

## **COURSE REFLECTION**

### **What I learned:**

I was very interested at the start of the course to learn about children's literature and film and how I could use it all in the classroom and in my personal life. I have always loved reading and watching movies based on books and never really understood the world behind the scenes or under the surface. However, that all changed with this course. What surprised me the most was the complexity of children's literature and films and how much more there was to what books were developed into films and the whole filmmaking process. Each module in this course helped me take a deeper look in the studies of children's literature and film, the interpretations of the original, and ways that scholars examine the underlying themes and content in films and literature.

In module one, we learned how to read books and films and practiced using film language. This was the first time I had ever analyzed a film, in terms of the filmmaking process and interpretations. We used the book Charlotte's Web and watched the two film versions, where we compared the animated version and the modern day film of the same novel. Throughout this module we viewed numerous cartoons to practice the film language and why it was important in interpreting stories. This module opened my eyes to what the filmmaking process was like, and why there may be different film versions from the same original piece of literature.

Through module one, I was surprised to learn the differences in the way filmmaker's portray similar stories, which ultimately depends on their personal interpretations. As a child I loved the cartoon version of Charlotte's Web, but when I read the novel, I was disappointed in how the movie strayed from the movie in the interaction between characters, and how some of the characters were portrayed so differently. I was surprised to see how one piece of literature was the impetus for two very different movies. It wasn't until this module, that I realized that the filmmakers of each film had interpreted the novel in different ways; just how my interpretation of the characters may differ from other's opinions and interpretations of the novel. Besides interpretations, each of the filmmakers had a different audience in mind for their film, where the cartoon version was intended for a children's audience, and the newer version was for adolescents and families. The factors of interpretation and targeted audience both allow for the same story to be told through different eyes and imaginations in the way that the whole story was told. I found it fascinating to find the similarities and differences

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between each movie to the original book, because each film changed something different from the novel. This module was a great introduction to the rest of the course, because I realized why movies sometimes differed drastically from the original written forms, and how to analyze films based on their own merit, rather than constantly comparing it to the original author's view and picture that I created in my imagination.

After learning how to read books and films we spent a few weeks on module two where we learned about fidelity to the original in terms of children's literature and films. This was probably my favorite module, because we looked at a diverse genre of books and films, such as picture books, books more popular than the film, films that were more popular than the book versions, classics, and books and films that dealt with controversial topics. Throughout the module we examined how the books were interpreted so drastically in their film version, where some books were turned into musicals, or used as a display of the newest technology during that time. Also, during the module we discussed how the original can go through several interpretations during the filming of the story. This module, helped me understand how different genres impact how much fidelity a film has to the original, and how re-interpretations can influence the fidelity of a movie to the written text of the story.

Coming into the class I always felt that movies should be identical to the books they were based off of, and would be extremely disappointed if they were different from the original story. Also, if the movie was inconsistent from the written version, I felt that it failed to capture the essence of the story that the author wrote and the pictures that I had created when I read the story. However, this module made me realize that movies will not be exact replicas of books, because they are told through a different artist's (the filmmaker) perspective and may involve different genres that, as a reader, I was unfamiliar with. After studying the books and films through module two I understand why filmmakers need to make changes and do make changes or deletions of the original story as a way to target a certain audience, give in to the pressures of the film industry, and make the story more relatable and enjoyable for the audiences.

Module two really opened my eyes to how the genre of the book can impact the filmmaking process and influence the fidelity that is maintained to the original. For example, in the genre of picture books, I learned that the original book serves as the foundation for what the story would be about, but that it was up to the filmmaker to use their interpretation and imagination in how they wanted to use the story for a full length feature film. When I read the picture book Jumanji and watched the film, I

