How can queer frameworks push us to develop more complex understandings of young people and their roles in culture and society? How do children’s picture books, young adult novels, youth television, and video games reinforce or disrupt normative understandings of youth, sexuality, queerness, and growth? This course explores the connections between queer and critical youth studies and applies them toward the examination of youth literature and media with LGBTQ+ characters and themes. Examines how queer youths are imagined and constructed in different texts and media, and how these texts can reconfigure—and potentially challenge—simplistic understandings of children, teens, and their cultures. Through critical, intersectional engagement with fictional works crafted for younger audiences and scholarship in queer youth studies, students will challenge ideas used to conceptualize Western understandings of childhood and adolescence, such as innocence, knowledge, growth, and experience.

In this course, you will:

✦ Draw from queer theory and critical youth studies to conduct rigorous and innovative critiques of texts and media focused on queer youth lives, experiences, and communities.

✦ Develop a historical understanding of the phenomena, ideologies, and ideas that have influenced the critical overlap between queer theory and youth studies.

✦ Determine the potential that different modes, genres, and media possess to disrupt normative approaches to childhood and adolescence, and comprehend the negotiations that mainstream cultural productions must undergo to present queer content to children and teens.

✦ Understand the extent to which developmental categories such as childhood and adolescence are socioculturally constructed and informed by normative ideologies and logics.

✦ Reflect on your own childhood and consider how the course content pushes you to reassess and rethink your own growth and development.

If you need or prefer a version of this syllabus with no images, tables, or complex formatting for purposes of accessibility, I have one readily available. Contact me via email at amatos@bowdoin.edu to request this simplified version.
Disclaimer on Course Content

This course focuses on matters of queerness, including its intersections with other axes of power and oppression such as age, gender, race, sexuality, and class. We will examine various forms of cultural, social, political, and representative oppression and marginalization that have shaped the lives of many children and young adults—and that might have had a major influence on those who are in this course with you. The topics, issues, texts, and media that we will explore in this course focus on experiences and imagery that might be disturbing or difficult to some people, including but not limited to death, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, racism, violence, gore, sexual assault, and other unacceptable forms of social injustice and exploitation. We will critically address these issues in class while actively thinking through the forms of oppression and exploitation that surface in our readings, discussions, and projects. If you think you will be unable to participate in class discussions or engage comfortably with the course material, you should seriously reconsider enrolling in this seminar. Remember: your emotional well-being always comes first!

Office Hours, Email, and Contact Information

Office: Ham House, 215 | Email: amatos@bowdoin.edu | Office Phone: (207) 721-5076

You will have the option to meet with me for office hours either in person (following social distancing protocols) or virtually (via Zoom). Use the “Office Hours” link available on our course’s Blackboard course to book a 30-minute appointment with me. I will hold office hours on Tuesdays from 1:00-3:00 PM and Wednesdays from 3:00-4:00 PM, starting on the week of September 6, 2021.

Important: Email correspondence should be used solely for short yes/no responses or personal emergencies. For matters that are more substantial and/or require sustained discussion and inquiry, please book an office hour appointment. Note that I only check my email during weekdays, and therefore, any email sent after 5:00 PM will be addressed the next available weekday.

Course Readings and Media

Most of the readings for this course, including short stories, critical articles, and book chapters, will be made available to you at no cost. While you are more than welcome to purchase any of the picture books that we will examine in this course, please note that these texts will be made available to you out of class.

For the months of October and November, you should make sure that you have access to HULU, which hosts most of the visual media that we will watch and critique this semester. You are welcome to purchase a subscription individually or you can watch the assigned television shows and films as a group. I will also arrange a series of evening viewings for those who cannot get access to this subscription service.

Last but not least, you must also purchase and play a video game for this course: Gone Home (2013) by Fullbright Games, which is available on the Nintendo Switch, Mac/PC, PS4, Xbox, or the Apple Store. Click here to purchase a copy of this game. If you’re having trouble accessing or playing this video game, remember that you can also watch walkthroughs and “let’s play” videos of Gone Home on YouTube. However, playing the game is the best way to learn about it and talk about it with others!

