MA in Children's Literature

Awarding Institution:	The University of Reading
Teaching Institution:	The University of Reading
Faculty of Arts and Humanities	Programme length: 12 months FT (24 months PT)
For students entering in 2002	Date of specification: 7 March 2002
Programme Director:	Mr Tony Watkins/Dr Karín Lesnik-Oberstein
Board of Studies:	Children's Literature
Accreditation:	None

Summary of programme aims

The Children's Literature MA aims to develop students' comprehension of a wide range of literary and cultural theories and critical approaches and their relevance to the study of 'children's literature' and 'childhood'. Working with a wide range of texts and a selection of other narrative media in English, the course aims to introduce students to the problems and issues around defining texts as 'children's' literature or media, and to develop their ability to question and to think critically and analytically about writings on identity, and the implications for their own thinking and formulations of arguments.

Transferable skills

Students on this MA will:

1) be able to analyse and think critically about complex texts and issues.
2) be able to assess the legitimacy of an argument in its own terms, and to formulate, both in written and oral form, complex arguments of their own with an awareness of the relevance and consequences of their own formulations and claims.
3) be aware of ways and resources to develop their knowledge and understanding further, as part of an ability to learn independently.
4) be able to communicate clearly to others their own thinking and the reasons for it.

Programme content

Compulsory modules

Mod Code	Module Title	Credits	Level
		X	X
ENMCHT	Theory of Children's Literature	20	M
ENMCH2	Twentieth Century Children's Lit.	20	M
ENMCH9	Nineteenth Century Children's Lit.	20	M
ENMCHD	Dissertation	90	M

Optional modules: THREE of the following: *Credits* *Level*

Mod Code	Module Title	X	X
ENMCHM	Myth and Folktale in Children's Literature	10	M
ENMCHP	Popular Forms of Children's Fiction	10	M
ENMCHF	Children's Film, Television, and Radio	10	M
ENMCHN	North American Children's Literature	10	M
ENMCHC	Commonwealth Children's Literature	10	M

Part-time/Modular arrangements

Part-time students take the following modules, where the order of the modules per year is reversed every two years (for each new cycle of part-timers):

Year 1 Autumn Term: Nineteenth Century core module + Options module

Year 1 Spring Term: Nineteenth Century core module + Options module

Year 1 Summer Term: Options module

Year 2: Autumn Term: Theory of Children's Literature core module + Twentieth Century core module

Year 2: Spring Term: Theory of Children's Literature core module + Twentieth Century core module

Year 2: Summer Term: Dissertation preparation plus individual dissertation supervision

Progression requirements

Students must obtain a pass mark (50%) on each of the three core module essays, and in two out of three of the optional module essays in order to progress to the writing of the dissertation **[we are told that we cannot require students to pass the coursework before progressing to dissertation: we continue to oppose this]**.

Satisfactory completion of the module work essays means that students are qualified for the award of the Postgraduate Certificate in Children's Literature (90 credits). However, when the student submits a satisfactory Dissertation, the Certificate is automatically replaced by the award of the MA in Children's Literature. Students who are unable or unwilling to proceed to the dissertation may opt to be awarded the Certificate of Children's Literature.

Summary of teaching and assessment

Students are taught in group seminars by the School of English and American Literature's children's literature tutors. Active participation by the students is expected and encouraged in the seminar teaching. The dissertation is supported by a series of seminars on aspects of dissertation writing, followed by one-to-one supervision. 'Forums' are also regularly held where all or most of the staff engage in open discussion and debate with the students and each other.

Assessment follows the University's classification:

70-100%	Distinction	(A)
65-69%	Very Good	(B+)
60-64%	Good	(B)
50-59%	Satisfactory	(C)
49% and below	Unsatisfactory	(F)

Reassessment arrangements are that:

(a) All modules other than the dissertation to be re-assessed in September.
(b) Students undergoing re-assessment to be allowed one month's extension to submit their dissertation.
(c) A failed dissertation to be re-submitted within one year from the original submission date.

Admission requirements
Entrants to this programme are normally required to have obtained:

An undergraduate Honours degree in English, preferably of at least a 2:1 standard, or in a discipline in which the study of literature has formed a substantial part.

Admissions Tutor: Dr Karín Lesnik-Oberstein

Support for students and their learning
University support for students and their learning falls into two categories. Learning support includes IT Services, which has several hundred computers and the University Library, which across its three sites holds over a million volumes, subscribes to around 4,000 current periodicals, has a range of electronic sources of information and houses the Student Access to Independent Learning (S@IL) computer-based teaching and learning facilities. There are language laboratory facilities both for those students studying on a language degree and for those taking modules offered by the Institution-wide Language Programme. Student guidance and welfare support is provided by Programme Directors, the Careers Advisory Service, the University's Special Needs Advisor, Study Advisors, Hall Wardens and the Students' Union.

