

# INFS 431

# LITERATURE AND SERVICES

# FOR CHILDREN

Session 5 – ORIGINS AND GROWTH OF  
CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

Lecturer: S. Nii Bekoe Tackie, School of Information and Communication  
Studies, Department of Information Studies  
Contact Information: [snbtackie@ug.edu.gh](mailto:snbtackie@ug.edu.gh)



## UNIVERSITY OF GHANA

College of Education

**School of Continuing and Distance Education**

2014/2015 – 2016/2017

# Session Overview

No one can point to a specific date when children's literature began. What is known is that interest in children's literature began to emerge in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. A few books had been written here and there but were as much meant for adults as for children. This session discusses the early writings for children and looks at the definitions of what is called children's literature.

# Session Objectives

At the end of the session, you should be able to:

- Trace the development of children's literature from the 18<sup>th</sup> century
- Describe the types of early literature for children
- Identify the factors that gave rise to the development of children's literature as it is known today
- Attempt a definition of children's literature
- Explain why it is difficult to specifically define what is children's literature

# Session Outline

The key topics to be covered in the session are:

Topic One: Early Writings for Children

Topic Two: Definitions of Children's Literature

# Reading List



Topic One:

# EARLY WRITINGS FOR CHILDREN



# The Origins of Children's Literature

There is no specific date for when children's literature began.

- Interest in children's literature piqued in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.
- Beginning of the century very few enjoyable books for children existed.
- Children read, certainly, but the books that they probably enjoyed reading (or hearing) most, were not designed especially for them.
  - Fables,
  - Fairy stories,
  - Lengthy chivalric romances,
  - Short, affordable pamphlet tales
  - Ballads called chapbooks, were available but
- They were published for both children and adults.

# The Origins of Children's Literature(Cont.)

- An example is
- *Winter-Evenings Entertainments* (1687) by Nathaniel Crouch.
- It contains
  - Riddles,
  - Pictures, and
  - ‘Pleasant and delightful relations of many rare and notable accidents and occurrences’
- Suggested to some that it should be thought of as an early children's book.
- Its title-page insists that it is ‘excellently accommodated to the fancies of old or young’.



# The Origins of Children's Literature(Cont.)

- Books published especially for children before the mid-18th century were almost always instructional
- (spelling books,
- school books,
- conduct books) or
- deeply pious.
- Yet just because a book seems dull or disciplinary to us today, doesn't mean that children at the time didn't enjoy it.
- Godly books of the sort produced from the 1670s by Puritans like John Bunyan are a case in point.
- James Janeway's *A Token for Children* (1671-72) gives what its subtitle describes as
- 'an Exact Account of the Conversion, Holy and Exemplary Lives and Joyful Deaths of Several Young Children'.

# The Origins of Children's Literature(Cont.)

- These children lie on their deathbeds, giving accounts of the sins too often committed by children –
  - idleness,
  - disobedience,
  - inattention to lessons,
  - boisterousness,
  - neglecting the Sabbath
- But tell those assembled round them that salvation awaits all who renounce such wickedness,
- They explain how happy they are to be going to their eternal reward.
- Hardly fun, we might think, yet memoirs and letters, as well as continuing sales over more than a century, testify to young readers' genuine enjoyment of these descriptions of heroic and confident, if doomed, children.

# The 18th Century

In the first half of the 18th century a few books that didn't have an obviously instructional or religious agenda were published especially for children,

such as

*A Little Book for Little Children* (c.1712),

included

riddles and

rhymes ;

*A Description of Three Hundred Animals* (1730),

a copiously illustrated bestiary,

the second part of which was published 'particularly for the entertainment of youth'.

# The 18th Century(Cont.)

The 1740s marked the turning point

- A cluster of London publishers began to produce new books
  - to instruct and
  - delight young readers.
- Thomas Boreman was one. He published
  - *Description of Three Hundred Animals*
  - *The Gigantick Histories* (1740-43).
    - a series of illustrated histories of London landmarks

# The 18th Century(Cont.)

- Mary Cooper wrote
- *Tommy Thumb's Pretty Song Book* (1744) in two volumes
- First known nursery rhyme collection, featuring early versions of well-known classics like
  - ‘Bah, bah, a black sheep’,
  - ‘Hickory dickory dock’,
  - ‘London Bridge is falling down’ and
  - ‘Sing a song of sixpence’.

