Claudia Nelson
Proposal for ENGL 640, Topics in Children’s Literature: Constructing the Female Citizen

(appropriate for English Without Borders and Concepts distribution requirements)

This course focuses on children’s literature’s construction of the female citizen—potentially including readers as well as characters—at different times, within different communities, and in different national traditions. Readings may include works such as the following: selections from James Janeway’s *A Token for Children* (1671); Sarah Fielding’s *The Governess* (1749); Charlotte Yonge’s *The Daisy Chain* (1856); Louisa May Alcott’s *Little Women* (1868); E. Nesbit’s *The Railway Children* (1906); L. Frank Baum’s *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (1900) and Alexander Volkov’s Soviet adaptation, *The Wizard of the Emerald City* (1939); selections from nineteenth- and twentieth-century English and American girls’ periodicals; Dorothy Canfield Fisher’s *Understood Betsy* (1917); Sally Watson’s *Jade* (1969); Mildred Taylor’s *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* (1976); Roberto Innocenti, *Rose Blanche* (1985); Pam Muñoz Ryan, *Becoming Naomi León* (2006). We will contemplate communities formed by such forces as religion, region, social class, nationality, ethnicity, and family and address questions such as the following: What common threads, if any, unite conceptions of female citizenship in different communities? What kinds of relationships are perceived between the girl as family member and the girl as citizen? What rhetorical techniques do authors bring into play to communicate to readers what the ideal female citizen might look like? What is the role of the social “misfit” in broadening understandings of citizenship?