

English 259

Rudolph Almas, ENGL 259, Summer I 2003, Fiction for Adolescents

NOTE: Fiction for Adolescents is listed in the English Department Course Catalog as ENGL 259.

English 405 Dr. Rudolph Almas

Session I (May 20-June 27) Office of the Dean

Summer 2003 Eberly College of Arts and Sciences

CRN # 50376 201 Woodburn Hall

Fiction for Adolescents PO BOX 6286

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PURPOSE: The purpose of this course is to introduce students to a type of fiction called Adolescent Literature, a type of fiction read mostly by young adults. You will read several samples of this literature, respond to the readings, and read about this type of literature. Some consideration will be given to the place of this literature in the secondary school curriculum.

The course has been deliberately designed and structured to provide you with an inquiry experience into adolescent literature and to encourage you to test your thinking skills by making connections between information you learn and literature you read and respond to. This section of English 405 (WR) has been approved to fulfill the "w" (writing) requirement for graduation. Although this course may not be listed as a writing-intensive course, it does fulfill this requirement.

REQUIRED READING LIST:

Monseau and Salvner, eds. Reading Their World: The Young Adult Novel in the Classroom

Novels (which should be read in this order if possible):

Blume, Are You There God? It's Me Margaret Peck _ Dav No [ig~ Would Die Zindel, The Pi~nan Taylor, ~ of Thunder. Hear MY Cry Rowling, Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone Hernandez, Across the Great River Lipsyte, The Contender Crutcher, Running Loose Duncan, Killing Mr. Griff~n Cormier, The Chocolate War Lasky, Beyond the Divide

All of these books have been ordered through the WVU Bookstore. Some local book stores might have an "adolescent" section where these books might be found. They might also be available at your local library.

PEDAGOGY: This course will be conducted essentially as a readings course. At the beginning of the course, you will attend one lecture which will introduce you to the issues that surround adolescent literature, a lecture which will prepare you for your readings and help with the final examination. As you

read independently, there will be several written projects to submit to your professor. Some feedback and course discussion will proceed electronically which is why you are asked to utilize your MIX account for e-mail. You will return to campus at the end of the Summer I session for a final examination.

REQUIREMENTS: (to be done in this order)

a. Mandatory attendance at the evening lecture:

May 20, 2003, Tuesday

6:30-9:00 pm

Room: 315 Percival Hall

We begin with a lecture so you know from the beginning a certain definition of adolescent literature and have a frame of concerns which will guide your reading. The lecture will provide you with the parameters in which your independent learning and thinking will happen.

Read the class text, the Monseau/Salvuer book. Summarize the content of chapters 1, 2, 3, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12, and 13. Type your chapter summaries (around 2 pages for each chapter, I imagine) and submit them to me ALL at the same time. Keep a copy of your written work for yourself. You may submit this written work electronically--to RALMASY(~WVU.EDU. I should be able to work with attachments. If we are incompatible, I'll let you know. The alternative to an attachment is to incorporate your text into the actual e-mail message you send me. If you submit your chapter summaries electronically, submit three or four at one time, rather than the whole batch.

Now you might think this is a boring and stupid exercise. I don't think it is. Research demonstrates that people better retain the general ideas they read about if they do written summaries rather than study for a test. Furthermore, the written summaries provide you with knowledge-based tools to discover how to connect information with the fiction you will read. Your own personal responses to the novels you read will be a type of inquiry exercise made all that more meaningful because you will have a frame for your reading. And finally, the written summaries will be instantly available to you as you do your other projects in this class.

Read the 11 novels, if possible in the order listed (they go from elementary to advanced). For each novel, prepare a 2 page, typed report that VERY BRIEFLY summarizes the plot of the novel (one paragraph or a few sentences will do), that categorizes the novel according to the information supplied you from the lecture and the Monseau/Salvner book, and that contains your response to the book--Was it a good book? Why? Who should be encouraged to read it? What specifically does it have to do with growing up? What specific things did the author do well? What kinds of problems did you have with the book as you read it? How and why could it be used in the classroom? What specific psychological or developmental characteristics of adolescents are explored? How did this novel contribute to your overall understanding of or sensitivity to "Fiction for Adolescents"? How would you connect this book to what you read about in the Monseau/Salvner book.