A specific induction to the use of the University Library is provided. The University has excellent holdings in Children's Literature, including extensive periodical and contemporary material at the Bulmershe library, and a Nineteenth Century Children's Literature Special Collection on the fifth floor of the Whiteknights Library. There are also good resources in critical and cultural theory. The Geoffrey Matthews collection in the English Department also offers an extensive holding of videos of films and television programmes used on the options modules, and within the Department there are video-viewing suites available.

All students on the course are assigned a member of staff as a Personal Tutor, with all members of staff also making themselves available to all students to offer personal support and advice. A Staff-Student Committee is formed each year (with student representatives elected for full-time, year 1 part-time, and year 2 part-time students) which meets twice each term to decide essay deadlines and to raise and discuss any issues or questions that staff or students may have. Students are provided with an extensive Course Handbook which is updated on a regular basis, as well as having access to the web-site of the Department's 'Centre for International Research in Childhood: Literature, Culture, Media' (see also below) at: http://www.reading.ac.uk/circl as a resource for further MA course information, research, and study on the world-wide-web. The web-site is designed and maintained by Dr Karín Lesnik-Oberstein, one of the MA tutors.

All staff and MA and research students are also automatically members of the Department's 'Centre for International Research in Childhood: Literature, Culture, Media' (CIRCL; Director: Mr Tony Watkins (until 2003), Deputy Director (Director from 2003) Dr Karín Lesnik-Oberstein, Associate Director (until 2002) Ms Catriona Nicholson), which organises research, publications, conferences, and seminars in these areas. CIRCL seminars are normally organised two or three times a term, and offer a wide and fully interdisciplinary range of topics and speakers

All MA classes are taught on one day a week, with part-time students scheduled to attend classes only in the late afternoon and evening, in order to make further study possible for students with employment or domestic responsibilities.

Career prospects

The MA in Children's Literature is exceptional in offering both specific, and much more widely and generally applicable career-benefits.

In specific terms, many students who attend either intend to become school teachers, librarians, to enter (children's) publishing, or to write (children's) books, and see the course as a part of their thinking about these fields, or are already practicing teachers, librarians, publishers, and writers who see the course as an opportunity to expand and develop their thinking further. It must be stressed however that the MA in Children's Literature does not offer any vocational, creative writing, or professional training strictly speaking: it is a rigorously academic course which examines and analyses many assumptions about pedagogy, childhood, and language, although as such it has proved to be of great help and stimulus to the way the students think about such employment too. Many of the students who have intended to go into such fields have been successful in doing so.

In more general terms, the course provides excellent preparation for PhD research in terms of the emphasis on critical and analytical thinking and the examination of the construction and formulation of argument. Students have gone on to do PhDs in a wide variety of fields, including, but not limited to, children's literature itself. The ability to understand and work with complex material in detail has also supported students entering into, or returning to, employment in other fields.

Opportunities for study abroad or for placements

These are not applicable to this course.

Educational aims of the programme

The Children's Literature MA aims to develop students' comprehension of a wide range of literary and cultural theories and critical approaches and their relevance to the study of 'children's literature' and 'childhood'. Working with a wide range of texts and a selection of other narrative media in English, the course aims to introduce students to the problems and issues around defining texts as 'children's' literature or media, and to develop their ability to question and to think critically and analytically about writings on identity, and the implications for their own thinking and formulations of arguments.

The study of children's literature, culture, and media is a burgeoning academic field which is raising complex issues about identity formations, such as childhood, gender, national identity, and sexuality. In this sense it is especially challenging and exciting for students because this field is so new, and the course aims to enable them to make very direct and relevant contributions to this developing discipline. In this way the course aims too to challenge students to develop a self-reflective awareness of their own assumptions about, for instance, childhood, language, identity, pedagogy, and liberty. The students' sense of being at the fore-front of a pioneering enterprise encourages and develops this independence of thought, and the ability to examine strongly held assumptions and beliefs.

Programme Outcomes

Knowledge and Understanding

A. Knowledge and understanding of:	Teaching/learning methods and strategies
1) 19th and 20th century children's literature and media in English. 2) A range of literary and other theories relevant to the study of these texts and media.	1) On the Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Children's Literature core modules, run each in weekly seminar classes over twenty weeks, a range of 19th and 20th century children's literature is set for, or selected with, the students, and is then discussed and analysed in group-seminars. Further texts and other narrative media are also taught on the appropriate options modules, such as Popular Forms of Children's Fiction, and Children's Film, Television, and Radio. *2)* The Theory of Children's Literature core module consists of weekly seminars run over twenty weeks, and uses a wide range of texts, drawn from a wide range of disciplines, which raise questions of theory. *Assessment* Core modules are assessed through 3000-3500 word essays (one for each of the three core modules) and the three optional modules through 2500-3000 word essays, of which the students must complete and pass five in order to progress to the dissertation. The essays are submitted at differing points over the course of the degree, at some date after the completion of the relevant module. The Dissertation is 20.000 words, and must be submitted by September 20th of the final year.

