

## Down the Rabbit Hole: Reading Children's Literature with Melissa Jensen

Jan 5, Feb 2, Mar 2, Apr 6, May 4, Jun 1 | 6:30–8:30 p.m. EST

This is not your great-gran's Bildungsroman. There will be no orphans here. No. Wait. There will absolutely be orphans here, including one from Kansas who bests a wizard, and another from a cupboard under the stairs who *is* a wizard. In this course, we will study the evolution and convolution of Children's Literature from the 19th to 21st centuries: stories written not just about children but, more importantly *for* them, asking many of the same questions we ask when looking at children themselves. What are they saying to us (Text)? What are they really saying to us (Subtext)? How are they taking on that critical challenge: finding their place in the world (Context)? We will read, discuss, analyze, even perhaps psychoanalyze the beloved, the famous, and the just plain odd, in order to best understand why these wondrous books are not just fabric of our youth, but also of critical cultural and literary importance.

Over our six sessions, we will read five novels, a selection of classic fairy tales (pdfs will be provided), and some essays (links and/or pdfs will be provided) for contextual and critical perspective. We will begin each session with a short, focused lecture by me on a topic related or of connected interest to the text(s); the bulk of our time will be spent in group discussion of the reading. There will be lots of reading, lively pondering, and livelier conversation. Previous knowledge of any or all of our texts is not necessary. It's enough that you're coming to them now.

Book list, recommended editions (No specific editions are required; these are simply the ones I use.):

- Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (Signet, 1960, isbn: 978-045150912. If you choose another edition, make sure it includes the original Tenniel illustrations. This is also available as a free, public domain book online on many sites, including [gutenberg.org](http://gutenberg.org).)
- L. Frank Baum, *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (HarperCollins, 2000, isbn: 978-0064409476. With this one, be sure to have the original Denslow illustrations. This is also available as a free, public domain book online on many sites, including [gutenberg.org](http://gutenberg.org).)
- E.B. White, *Charlotte's Web* (HarperCollins, 2012, isbn: 978-0064400558...Garth Williams illustrations)
- J. K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* (Scholastic, 1998, isbn: 978-0590353403)
- Jacqueline Woodson, *Brown Girl Dreaming* (Nancy Paulson Books, 2016, isbn: 978-0147515827)

Schedule:

Jan 5 Session 1: Morality and Mortality. Intro to KidLit and Tales Grim(m) and Glittery.  
Reading: selected classic fairy tales\*

Feb 2 Session 2: Wonder and Nonsense. Down the Rabbit Hole.

Reading: *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (and selected supplemental materials\*)

Mar 2 Session 3: Populism, Cosmopolitanism, and the Great American Fairy Tale.

Reading: *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (and selected...)

Apr 6 Session 4: Mortality and Morality. The Natural Order of Things.

Reading: *Charlotte's Web* (and...you get the gist...)

May 4 Session 5: Magic and Mortality. The Boy Who Lived, and Changed the World.

Reading: *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*

Jun 1 Session 6: Identity and Coming of Age. A Child and a World, Changing.

Reading: *Brown Girl Dreaming*

\*Supplemental materials will be made available after each session for the subsequent one.

\*\*PDFs for these stories will be made available upon registration for the course.