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realized that characters were added along with an entire back story of the characters in order to make the movie more interesting, and to fill a certain time requirement that a length of a film should be. When there is little material, the filmmaker must supplement the ideas from their imagination and interpretation when creating the film. One of the most interesting comparisons in fidelity to the original was The Wizard of Oz. The movie had been a favorite film of mine from childhood, and I had never read the story. However, when I read the novel, I was incredibly bored with it and felt like it was too long for a children's story. I felt that if I was bored with the story, I could only imagine how a child reading, or having it read to them, must feel! The Wizard of Oz was an example of the genre where the film was more popular than the original. I learned that this can happen through the magic of Hollywood, where the filmmaker interpreted the story in a much different light than the original novel and made the story better than the book version. I felt that the movie made the story much more concise and made the characters more likeable than the book. Another type of genre that we observed was the magic of Disney's interpretation of the novel Mary Poppins and classic literature of The Little Mermaid. Each of these originals were interpreted differently by Disney, in the way that they were made to have happy and cheerful characters, with the typical "happily ever after" ending. In Mary Poppins the original novel, the maid was a little grumpier and seemed somewhat selfish in her adventures and outings, but Disney made her a very cheery and rosy disposition. Besides the character changes, the film also exposed the cultural attitudes from the time, such as the feminist movement, gender hierarchy, and sexism that wasn't necessarily evident in the book. Also, the movie was praised for its technological advancements of using cartoons alongside human actors. This film showed me, once again, how the filmmaker's attitudes and perspectives can change the original feel of the novel. When it came to The Little Mermaid, I was shocked that there was even a story that the film was based off of. However, after reading the story, I found that the film had very little fidelity to the original, in the way that Disney made the movie less violent and ended happier than the original fable. The written version of the story, had violent elements, and a more serious social lesson that women shouldn't follow their dreams, because when they do, something bad will likely happen. The changes that the filmmaker made shows how Disney was intending the film for a young and family oriented audience by changing the ending of the story that the princess marries her prince and all her dreams came true. My favorite analysis of fidelity to the original was with Charlie and the Chocolate Factory, because I learned how to read between the lines of the text and film and examine the novel and film more in depth. Through this analysis I was able

to look at the underlying social implications in the text and how they were interpreted by the filmmakers of the different versions. Once again, the teachings from module one helped in understanding why the characters were portrayed differently between the two movies, such as why Mr. Wonka was made to be a darker character in the older version and a quirky, insecure man in the second film. Module two's Fidelity to the Original really taught me how complex children's literature and film is and why fidelity to the original isn't always important. The making of a book into a film is much more complicated than I realized, and this module showed me the intricacies that filmmakers must endure when creating a film based on a book.

In module three we looked at a different type of book, one that was part of a series, and how it became part of popular culture and a cultural phenomenon. During this module we read the first book of the Harry Potter series and watched the film, and then researched on the internet for an hour to see all that was available in terms of the Harry Potter phenomenon. It was through the scholarly readings that I realized how the series has impacted critics, scholars, and the book industry as a whole, through the severe analyses done on the book series. Module three taught me how a book can start out as popular among readers, and then turns into an international phenomenon where everyone knows of the character Harry Potter, even if they have not read a single book in the series, and the complexities of the phenomenon.

What shocked me the most in module three was the magnitude of the Harry Potter phenomenon, its impact on the literary community, and the diverse following the book has including children and adults. The most impactful activity in the module was the research we did for an hour online about the whole phenomenon. During the research I discovered merchandise of the characters from the novels, board games, video games, wands, magic shops, blogs, websites, and much more. Through this hour of searching I felt that I had discovered a new world that I never knew existed, but the reality is that I probably only scratched the surface of the whole phenomenon. Since the books started out very popular, I realized that it was important for the film to remain consistent with the original text, because the movies would progress along with the series. If the filmmaker chose to stray from the original, many would be disappointed and may not attend the future movies. However, I have read reviews of the movies where people felt that there were things left out of the movies, but the books contain so much that the filmmaker must be selective in what is truly important to the progress of the series. Many critics have argued that the film is not an artistic interpretation of the story, but rather a

direct replica of the book version. I agree with this argument, but I believe that if the filmmaker wanted the films to be successful that they couldn't use interpretations of the book, because the book already had a strong following. The Harry Potter series has an unprecedented following and phenomenon that surrounds the series, and I never realized the magnitude of it all until module three.

Besides from the research done on the internet around the phenomenon, I was shocked by the extent of scholarly articles available about the Harry Potter series and the research and analysis done on the books. Many of the studies and opinions about the article surprised me, such as gender, sexual orientation, social aspects, and several other controversies that surround the series. Many of the scholars brought up issues and social controversies that I would have never noticed in the book. These articles made me analyze books in what the underlying themes and tones of the stories may offer. Also, the articles exposed the changes that have been occurring in the literary community over the past decade and the pressures placed upon authors to create stories that can be aggressively marketed to make more money. Reading these articles made me question if the artistic integrity of books is lost, if the authors are influenced to make books that could be turned into blockbuster films and have toys designed after the characters. The commercial success of Harry Potter has increased over the years, and will continue to increase through the end of the series. Harry Potter has set a precedent for children's literature and has made people fall back in love with reading. I am a fan of the Harry Potter series, but do not agree with all the commercialism that surrounds the series. However, part of me is torn as an educator, because I like that there is marketing that helps get people interested in reading, especially children. Module three helped me understand the magnitude of the Harry Potter phenomenon and the complexities of the issues in the literary community, and the controversies of the social undertones in the books.