You will have access to this course’s Blackboard site on the second week of class. There, you will be able to download the assigned course readings and media, book an office hour appointment with Professor Matos, submit your course projects, and keep track of your course trajectory!
Evaluation and Assessment

My version of this course uses a nontraditional form of “grading” and assessment that centers (self)reflection, qualitative (nonnumerical) feedback, and approaching learning as an ongoing and enduring process. This form of assessment, a version of **contract grading**, eliminates the use of point-based scores or letter-based grades, focusing more attention on *process* and *ongoing learning* rather than the final product that you turn in. **No letter grades, points, scores or percentages will be given to any of the essays, projects, or tasks assigned for this course.** You will, however, receive feedback for your assignments and a final letter grade that is contingent on how you meet course expectations. I will also push you to honestly explore your growth as a thinker and writer in this course. This system will allow you to focus more on the course content and methods and less time worrying about grades. Here is a breakdown of how I will determine the final grade that you will receive for this course at the end of the semester:

If you meet **all** of the following expectations, you will pass the course and receive a final grade of **B**:

- You must complete and turn in the three (3) major projects that I will assign this semester on their established due dates. *All* of your work must demonstrate that you seriously and earnestly completed the assignment and met its expectations. You must revise and resubmit essays that don't meet the expectations or criteria listed in the assignment’s guidelines (I will indicate if you need to do this).
- At the end of the semester, you will craft a reflection letter in which you self-evaluate your progress and overall performance in this course, and disclose what you have learned about in terms of the intersections between queer and youth studies.
- You must attend class regularly. You can miss up to four (4) class meetings, no questions asked, no excuses necessary.

If you do not meet all of the expectations listed above, you will not pass this course or you will receive a final grade lower than a **B** (more details below). **A grade of A will be given to students who meet all of the base expectations for a B, demonstrate additional interest in the course material, and go beyond the base expectations for this course.** Here is what I expect of students who desire an **A**:

- You are creative, innovative, daring, and/or ambitious when developing projects for this course. You push people to think of the course content in an original, innovative, or ambitious way.
- You contribute thoughtfully to class discussions and group work. You connect your ideas to those that others raise, you ask insightful and relevant questions, and you help to foster a collaborative learning community in and out of the classroom.
- You demonstrate a passion or interest in the course subject matter, and/or put serious effort in attempting to understand why the course content is useful, important, or relevant (either to you or others).
- Your writing, projects, and class discourse show that you can critically examine, understand, explain, and deconstruct challenging, complex, and ideologically-layered ideas, issues, and approaches.
- You attend class frequently and have missed no more than three (3) class meetings. No excuses or explanations needed for these absences.

You will receive a final grade of **C** if you don’t submit any major project revisions that I request and/or if you miss 5-6 class meetings. If you don’t submit one of the course projects or have more than 6 absences, **you will not pass this course.**

Forget about the stress and anxiety associated with assignment grades and scores. Focus on finding joy, value, and complexity in the ideas and approaches we will explore. Purposefully and earnestly use the course content, assignments, and discussions to think more critically about the intersections between queerness, childhood, and adolescence in western contexts.
Here is a list of all of the projects and tasks that you must complete to pass this course. You must submit all of these assignments to pass the course, and you must revise a project if I ask you to:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Revisiting a Childhood Event or Experience</strong></td>
<td>This course wants to think carefully and critically about the concepts of childhood and adolescence, and even more so, how queer studies and approaches can push you to think about your life and past experiences. With this in mind, you will write a short discussion where you examine a moment from your childhood that connects to or resonates in some way with one or more of the theoretical pieces discussed in class. Drawing from the readings assigned for UNIT I in this course, you will reflect on a moment from your childhood or adolescence that challenges or pressures normative understandings of youth and their experiences. This assignment will require sustained reflection and examination. It’s not enough to simply share your past experience, but you must also think carefully about how theory can help you to unpack and examine it. You will also consider how your identities, cultural background, beliefs, and attitudes inflect your current understanding of your past event or experience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Crafting a Queer Children’s Picture Book</strong></td>
<td>Drawing from our readings and discussions for UNIT II in this course, you will collaborate with up to two (2) other peers in this course to plan, draft, and craft a children’s picture book focused on queer life, experience, or community. More specifically, you will be asked to develop a book that focuses on a topic that hasn’t really been explored with much depth in class, or, you will identify a way to more effectively tackle a topic or issue raised by one of the picture books we’ve read. You will also consider what are the most effective narrative, visual, and aesthetic strategies that can convey queer content to younger audiences. This project will be accompanied by a critical reflection that will: a) explain the process of planning, drafting, and creating the picture book; b) thoroughly explain the rationale behind the picture book, and the sources/class discussions that influenced the choices your group made; and c) discuss both the affordances and drawbacks of using this medium to convey queer content to younger audiences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Translation Project</strong></td>
<td>The third project in this course will measure your ability to understand the course material, and even more so, make a queer concept or idea accessible and readable to a younger audience. You will select a topic or concept that we have explored in our class discussions and you will “translate” that topic for a younger audience using a different medium. The goal of this assignment is to push you to think critically about how queer content can be made accessible to young thinkers. There are countless possibilities for this assignment, however, projects that you can develop include: a) a series of TikTok videos; b) a board game or video game; c) a comedy sketch or standup comedy routine that is accessible to a young audience; d) a comic or webcomic; or e) a short film. You will share your translation project with the rest of the class during the course showcase that will take place in the final weeks of class. This project must be accompanied by a critical reflection where you discuss the research that you used to develop your ideas, the process of translating your selected concept, and how the course content influenced some of the decisions that you made.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Course Letter</strong></td>
<td>In lieu of a final exam, you will develop a letter in which you accomplish two tasks: 1) Address the following question: “What do I know now about the intersection between queer and youth studies now that I’m done with this course?” and 2) Discuss your development in this course (focusing on your overall progress and learning) and reflect on on how well you met the expectations that I established above. This will be your last chance to highlight what you have learned throughout the semester and to offer an honest self-assessment of your experience in this course. This letter will be crucial in determining your final grade, so make it count!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Everyone in this class is coming in with a different range of experiences, knowledges, levels of expertise, backgrounds, beliefs, and ideologies. For instance, one of your peers may be very experienced when it comes to youth studies whereas another one of your peers might be more familiar with ideas and frameworks present in gender studies and queer theory. Some of you might be deeply invested in children’s and young adult cultural productions whereas some of you are here to learn more about ideas that may be unfamiliar to you. Some of you might have firsthand experience with different forms of violence and oppression that we will encounter in the course content, whereas some of you might come from more privileged backgrounds. Long story short: all of us are different, none of us approach things in the same way.

