

Sophister Module Description

Full Name: The Wild Child: Wildness in Children's Literature

Short Name: The Wild Child

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Learning Outcomes:

On successful completion of this course students should:

- Be able to demonstrate an understanding of landscape and spatial theories
- Competently apply theories of landscape and spatial studies to selected children's texts
- Complete close readings of children's texts, from picturebooks to novels for young adults with a focus on depictions of landscape
- Have a detailed understanding of the culturally constructed nature of concepts of 'wilderness' and 'childhood' and to evaluate selected texts for children in view of this.
- Have developed an understanding of key theories within ecocriticism and how they have been applied to children's literature

Learning Aims and Content:

Kenneth Kidd and Sidney Dobrin in their 2004 collection *Wild Things: Children's Culture and Ecocriticism* note that 'Children are still presumed to have a privileged relationship with nature' (p.6). In fact, children are often positioned as somewhat wild, and childhood as a period before the child is fully inducted into the civilized adult world. This course looks at the idea of 'wildness' in children's literature. The first half of the course examines landscape wilderness as it appears in a range of different children's texts, from Ingalls Wilder's canonical American text *Little House in the Big Woods* to Nicki Singer's environmentally-themed *Island*. The second half of the course focuses on depictions of wildness associated with childhood, from Emily Hughes' picturebook *Wild*, to David Almond's *The Savage*. Throughout the course we will problematize the idea of wilderness, both in connection to the landscape and to the child. We will consider the long-standing connection between the child and nature, and how this might impact on our broader understanding of childhood.

This course offers students the opportunity to explore representations of landscape and wilderness in a range of children's texts. The 'spatial turn' in literary criticism (and the humanities more broadly) highlights the cultural influence on concepts such as landscape, wilderness and nature. Utilising ecocriticism, landscape theory and ecopedagogical theory we will explore the depictions of spaces and how people inhabit these spaces before moving on to consider how children come to embody 'wildness' in a selection of contemporary texts.

The key aim of this course is to problematize the concepts of both wilderness and childhood, and to explore how these concepts have been depicted in a broad range of texts for child readers. Students will have the opportunity to explore different modes of writing from picturebooks to novels for young adult readers and will be encouraged to compare the differing ways that concepts of wilderness and the 'wild' child are depicted for these different audiences.

Assessment Details:

- Annotated and Illustrated Index (50%)
- Critical Reflection (50%)

Preliminary Reading List:

Texts

Week 1: Introduction – wilderness and the ‘wild’ child

Week 2: Making the wild a home: Laura Ingalls Wilder, *Little House in the Big Woods* (1932)

Week 3: The wild Irish landscape: Eilis Dillon, *Island of Ghosts*, (1990)

Week 4: The threatening wild landscape: Geraldine McCaughrean, *The White Darkness* (2005)

Week 5: Student Presentations

Week 6: The endangered wild landscape: Robert Macfarlane, *The Lost Words* (2017)

Week 7: READING WEEK

Week 8: Student Presentations

Week 9: The endangered wild landscape and the child hero: Nicki Singer, *Island* (2015)

Week 10: The happy Wild Child: Emily Hughes, *Wild* (2013)

Week 11: Domesticating the wild child: Karen Hesse, *The Music of Dolphins* (1996)

Week 12: The Wild Child and Trauma: Omar Mohamed and Victoria Jamieson, *When Stars are Scattered* (2020)

The Wild Child – Assessment Details

1. Annotated and illustrated index (50%)

Details: Select 1 text from the module and create an index of key words used throughout the text to describe how wildness is imagined in the text. You can focus on descriptive adjectives, plant and animal names, active verbs – whatever you think are the key terms used in the text as they imagine and depict the landscape or ‘wild’ protagonist. You should list and number each of the terms, and then provide an illustration (photograph, drawing, embroidery – anything goes), along with a short description of the power of the word in the context of the text. You can include short quotations from either the primary text or secondary texts to support your annotations if desired. You should include at least 15-20 terms.

Word limit: 2000 words

Aims:

- To identify and interrogate key words used throughout the text to describe and portray the natural environment and to construct an image of ‘wildness’ in the text.

- To look in detail at the language used in the text and apply the ecocritical, children's literature, and spatial theory studied in the course to help interrogate the power of those terms to construct a literary representation of the environment or peoples as 'wild'.
- To respond creatively to the terms selected – creating photographs, illustrations or any other visual representations to accompany each entry in the index.

2. Critical Reflection (50%)

Details: Select 1-2 texts from the module and reflect on the construction of wilderness in the text. The critical reflection should draw on the ecocritical, children's literature, or landscape theory explored in the module. The reflection should answer the following question (which can be used as the title):

- In what way does/do the text(s) construct the idea of wildness for the child reader?

Word limit: 3000 words

Aims:

- To display an understanding of the primary texts explored in the module, drawing on quotations and specific examples from the text to support your arguments.
- To interrogate selected texts utilising the key theoretical frameworks introduced by the module.
- To build on the work of the annotated and illustrated index to consider the ways in which we construct the world and our relationships to our environments through literary texts.

Please note:

- *Curricular information is subject to change.*
- Information is displayed only for guidance purposes, relates to the current academic year only and is subject to change.