Each of the modules in the course has helped me to examine and analyze children's literature thoroughly and how the interpretations of books can vary drastically. The modules made me understand why there are differences between books and films and what those differences mean in terms of interpretations of the original content. Also, the modules illustrated the implications of a cultural phenomenon and how marketing can influence children's literature and films. Overall, I have learned that it is the perspective and interpretations that change a story, and that everyone has their own individual interpretation of a story and that there are often underlying themes and tones to books that are important to notice and analyze.

### **Future Application to the Classroom**

This course has offered several new ideas and approaches that I can use in future classrooms with elementary and middle school aged children. The course has changed the way I view children's literature and "classics", and the importance of teaching children to analyze the literature they are reading. Also, many teachers just show the film version of a book to fill a day, but I have learned how to teach children to notice the differences and use them as discussion topics for how it changes the interpretation of the story. Even for very young students, I can read aloud picture books and talk about the literary elements, and then view the film version and talk about what is the same and different, and why they think those changes were made. The course taught me how to discuss the very basics of children's literature and how to go in depth in the topics and underlying themes of the books and movies, which would be appropriate for older students.

What I can carry forward from this class into my own teaching would be how to pick books to read with students and how to approach children's literature. I would want to teach my students how to interpret the text and the film and what it means to the story. The activities where we had to practice using the literary and film language for each element of the story would be a great activity to do with students, and vary the activity based on the grade level. Even with a children's favorite, such as Charlotte's Web, I could read the book with the students and watch the two film versions and practice using the literary and film language, like we did in the class. It is important to teach children to interpret the text and literary elements, because it is something they will not only do throughout their academic career, but even in their leisure reading. Interpreting the text is something that many people do automatically, but don't even realize it.

Another element that I will use in my future classes would be teaching students the importance of individual interpretations of stories, because that will help them understand why movies differ so much from the books. Many people get upset when movies vary from the books they were based off of, but don't realize that the filmmaker has a different reason for creating the film, is under different pressures than the author, and has a different perspective of the original story. I think when I teach students about genre, I would be able to use the genres we discussed in class with the films and how it influences how the story is portrayed in a film. The activities and topics from "fidelity to the original" would serve as interesting discussions and conversations with students, such as how books are re-interpreted throughout the years, how Disney changes classic literature, why picture books and their

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movies differ, and the social and political influences on an old novel and film. I would like to use each of these topics in my future classes to serve as discussions and teach students about the various genres within children's literature and film. Teaching children about their expectations when they view films of their favorite books and why film versions differ from the original text is important, because filmmakers will continue to use children's literature for their movies and the students need to know how to view and interpret it all.

The Harry Potter activities really helped me understand the magnitude of the phenomenon, but more importantly, it helped me in using the story in the classroom. Each day, I see several students reading one of the books from the series and always talk to them about the characters and the story, but I think addressing the whole phenomenon as a class would be beneficial for students. I think the book can be used across all grade levels, where with younger students we could discuss the literary elements, and older students discuss the social implications of the book and have conversations regarding the controversies that are present. I think using a common and popular book with students is a great way to start difficult conversations, such as death, peer conflict, and gender stereotypes. Children can relate to each of these topics in some way. As a teacher, I would use the phenomenon to my advantage to get students engaged in reading and fall in love with the stories. This might encourage them to read the other books in the series, or other fantasy novels.

The course has helped me understand my attitudes and views of children's literature in film before the class, and has impacted my current perspectives of it all. Before the course I used to believe that films were supposed to be exact replicas of the books that they were based off of. I would walk away from theaters extremely disappointed at the changes that were made in the film and that the story wasn't what I pictured in my mind. However, this course helped me understand that the filmmaker's perspective is different from the author's and from mine. Also, I learned that some films have to differ from the story, especially if the original book doesn't have enough material to cover a full two hours.

The course has allowed me to look at children's literature in a way that I normally would not have the opportunity or knowledge to before, such as analyzing underlying themes and tones in the literature. When I read Mary Poppins I read the book to get through it as leisure read, but when I viewed the film and did the activities for the class, I realized that there were social controversies within the novel that I had realized, but didn't pay attention to. Another book that had some political

undertones was Charlie and the Chocolate Factory, which was interesting to read about in a famous and popular children's novel. The movie versions of the book were different in their interpretations of the original text, and I enjoyed reading and discussing what the interpretations meant. Now, when I see movies are being made from books, whether they are favorite children's books, or popular novels, I am interested in viewing the movie to see what changes were made and how it changes the story. For example, I know the Diary of a Wimpy Kid is extremely popular among children, and I am interested to see the response the movie will receive. Analyzing the undertones in children's literature is important, because it helps create discussions with students and to realize what students are reading about.