Rather than using these differences as a way of reinforcing divides, hierarchies, and judgements, use them as a means of collaborating with each other, learning from each other, and teaching each other. The following course policies will always be in effect throughout the semester:

- Always use discussions as an opportunity for “teachable moments.” When somebody says something incorrect or problematic, assume that they have good intentions and are coming from a place of not knowing, but also take the time to intervene and explain your point of view. Do not mock or belittle one of your peers due to their apparent lack of knowledge, ability, or skill. Instead, use this as an opportunity to help your peer to grow intellectually and emotionally.
- In this course, you are critiquing ideas and practices, but you are not “attacking” or critiquing people. While this course will provide a space for opposing points of view, make sure that you don’t belittle or shame an individual or group of people while sharing a different or opposing perspective.
- Our discussions and conversations (both in and out of class) are confidential. People should feel safe to raise ideas, concerns, or questions that are conducive to their learning needs without feeling judged or ridiculed.
- Make sure to reflect on your privilege when engaging in class conversations. Are you taking up too much space in the conversation? Are you allowing people who are impacted by systemic oppression to express their insights and viewpoints? To what extent are your own perspectives coming from a place of privilege?
- Last but not least, it’s okay not to know things! There will be times when I won’t have answers to your questions and inquiries. Learn to feel comfortable saying “I don’t know” or “I need more time to think about this.”

Course Calendar

Make sure to come to class having completed all of the readings and tasks listed under the dates in this course calendar. It is your responsibility to engage with the readings and to complete all assignments on time. This course calendar is subject to change in order to address contingencies that arise throughout the semester or to assure that the course objectives are being met.

Advice: Learning in this course will be driven by collaborative discussions, academic and personal writing, one-on-one feedback, and active reading, writing, research, and reflection. YOU are in charge of determining how much help and assistance you need from your professor and peers. If you’re having difficulties understanding any of the course readings, concepts, or approaches, please schedule an office hour meeting with your professor! He would be more than happy to offer you personalized lessons and tutorials that will help you to better understand and apply the course material. Be purposeful with your education in this course!

Wednesday, September 1, 2021

Class Introduction

Make sure to read the course syllabus throughly.
UNIT I: THEORIZING THE (QUEER) CHILD

Monday, September 6, 2021
**Raising Your Kids Gay?**
Read: Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, “How to Bring Your Kids Up Gay.” (Blackboard)

Wednesday, September 8, 2021
**“But think of the children!” Futurity and the Child as Symbol**
Read: Lee Edelman, Introduction to *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Blackboard)

Monday, September 13, 2021
**Growing Sideways: The Queer Child**
Read: Kathryn Bond Stockton, Introduction to *The Queer Child* (Blackboard)

Wednesday, September 15, 2021
**Race, Innocence, and the Child**
Read: Robin Bernstein, Introduction to *Racial Innocence* (Blackboard)

UNIT II: QUEER CHILDREN’S LITERATURE AND MEDIA

Monday, September 20, 2021
**Queer Resonances in Early Children’s Literature**
Read: Kenneth Kidd, “Queer Theory’s Child and Children’s Literature Studies.” (Blackboard)
Munro Leaf’s *The Story of Ferdinand* (In-Class)

Wednesday, September 22, 2021
**Conveying Queer Content to Children**
Read: Kimberley Reynolds, “Breaking Bounds: The Transformative Energy of Children’s Literature.” (Blackboard)
Michael Hall’s *Red: A Crayon’s Story* (In-Class)

