States in English during the preceding year.

The Schneider Family Book Award honor an author or illustrator for a book that embodies an artistic expression of the disability experience for child and adolescent audiences.


The Theodore Seuss Geisel Award is given annually to the author(s) and illustrator(s) of the most distinguished American book for beginning readers published in English in the United States during the preceding year.

The YALSA Award for Excellence in Nonfiction honors the best nonfiction book published for young adults (ages 12-18).

Additional Resources

The Bulletin of the Center for Children’s Books The Bulletin, founded in 1945, is devoted entirely to the review of current books for children. It provides concise summaries and critical evaluations to help you find the books you need. Each review gives you information on book’s content, reading level, strengths and weaknesses, and quality of format, as well as suggestions for curricular use. http://bccb.lis.illinois.edu/

The Jane Addams Children’s Book Awards are given annually to the children’s books published the preceding year that effectively promote the cause of peace, social justice, world community, and the equality of the sexes and all races as well as meeting conventional standards for excellence. http://www.janeaddamspeace.org/jacba/