The course has also helped me think about children's literature as not just an industry that is trying to make exciting reading for children, but now has a whole new economic industry of its own. Through the scholarship that was read in the Harry Potter phenomenon module, I learned that the commercialism of children's books is extremely important to the book industry. I have noticed an increase in the number of children's books that have been turned into movies and other merchandise in order to bring in more money for the industry. Harry Potter was an unprecedented success, but others are hoping to follow in its path, such as the *Twilight* series, *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*, and several others. Even buying books has changed over the years, from small individual bookstores to large chains that display books and products in hopes to sell the customer as many books as possible. It seems that our society's need for books has changed from an intellectual stand point to more entertainment purposes. I will be interested to see how the industry will progress and how commercial it will all become.

Since the course has influenced my new ideas and attitudes towards children's literature, it will change how I approach literature with my students. As a teacher, I think it is important to share all the information with my students and have them come to their own conclusion about what they read and what influences them to read something. I think starting the year out with an activity where they discuss how they pick out books to read, would help them understand what interests them and the impact the literature has on them. I think it is important to help children analyze what they read in terms of social and political issues within the text, or understand what message the author is trying to give the reader. Then, when they view the movie they understand the written perspective and can compare it to the film version, and then analyze the film's perspective. This is common media that children will see expand throughout their lives and they need to understand how to observe and analyze it, understand what it means, and how it may impact others.



My ideas about children's literature come from my past experiences with it as a child and as a teacher, from the course, and from the media. As a child I read many books on my own and was read books by my teachers and parents. I always enjoyed reading and being engaged in a story. This class has made me realize that I have always read all books at a surface level, rather than taking a deeper look into the underlying themes within the story. This course has taught me how to read children's books and films that are based off books. I enjoyed all the books and films that we read in the course, and would be able to use them in my future classrooms. The class has changed how I read books and films and how they impact the readers and viewers. My ideas of children's literature also stem from the media. When I read good reviews and hear good things about books or movies from friends, I am persuaded to read or watch that book or film. Also, in the media when I see advertising and marketing about a film that was based off a novel, it makes me want to read the novel and then view the film. When I see a movie and discover it was based off a book, I always want to read the book, because I feel that the books offer more (most times) and allows me to make my own interpretations. The media is a strong influence on my ideas of children literature, because there is so much out there on the internet, television, movies, and advertising to influence me to pick up a book and read it or go see a movie. When I was walking around the bookstore the other day, I realized how much children's literature has changed. When I was growing up, I don't remember there being a huge children's section at the store, filled with stuffed animals and little chairs to sit and read. I like that it encourages reading, but wonder if it could be done in a less commercial way. Through my personal experiences, lessons from the course, and influences from the media, have all given me various viewpoints and ideas about children's literature.

The class has helped me come up with some ideas that I might try in my future classroom, such as teaching students how to interpret books and film, why movies vary from the original text, and how a book can turn into a phenomenon. I think these ideas are all important to teach students, because they will continue to read as they grow into adults and view movies, and need to understand how the two are related to each other, and how they impact the readers and viewers. Learning to interpret books and films would be fun for the students and it is something that they will do throughout their schooling. We could interpret books and films of picture books and novels, depending on the grade level, but both would be effective. Also, I think using any of the books that we looked at in class, or different ones, such as Where the Wild Things Are to The Outsiders would help students in understanding how films are

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different from books and why they are. Then maybe having students pick a book and film on their own to read and watch and discuss what changed and how the perspectives of the story differed, and how the changes impacted the original story. I think giving students the choice on the book and film would help them engage more in the activity, because reading is about being interested or learning from what you are reading. If children aren't interested in the topic, chances are they will not enjoy or be engaged in it! Finally, teaching students how a book can turn into a huge international phenomenon is important and discussing why it has become a phenomenon will open up many discussions about the story and the book industry. Each of the modules from the course can serve as teaching points to use with children no matter their grade level.

The course was extremely beneficial in teaching me about the complexities of children's literature and various activities and approaches I could use in teaching students about children's literature and film. The literary world is full of complexities when it comes to children's literature and film, and many controversies and issues that I would not have realized until this course. Teaching serves as another interpretation of children's literature in the way that the teacher provides his or her perspective of the books that is read to the students, and the selection of books that the teacher chooses for the students to read. Teaching students about interpretations and the information presented can be influential to students and how they view and feel about the books and films they are reading in class. The class has changed how I view films based off of children's literature in the way that I look at fidelity to the original, the filmmaker and author's perspective, and what influenced the marketing of it all.