Friday, September 24, 2021
**Autoethnography due today on Blackboard by 11:59 PM.**

Monday, September 27, 2021
**Lions and Tigers and Bears… Oh My! Animals in Queer Children’s Text**
Read: Justin Richardson and Peter Parnell, *And Tango Makes Three* (In-Class)
Jessica Walton and Dougal MacPherson, *Introducing Teddy* (In-Class)

Wednesday, September 29, 2021
**Queering the (In)Human**
Read: Jill Twiss and E.G. Keller’s *A Day in the Life of Marlon Bundo* (In-Class)
Jon M. Wargo and James Joshua Coleman, “Speculating the Queer (In)Human: A Critical Reading of Contemporary LGBTQ+ Picturebooks.” (Blackboard)

Monday, October 4, 2021
**Queer Children’s Television (Part I)**
Watch: Episodes 1-4 of *The Bravest Knight* (HULU)

Wednesday, October 6, 2021
**Queer Children’s Television (Part II)**
Watch: Episode 22, Season 2 of *Steven Universe* (HULU)
Read: Mandy Elizabeth Moore, “Future Visions: Queer Utopia in *Steven Universe.*” (Blackboard)

Monday, October 11, 2021
**Fall Vacation, No Class**

**UNIT III: THEORIZING QUEER YOUNG ADULTHOOD**

Wednesday, October 13, 2021
**Queerness and Adolescence: Historical Perspectives**
Read: Gabrielle Owen, “Queer Theory and Categories of Age” in *A Queer History of Adolescence* (Blackboard)
Angel Daniel Matos, “Adolescence” (Blackboard)

Friday, October 15
**Children’s Picture Book Project due today on Blackboard by 11:59 PM.**

Monday, October 18, 2021
**Tensions and Anxieties in Queer Teen Representation**
Read: Derritt Mason, Introduction to *Queer Anxieties of Young Adult Literature and Culture* (Blackboard)

**UNIT IV: QUEER YOUNG ADULT LITERATURE AND MEDIA**

Wednesday, October 20, 2021
**YA Literature and the AIDS Crisis**
Read: David Levithan, “A Word from the Nearly Distant Past” (Blackboard)
Read: Gabriel Duckels, “(Re)Turning to AIDS in Queer Young Adult Fiction.” (Blackboard)

Monday, October 25, 2021
**Trans (Re)Imaginings**
Read: Elliott Wake, “Every Shade of Red.” (Blackboard)
Julian Gill-Peterson, “How to Bring Your Kids Up Trans” in *Histories of the Transgender Child* (Blackboard)

Wednesday, October 27, 2021
**The Queerness of Comics**
Read: Dareick Scott and Ramzi Fawaz, “Queer About Comics.” (Blackboard)
Tillie Walden, *On a Sunbeam* (Blackboard)

Monday, November 1, 2021
**Who Needs Men, Anyway?**
Read: Tillie Walden, *On a Sunbeam* (Blackboard)
Additional reading to be determined.

Wednesday, November 3, 2021
**A Queer Space Saga**
Read: Tillie Walden, *On a Sunbeam* (Blackboard)

Monday, November 8, 2021
**Queerness in Teen Television**
Watch: *Love, Victor* (HULU)
Additional reading to be determined.
Wednesday, November 10, 2021

**Negotiating Queerness in Youth Network Television**
- Watch: *Love, Victor* (HULU)
- Read: Jackson McHenry, “*Love, Victor* is Maturing into a Better, Messier Version of Itself” (Blackboard)

Monday, November 15, 2021

**Queerness and Video Games (I)**
- Play: *Gone Home* (purchase and play on your preferred gaming system or computer)
- Read: Eliot Schreer, “Player One Fight!”

Wednesday, November 17, 2021

**Queerness and Video Games (II)**
- Play: *Gone Home*
- Read: Bo Ruberg, Introduction to *Video Games Have Always Been Queer* (Blackboard)

Monday, November 22, 2021

**Queer Teen Cinema (I)**
- Watch: *Were the World Mine* (HULU)
- Additional reading to be determined.

Wednesday, November 24, 2021

**Thanksgiving Vacation, No Class**

Monday, November 29, 2021

**Queer Teen Cinema (II)**
- Watch: *Plan B* (HULU)
- Your translation project must be submitted to me by no later than 11:59 PM.

**UNIT V: TRANSLATION PROJECT SHOWCASE**

Wednesday, December 1, 2021

Translation Project Showcase

Monday, December 6, 2021

Translation Project Showcase

Wednesday, December 8, 2021

Translation Project Showcase

Monday, December 20, 2021

Reflection letter must be uploaded to Blackboard by 11:59 PM.