# The 18th Century(Cont.)

## The father of children's literature

- Most celebrated of the pioneers of children's literature is John Newbery,
- First book for the entertainment of children was
  - *A Little Pretty Pocket-Book Intended for the Instruction and Amusement of Little Master Tommy and Pretty Miss Polly* (c.1744).
- It was indeed a pretty book, small, neat and bound in brightly coloured paper
- Newbery advertised it as being sold with toys – (a ball for a boy and a pincushion for a girl)
- The toys were to be used to record the owner's good and bad deeds (by means of pins stuck either to the black side of the ball or pincushion, or the red side).
- Newbery's books perfectly embodied the educational ideas of John Locke, who had advocated teaching through amusement

# The 18th Century(Cont.)

- Newbery became known as the ‘father of children's literature’
- Chiefly because he was able to show that publishing children’s books could be a commercial success.
- This may have been because he made most of his money from selling patent medicines, and by publishing for adults
- Nevertheless, his children’s book business flourished, and, following his death in 1767, it was taken over by his descendants, surviving into the 19th century.
- Newbery was a great innovator too.
- He produced the first children’s periodical
- *The Lilliputian Magazine* (1751-52), a miscellany of stories, verse, riddles and chatty editorials.

# The 18th Century(Cont.)

- His most famous work, *The History of Little Goody Two-Shoes* (1765)
- called the first children's novel.
- It tells the story of a poor orphan, Margery, who makes a career for herself as a teacher
- marries the local landowner who she has impressed by her honesty, hard work and good sense.
- like a less glamorous Cinderella (with no fairy godmother, balls to attend, or glass slipper).



# The 18th Century(Cont.)

## **A rapid expansion of children's literature**

- Reasons for the sudden rise of children's literature never fully explained.
- Entrepreneurial genius of personalities like Newbery undoubtedly played a part
- Equally significant were structural factors,
- including the growth of a sizeable middle class,
- technical developments in book production,
- influence of new educational theories, and
- changing attitudes to childhood.

# The 18th Century(Cont.)

- Whatever the causes, the result was
  - a fairly rapid expansion of children’s literature through the second half of the 18th century,
  - such that by the early 1800s, the children’s book business was booming.
  - For the first time it was possible for authors to make a living out of writing solely for children, and to become famous for it.
- Children’s literature, as we know it today, had begun

Topic Two:

# DEFINITIONS OF CHILDREN'S LITERATURE



# The Concept of Children's Literature

The concept, “**children's literature**”, has neither a specific definition nor a widely used definition (Hunt, 1996).

- May be described broadly as anything that children read  
OR
- More specifically as
  - fiction,
  - non-fiction,
  - drama or
  - poetry
- Written for and used by children and young people.
- For Anderson(College of Education, University of South Florida), children's literature is all books written for children



# The Concept of Children's Literature(Cont.)

- But excluding works like
  - comic books;
  - joke books;
  - cartoon books and
  - non-fiction books that are not intended to be read consecutively, for example :
    - dictionaries,
    - encyclopaedias and
    - other reference materials.

# The Concept of Children's Literature(Cont.)

The **International Companion Encyclopaedia of Children's Literature** notes that

- boundaries of children's literature are not fixed but blurred.
- sometimes there is no agreement on whether a particular work should best be described as literature for adults or for children.
- notable example in the present age is the **Harry Potter** series written by **J. K. Rowling**.
  - created and marketed for children but it enjoys a huge adult patronage.
- Its popularity has led to the creation of **The New York Times** best-seller list for children's books.

# The Concept of Children's Literature(Cont.)

## Encyclopaedia Britannica

- Describes Children's literature as the body of written works and accompanying illustrations produced in order
  - to entertain or instruct young people.
- The [genre](#) encompasses a wide range of works, including
  - acknowledged classics of world [literature](#),
  - picture books
  - easy-to-read stories written exclusively for children,
  - fairy tales,
  - lullabies,
  - fables,
  - folk songs, and
  - other primarily orally transmitted materials.

# References





# Activity

List all the titles of books; their authors; and dates published for children before the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century(1800s)