

Sophister Option Description Template

Option Name: Amiable Hustlers: How to Sell a Children's Book

Option Short Title: Amiable Hustlers

ECTS Weighting: 10

Semester/Term Taught: HT

Staff: Dr Jane Carroll (Jane.Carroll@tcd.ie)

Option Content & learning aims

This module gives you the chance to focus your attention on books rather than texts: to pay attention to the physical object that sits between your palms or rests on your desk or gets eaten by the dog. Since the first “modern” children’s books published by John Newbery in the 18th century, children’s books have led innovations in the way that books were printed, bound, marketed, and read.

As well as looking at traditional codices, we’ll examine what Walter Benjamin called “booklike creations from fringe areas” – pop-ups and mechanical books – and the toys and other paraphernalia that were sold alongside children’s books that have posed problems for booksellers, librarians, and researchers for centuries. We will examine the radical forms that children’s books take – from miniature books to picture books to verse novels – and look to the formal elements of the books on the module. Together, we’ll explore typography, illustration, and paratextual elements like cover-design, prefaces, and the “discussion prompts” included by many modern publishers with an eye on the school curriculum and a wider market.

This module gives space to the book, and to thinking about how books are packaged and sold to young readers from the 18th century. Moving into the 21st century, we’ll trace the major trends in the globalised book market and discuss the emergence of trends in children’s publishing and, in particular, in Young Adult genre fiction. The final session will be given over to a guest speaker and to talking about moving from a degree in English into the book business.

Reading

The focus of this module is books rather than texts. We will be working closely with the collections of children’s books held in the Library of Trinity College Dublin. Some of the material is held in special collections and can only be viewed by prior arrangement. Where possible, scans or photographs of this material will be made available in advance but digitization cannot compensate for the haptic encounter with the book and if you take this module, be prepared to dedicate time to desk-work in the Library, and to browsing the stock in bookshops and public libraries.

Module Content and Key Reading

1. Preface: John Newbery & The Invention of the Children’s Book [John Newbery, *A Little Pretty Pocket Book* (1747)]

2. Tie-Ins, Toys and Gimmicks: The Book among Commodities [Beatrix Potter, *Peter Rabbit* (1902); Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865)]
3. Little Books for Little Hands: Miniatures, Thumb Bibles, Abridged Versions
4. Unbookish Books: The Mechanical and Movable Book [Fuller, *The History and Adventures of Little Henry* (1810); Brand, *The Speaking Toybook* (1905); Anon *Les Surprises: Bien ou Mal* (1865)]
5. Comics, Clubs, and Imagined Communities (Materials from The Puffin Club and Bill Woggon's *Katy Keene* (1947-1961) - scans will be provided)
6. Picturebooks: Innovation & Constraint (Jessica Love, *Júlian is a Mermaid* (2018); Shirley Hughes, *Alfie Gets in First* (1977); Oliver Jeffers, *There's a Ghost in this House* (2021)]
7. Reading Week
8. Typography: The Medium is the Message [David Almond, *The Savage* (2008); David Almond, *My Name is Mina* (2010)]
9. White Space: Verse Novels, Race, and Readership (Elizabeth Acevedo, *The Poet X* (2018); Dean Atta, *The Black Flamingo* (2019)]
10. All change: Repackaging the Classics for New Audiences [Roald Dahl, *Charlie & the Chocolate Factory* (1964)]
11. The Globalised Book Market: Homogeny in YA [Sarah J. Maas, *A Court of Thorns and Roses* (2015); Holly Black, *The Cruel Prince* (2018)]
12. Working in Children's Book Publishing: Jobs in the Book Trade (Guest Speaker)

The reading list will be finalized before the start of term.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of the module you will be able to:

- Engage confidently with the archives and collections at TCD
- Demonstrate your handling skills in working with older printed material
- Describe a range of key critical approaches to book history
- Recognize key trends in the publishing and production of children's books
- Identify the contribution of formal elements of the book to your reading experience
- Articulate responses to the key themes and issues of the module in your final essay
- Identify the aspects of the module that interest you most and undertake independent research as the basis for an essay
- Demonstrate your knowledge and understanding of the material on the module and your confident engagement with relevant critical methodologies and theoretical frameworks in your essay

Assessment Details

This module is assessed by essay (100%) - 6000 words

Please note:

- Curricular information is subject to change.
- Information is displayed only for guidance purposes, relates to the current academic year only and is subject to change.