Skills and other attributes

B. Intellectual skills – able to:	**Teaching/learning methods and strategies**
1) think critically and analytically and reflect on their own use of critical languages, and the consequences of such languages. 2) tolerate and engage with a range of approaches and ideas, and differing ideas or perspectives from others, staff or students. 3) evaluate and participate in their own learning process, and to develop an independence of learning and argument.	1) In all modules students are encouraged and required to reflect on their and their tutors' formulations and arguments, also in terms of their written work. In seminars students are asked to question also their tutors' formulations and positions, and this is reinforced through the 'forums' which are held several times each term, and in which staff and students engage in open debate and discussion with students and each other. 2) Throughout the course it is emphasized that there are no 'answers' or 'correct' approaches, but a range of ideas and questions. In all seminars the tutors apply this to themselves and attempt to demonstrate this through their own self-reflective teaching-practice, as well as to use the 'forums' to challenge the students' ideas of 'authority' or 'truth'. In seminars, students are expected and encouraged to debate with one another and the tutors, and to raise questions and problems. 3) In the Theory of Children's Literature core module, texts are chosen with each group of students each year, sometimes from week-to-week, depending on the choice of the students. There is no pre-set 'course', only an addressing of the intellectual questions and problems of each particular group of students, including choosing together the texts for the course, the format of teaching, and the format of the 'essay' to be written for the course. *Assessment* 1) Students must demonstrate their development of these skills through participation in seminars, through the raising of questions and the formulation of readings of texts, and arguments; and in their module essays, in terms of demonstrating their awareness of their own choice and use of critical languages, and the implications of these languages in formulating their readings and analyses of texts. 2) Students must demonstrate the development of these skills in their 20.000 word dissertation.

C. Practical skills – able to:	**Teaching/learning methods and strategies**
1) use research facilities such as the libraries and the internet appropriately and efficiently. 2) use information technology, such as computer software, where necessary and useful. 3) locate inherent contradictions and baseless assumptions in arguments and plans or projects. 4) organise and focus their own learning and develop it further.	1) library induction, and use of the CIRCL site and other Internet resources available; learning on modules to assess and differentiate the validity of (Internet) texts as information and argument. 2) attendance of university IT modules where appropriate. Use in presentation and formulation of written work. 3) through analysing text and the formulations of argument critically. 4) through independent reading and study required on the MA course and particularly during the writing of the dissertation, supported through dissertation-writing seminars and one-to-one supervision. *Assessment* See above.

D. Transferable skills – able to:

1) analyse and think critically about complex texts and issues.
2) assess the legitimacy of an argument in its own terms, and to formulate, both in written and oral form, complex arguments of their own with an awareness of the relevance and consequences of their own formulations and claims.
3) be aware of ways and resources to develop their knowledge and understanding further, as part of an ability to learn independently.
4) communicate clearly to others their own thinking and the reasons for it.
5) work with others in groups and attempt to comprehend and tolerate a variety of arguments.
6) enjoy learning and stretching their own thinking.

Teaching/learning methods and strategies

1) read a wide variety of texts with close attention to language, discussed and questioned in seminar groups.
2) in seminar group discussion and written work arguments must be formulated, both by staff and students, with an awareness of the choice of critical languages, and the consequences of such choices for the formulation of readings and arguments.
3) a familiarity with library and IT resources is developed through the course both in terms of discussion and information on where materials are available, and how they may be approached and evaluated.
4) again, the formulation of questions, arguments, and debates in seminars is crucial.
5) seminar work and forum discussions disrupt concepts of 'authority' or 'truth'.
6) being encouraged throughout to reflect on their own thinking, and that of the tutors, being permitted to be critical and questioning of tutors, never being asked to follow 'rules' or to 'do what is expected', but consider only what and how they speak and write and why.

Assessment
All these transferable skills are assessed in the writing of the essays and the dissertation.

Please note: This specification provides a concise summary of the main features of the programme and the learning outcomes that a typical student might reasonably expect to achieve and demonstrate if he/she takes full advantage of the learning opportunities that are provided. More detailed information on the learning outcomes, content and teaching, learning and assessment methods of each module can be found in module and programme handbooks.