The above are merely sample questions to help you prepare a complete and interesting response. Do not feel obligated to answer every question. Submit each response paper when it is finished. Please don't wait to send them all together. Keep a copy of your written work for yourself. The key to receiving a good mark on a response paper will be your demonstrating that you are drawing CONNECTIONS between and among the novel you have read, the lecture material, the handouts, and the discussions in the course textbook. If you don't do much connecting, your grade will suffer.

This notion of making connections is your way of discovering how to evaluate adolescent fiction. Discovery activities ask you to bring your knowledge of something to bear on a problem you are confronted with. The "problem" in this case is the need to provide a response to something you have read. Research tells us that we clarify and enhance our thinking processes when we put our thoughts into writing. Indeed, while we write we often discover what we think and, so, refine that thinking. Your individual novel responses may be submitted electronically to Dr. Almasy.

Submit by June 24 (earlier if possible) a typed paper, probably 5-7 pages in length, that demonstrates you have absorbed the Monseau/Salvner material and that you have carefully read some adolescent novels. Keep a copy of this paper for your records. Part of your grade will depend on how carefully you integrate the Monseau/Salvner material into your own analysis.

This paper is a major inquiry activity that will help you absorb information, exercise your judgment, test your ability to make meaningful observations, and organize your thoughts. You will note that your professor is not asking you to do any extra "research" for this paper. You don't need to do any research because the material to do this paper will already be in your brain. You have some basic information on adolescent literature, and you have good experiences reading and responding to representative selections. Now you need to exercise and, then, trust your own critical thinking by putting it all together, and in the "putting it all together" you will be playing the part of an intelligent scholar who is making an argument about what you have observed and what you believe in terms of a writer or writers.

PLEASE DO NOT SUBMIT THIS PAPER ELECTRONICALLY. GET IT TYPED. Bring it or mail it to my office in Woodburn Hall.

Choose one of the following assignments:

"Single Author Focus" Read a minimum of three novels by the same author (four if the author is also the author of one of the eleven required novels). This paper should identify and document the major similarities and differences between and among the author's works you have read.

"Two Author Focus" Compare and contrast two works each from two different authors (THAT'S FOUR (4) BOOKS TOTAL). Here, as above, your analysis could include matters of style, themes treated, individual conventions, characteristics, strengths, weaknesses, etc. Include a brief rationale as to why you paired the authors you chose.

"Theme or Topic Focus" Listed below are different themes or topics which you will find dealt with in several different novels (but this list is not exhaustive). This option would involve your discussing the ways in which ONE particular theme or topic (below or of your own choosing) was treated in at least four novels by four different authors. The four novels may all be from the required reading list but need not be. Suggested topics:

relationships with senior citizens school life, education first loves running away growing up, maturing death, tragedy, or illness divorce, single parents parental, peer, or sibling relationships concern with normalcy and/or appearance problems in being alive issues of race or gender pressures on youth what does the future look like hope religion

NO MATTER WHICH OPTION YOU SELECT, YOUR PAPER SHOULD BE COHERENTLY WRITTEN, WELL-ORGANIZED, PERFECTLY TYPED, WITH ATTENTION TO USAGE CONVENTIONS, DICTION, AND SPELLING. ORGANIZE YOUR PAPER AROUND A THESIS OR A POINT YOU WANT TO MAKE. THINK OF YOURSELF AS ARGUING THIS POINT, PROVING YOUR THESIS--THROUGH A DECENT ARGUMENT WITH ILLUSTRATIONS AND EXAMPLES. YOU PRACTICE CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS WHEN YOU FORCE YOURSELF TO IDENTIFY AND DEFEND AN ARGUMENT. YOUR THESIS IS MERELY YOUR ENTRY INTO DISCOVERING WHAT YOU FEEL NEEDS TO BE SAID.

