

**MA (Res) in Children's Literature (full-time)**  
**For students entering in 2014/5**

Awarding Institution:	University of Reading
Teaching Institution:	University of Reading
Relevant QAA subject Benchmarking group(s):	
Faculty:	Arts, Humanities and Social Science Faculty
Programme length:	1 years
Date of specification:	16/Sep/2014
Programme Director:	Prof Karin Lesnik-Oberstein
Programme Advisor:	
Board of Studies:	English
Accreditation:	

**Summary of programme aims**

The Children's Literature MA (Res.) 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 MA (Res.) prepares students for advanced study at doctoral level

**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
ENMCHT	Theory of Children's Literature	20	7
ENMCH2	Twentieth Century Children's Lit.	20	7
ENMCH9	Nineteenth Century Children's Lit.	20	7
ENMCHD	Dissertation	90	7

*Optional modules: THREE of the following:*

ENMCHM	Myth and Folktale in Children's Literature	10	7
ENMCHP	Popular Forms of Children's Fiction	10	7
ENMCHF	Children's Film, Television, and Radio	10	7
ENMCHN	North American Children's Literature	10	7
ENMCHCW	Commonwealth Children's Literature (Colonial and Post-colonial writing)	10	7

**Part-time or 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**

#### **Summary of Teaching and Assessment**

The University's taught postgraduate marks classification is as follows:

#### **Mark Interpretation**

70 - 100% Distinction

60 - 69% Merit

50 - 59% Good standard (Pass)

#### **Failing categories:**

40 - 49% Work below threshold standard

0 - 39% Unsatisfactory Work

For Masters Degrees

To pass the degree of Master students must gain an average mark of 50 or more overall including a mark of 50 or more for the dissertation. In addition the total credit value of all modules marked below 40 must not exceed 30 credits and for all modules marked below 50 must not exceed 55 credits.

Students who gain an average mark of 70 or more overall including a mark of 60 or more for the dissertation and have no mark below 40 will be eligible for a Distinction. Those gaining an average mark of 60 or more overall including a mark of 50 or more for the dissertation and have no mark below 40 will be awarded eligible for a Merit. *[note: these regulations may be modified. Students will be informed should this occur]*

#### **For Postgraduate Diplomas**

To pass the Postgraduate Diploma students must gain an average mark of 50 or more. In addition the total credit value of all modules marked below 40 must not exceed 30 credits and for all modules marked below 50 must not exceed 55 credits \*

Students who gain an average mark of 70 or more and have no mark below 40 will be eligible for the award of a Distinction. Those gaining an average mark of 60 or more and have no mark below 40 will be awarded eligible for a Merit.

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.

A failed dissertation to be re-submitted with 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:** Professor Karin Lesnik-Oberstein

### **Support for students and their learning**

University support for students and their learning falls into two categories. Learning support is provided by a wide array of services across the University, including: the University Library, the Careers, Placement and Experience Centre (CPEC), In-session English Support Programme, the Study Advice and Mathematics Support Centre teams, IT Services and 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 Personal Tutors, School Senior Tutors, the Students' Union, the Medical Practice and advisers in the Student Services Centre. The Student Services Centre is housed in the Carrington Building and offers advice on accommodation, careers, disability, finance, and wellbeing, academic issues (eg problems with module selection) and exam related queries. Students can get key information and guidance from the team of Helpdesk Advisers, or make an appointment with a specialist adviser; Student Services also offer drop-in sessions and runs workshops and seminars on a range of topics. For more information see [www.reading.ac.uk/student](http://www.reading.ac.uk/student)

A specific induction to the use of the University Library is provided. The University has excellent holdings in Children's Literature, including a Nineteenth Century Children's Literature Special Collection. There are also good resources in critical and cultural theory.

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 may be formed each year or students are given the option of meeting as a whole group with the staff to discuss any issues or concerns (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 'Graduate 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 Professor Karin Lesnik-Oberstein, one of the MA tutors.

All staff and MA and research students are also automatically members of the Department's 'Graduate Centre for International Research in Childhood: Literature, Culture, Media' (CIRCL; Director: Professor Karin Lesnik-Oberstein) 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 (Res) 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 (Res) 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.

### **Programme Outcomes**

#### **Knowledge and Understanding**

##### **A. Knowledge and understanding of:**

19th and 20th century children's literature and media in English.

A range of literary and other theories relevant to the study of these texts and media.

##### **Teaching/learning methods and strategies**

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. Students are also trained on the Nineteenth and Twentieth/Twenty-First Century modules in the use of archives, in the University's Special Collection of Children's Literature. 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.

The Theory of Children's Literature core module consists of a weekly research workshop 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. 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:**

think critically and analytically and reflect on their own use of critical languages, and the consequences of such languages.

tolerate and engage with a range of approaches and ideas, and differing ideas or perspectives from others, staff or students.

evaluate and participate in their own learning process, and to develop an independence of learning and argument.

#### **Teaching/learning methods and strategies**

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.

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.

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*

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.

Students must demonstrate the development of these skills in their 20,000 word dissertation.

### **C. Practical skills -able to:**

use research facilities such as the libraries and the internet appropriately and efficiently.  
use information technology, such as computer software, where necessary and useful.  
locate inherent contradictions and baseless assumptions in arguments and plans or projects.  
organise and focus their own learning and develop it further.

### **D. Transferable skills -able to:**

analyse and think critically about complex texts and issues.  
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.  
be aware of ways and resources to develop their knowledge and understanding further, as part of an ability to learn independently.  
communicate clearly to others their own thinking and the reasons for it.  
work with others in groups and attempt to comprehend and tolerate a variety of arguments.  
enjoy learning and stretching their own thinking.

### **Teaching/learning methods and strategies**

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.  
attendance of university IT modules where appropriate. Use in presentation and formulation of written work.  
through analysing text and the formulations of argument critically.  
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.

### **Teaching/learning methods and strategies**

read a wide variety of texts with close attention to language, discussed and questioned in seminar groups.  
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.  
Training in the use of archives for research is given using the University's Special Collection of Children's Literature and students must give group-presentations based on an archive-research topic of their choice.  
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.  
again, the formulation of questions, arguments, and debates in seminars is crucial.  
seminar work and forum discussions disrupt concepts of 'authority' or 'truth'.  
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. The University reserves the right to modify this specification in unforeseen circumstances, or where the process of academic development and feedback from students, quality assurance processes or external sources, such as professional bodies, requires a change to be made. In such circumstances, a revised specification will be issued.

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