

Playing with the Past

Centre Term 2026

9:20-12:20

Crounse 301

Dr. Tara Strauch

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Office Hours: by appointment



Required Equipment:

Nanea: The Spirit of Aloha by Kirby Larson

An American Girl Anthology, Justine Orlovsky-Schnitzler and KC Hysmith, eds.

Please select and purchase an American Girl style doll from the “Our Generation” line at Target or the My Life As from Walmart:

<https://www.target.com/b/our-generation/-/N-5r27nZ2v73g?type=products>

You can pick whatever doll you would like but they will eventually represent your story so you might consider what time period and characteristics your main character might have. ALSO, there are boy dolls too.

Course Format and Policies:

Attendance: If you miss more than 25% of the course meetings you will fail the class. If you need to miss class for any reason, you are responsible for getting notes from someone in the class. Attendance and participation are an important part of this class.

Academic Integrity: You must document any idea you derive from another person or source, including websites, in your paper assignments in the form of a citation. We will discuss proper citation practices in

class. To take ideas from other people or sources without attribution constitutes plagiarism, regardless of your intentions. The College's understanding and expectations regarding issues of academic honesty are fully articulated in the student handbook and form an essential part of the implicit contract between the student and the College.

If you choose to misrepresent someone else's work as your own you may; receive a zero on the assignment, be asked to redo the assignment or complete a substitute assignment or face other penalties from the college depending on the assignment and the misrepresentation. This is also true for AI generated text like that from ChatGPT which misrepresents some computer's work as your own. I will use Turnitin on moodle to check for plagiarism including use of AI generated text.

I expect that you will not use generative AI for your children's book. You should be able to demonstrate the progress of your writing through—google doc version history, saving each draft as its own file, Microsoft version history, or other method.

Special Accommodations: Students requiring special accommodations due to learning, physical, health, or psychiatric disabilities are strongly encouraged to discuss these accommodations with Dr. Brian Cusato, Director of Centre Learning Commons. All adaptations to class policy must come from that office and I MUST sign the accommodation notice before any accommodation can take effect.

I am happy to consider accommodations or special requests due to religious holidays, health or wellness concerns, family needs or other life events. Please see me outside of class time to talk about these issues.

Class Goals:

- **Learn about the history and philosophy behind the creation of American Girl historical dolls**
- **Examine the narratives and characteristics employed by the authors of American Girl books. How do they tell these stories and what are the consequences?**
- **Identify gaps in this company's coverage—what stories haven't they told? Or what stories could they tell from other perspectives.**
- **Explore why these dolls and stories are popular and how they function in popular culture.**
- **Write your own American Girls story and create your own doll.**

Grade Breakdown:

Midterm Exam=20%
Historical Factsheet=10%
Doll Narrative rough draft= 15%
Doll Narrative Peer Review=5%
Doll Narrative final draft= 20%
Doll Presentation= 10%
Final Exam=10%
Professionalism=10%

Assignment Descriptions:

Midterm and Final Exam: Using the books and articles we have read you will write an in-class essay based on one of the provided prompts. Each exam will also have an identification section.

Doll Narrative: Each student will write their own 5,000+ word story in the style of an American Girl book (e.g. a juvenile main character who interacts with important political or cultural events from their historical period.) We will draft these stories, engage in peer review, and revise them before submitting a final draft.

Doll Presentation: Each student will present their story and accompanying doll at the Centre Exhibition. You need to have a brief elevator speech about your doll to share with visitors.

Lecture Schedule: *Everything is Subject to Change*

Monday January 5th—Intro to Class and Meet the Dolls

Tuesday January 6th –What is Girlhood and does it matter?

- Read an original pre-mattel book from the book stash
- Eating Breakfast like it's 1774—An American Girl Anthology
- <https://www.historians.org/research-and-publications/perspectives-on-history/december-2015/american-historian-meet-american-girl>

Wednesday January 7th –Learning from the Past

- <https://online.ucpress.edu/tph/article/43/1/18/116371/Which-Vitamins-are-in-the-Chocolate-Cake-How>
- The Care and Keeping of Me—An American Girl Anthology

Thursday January 8th—Writer's Workshop

- Read another book from the stash!
- Historical Fiction or Fictionalized History? Problems for Writers of Historical Novels for Young Adults: <https://scholar.lib.vt.edu/ejournals/ALAN/fall98/brown.html>

All Students submit a historical time-period fact sheet by end of day

Friday January 9th— Why aren't there any 17th century dolls? (And what kind of stories can we tell, anyway?)

- Read a short selection from the Diary of Remember Patience Whipple (moodle)
- Breeches, Silks, and Flowered Hats: Mattel's American Girl Brand—An American Girl Anthology

Monday January 12th— Melody, Addy, Cecile and the stories of African Americans

- Read an Addy, Melody, Cecile, or Claudie book from the stash.
- Nothing but Each Other and Hope—An American Girl Anthology
- <https://www.theparisreview.org/blog/2015/05/28/addy-walker-american-girl/>
- <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/addy-turning-thirty-why-her-life-still-matters-connie-porter/>

Tuesday January 13th—Where is All the War?

- Read Nanea: A Spirit of Aloha

- Read Selections from Moodle

EVENING EVENT: Barbie Screening! 8PM in Valkamp

Wednesday January 14th— Podcasts, Memes, and Nostalgia

- <https://www.newyorker.com/books/under-review/why-are-millennials-still-attached-to-american-girl>
- An Interview with the Creators of the Hellicity Merriman Meme Account—An American Girl Anthology
- <https://time.com/6289787/barbie-movie-history-mattel/>

Midterm Exam

Thursday January 15th— Talk to a Bookseller!

- Read another Book from the Stash!
- Teaching Girl('s History—An American Girl Anthology

Friday January 16th— Kaya and Josephina; telling stories of Indigenous America

- Belonging and Indigeneity in the American Girl Universe—An American Girl Anthology
- Selections from Moodle

Monday January 19th—Martin Luther King, Jr. Day NO CLASS

Tuesday January 20th— Can we have an 80's/90s/2000s Doll? Can we write more exciting middle-grade historical fiction?

- Read a post 1960s doll or doll of the year book from the stash!
- Selections from Moodle
- **Peer Review Day**
 - Drafts due to your partner and to Dr. Strauch by 9AM

Wednesday January 21st—Race, Class, and American Girl

- How the Irish (Doll) became White—An American Girl Anthology
- Ivy Ling, Corinne Tan and Chinese American Misrepresentation in American Girl—An American Girl Anthology

Thursday January 22nd— American Girl Stores and Movies

- <https://www.insider.com/i-spent-over-2400-taking-daughter-american-girls-store-2023-9>
- <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/18/style/american-girl-cafe-harry-hill-serena-kerrigan.html>
- <https://www.sandyrustin.com/musicals/american-girl-live>

Friday January 23rd— Rebecca Rubin and Religious Minorities

- <https://s-usih.org/2021/11/is-american-girl-a-religious-authority/>
- “Maybe I could be part of the story too”: Making Meaning and understanding American Jewish Identity through American Girl—An American Girl Anthology

Monday January 26th— Final Exam and Movie Day

Tuesday January 27th –

- **Doll Presentations: 10-11:30 in Sutcliffe**
- **Paper Due at 5PM**