e. Mandatory attendance at the final examination--which you should be able to pass if you have read the novels and studied the Monseau/Salvner text. The final will consist of a series of essay questions that you will be able to answer if you have memorized the material from the opening lecture, absorbed the Monseau/Salvner material, paid attention to the handouts, and read and remembered specific novels from the class. You may bring the novels (but only the novels) you have read to the examination if you wish. You might do better on the examination if you have been able to read more than the 11 required novels. This final examination is less an examination of what you have memorized and more another opportunity to test how well you can make connections between information you have learned and pieces of fiction you have read. The very exercise of writing short essays on questions which require you to bring knowledge and experience together is an exercise that sharpens your thinking skills and allows you to trust your judgment. I guarantee that this final exercise will show you how much you know, what you have discovered by taking this course, and how well you think.

June 26, 2003 Thursday 6:30-9:00 pm Room: 315 Percival Hall

A word about your schedule and the completion of this course: your professor believes you should be able to do all this work in the six weeks allotted to the first summer session. Many students do. You must attend the lecture on May 20 and the final exam session on June 26. Certainly, you should be able to submit your Monseau/Salvner summaries by June 2 and your response papers by June 20. The paper is due the following week, June 24. You will really not be prepared or able to take the final unless the chapter summaries and the response papers have been submitted. If, for some untoward reason, you cannot submit your paper by June 24 and I do not receive the paper during the week IN TIME TO GRADE IT, you will be given an I (for incomplete) in the course, and you will have until August 18, 2003 to complete the paper and thus the requirements of the course. If you do not attend the final examination, you will be given a F for the course. I REPEAT: YOU MUST ATTEND THE FINAL EXAMINATION!!

The above dates are not "due dates," rather merely a suggested schedule. If you don't get the work finished by June 27, you will automatically receive an "incomplete"--which for your professor is no big deal. But if you receive an incomplete, all the work had better be finished by August 8. We can work together on this.

For those doing hardcopy, the professor encourages you to retrieve your papers after they have been read, which usually doesn't take long. All papers are kept in 201 Woodburn. Ask Dr. Almasy or Beth Michael for them when you visit 201 Woodburn. The professor also encourages you to ask questions and make comments to members of the class via the electronic discussion group. Since I will be building a web site for this course during the summer, I also want you to find great URLs which have to do with adolescent literature and writers.

This course will utilize the features of the M~ electronic system-WVU's student Web platform. MIX enables your professor to e-mail everyone in the class without establishing a listserv. There should be a virtual chat area and message board for class members if needed. If you have activated your MIX account already, you're all set, if you haven't you should. Go to www.mix.wvu.edu to activate. If you prefer another means of getting your e-mail, you should have your MIX mails automatically forwarded to your preferred account.

The grading in this course follows this scheme:

20% for chapter summaries 30% for novel responses (one holistic grade for all 11 responses) 30% for the paper 20% for the final examination.

From the papers returned, it may not be immediately obvious what grade you are earning, but this should be of little concern to you. You are in this class not to earn a grade but to learn something, practice your

thinking, and test your judgment! However, just ask your professor anytime if you want to know whether your work is A or B or C. Generally, if your work is weak, your professor will contact you or indicate so on the papers which have been read. The professor will also try to use the electronic medium to communicate to you personally.

West Virginia University is committed to social justice. The instructor of this course concurs with WW's commitment and expects to maintain a positive learning environment based open communication and mutual respect. Any suggestions as to how to further such an environment will be appreciated and given serious consideration. If you are a learning, sensory, or physically disabled student and feel that you need assistance in this course, please do not hesitate to speak with your professor as soon as possible.