Course Proposal for the First Year Seminar

Name: Elisabeth Gruner

Department: English

Availability (Fall and/or Spring Term; one or two sections): Fall 2010, Spring 2011

Approval of Department Chair:

Title: Twice-Told Tales: Fairy Tales in Literary and Popular Culture

Description of Course Content/Theme: The course will be a “case study” of a single tale type (Cinderella, Sleeping Beauty, Hansel & Gretel, etc.) Students will read, research, and find retellings, revisions, and parodies of the tale as well as other artistic expressions (music, film, novels, etc.) inspired by it as they consider the reasons for the persistence of fairy tales and their shifting meanings in different times and places.

Briefly describe how the course will seek to achieve the five goals of the First Year Experience:

1. Expand students’ understanding of the world (e.g. state how the course will challenge students either to think about important questions and issues they may not have thought about before, or think about them in ways they have not thought about them).

   Students will explore familiar texts from several unfamiliar vantage points, including literary, historical, cross-cultural and psychological perspectives.

2. Enhance their ability to read and think critically (e.g. a preliminary list of books and articles for the course and exercises or pedagogical methods that will be used to improve critical reading and thinking).

Possible texts for a case study of “Cinderella” and its variants:

   folk/fairy tale anthology—there are several good options here

   Cinderella: A Casebook, ed. Alan Dundes

   Burnett, A Little Princess

   Brontë, Jane Eyre

   Rowling, Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone
Revisionary versions of “Cinderella” by Angela Carter, Anne Sexton, Robert Munsch, Babette Cole, Tanith Lee, Anne Thackeray Ritchie, Virginia Hamilton and others

film versions of “Cinderella,” including Ashpet, An American Cinderella (1990); Cinderella (Disney; 1950); Ever After (1998); Cinderella (Rodgers & Hammerstein; 1997); etc.

Exercises to improve critical reading and thinking would include comparing and contrasting two versions of the tale, annotating a version of the tale (perhaps a group exercise), and analyzing reviews of popular culture versions of the tale. Optional assignments might include writing a new version of the tale and analyzing its relationship to the original.

3. Enhance students’ ability to communicate effectively in writing, speech, and other appropriate forms (e.g. describe the type and number of writing assignments students will complete, the opportunities students will have to develop their writing skills, the kinds of questions they will address, the ways in which they will be asked to communicate their ideas, and the type of feedback students will receive).

Students will have three to four writing/communication assignments during the course of the semester. One may be primarily bibliographic or descriptive, while the others will be more analytical; at least one will also incorporate library research. One assignment will also require students to present their findings to the class, either online or in person. Students will have the opportunity to revise drafts with peer review, working with a writing or speech consultant, and one-on-one editorial sessions with me.

4. Develop fundamentals of information fluency and library research. Make time on your syllabus for students to complete the required library workshop outside of class and at least one additional library-related assignment for the class. Indicate any additional ways in which students will make use of library resources.

The primary use of library resources in the class will be to discover further versions of the chosen tale and to access critical materials on the works. Students may also have occasion to use the Mother Goose collection, housed in Special Collections. Library-related assignments may include producing annotations for a version of the tale, bibliographies of parodies or other revisions, and/or a research paper on an aspect of the tale’s reproduction and/or reception.

5. Provide the opportunity for students to work closely with a faculty mentor (e.g. Indicate specific efforts you will make to interact with each student, learn more about each student’s interests and abilities, and provide appropriate guidance for their intellectual growth.)

In a small class, opportunities for students to work closely with a faculty mentor arise naturally. Nonetheless I will build in further opportunities, including a required one-on-
one research meeting, opportunities to meet to discuss paper drafts, and regular office hours.

Briefly state your background for teaching this class:

I have taught children's literature for over ten years, and have focused much of my teaching and research on fairy tale revisions. Two of my published articles focus explicitly on revisions of "Cinderella"; in addition, a forthcoming article treats echoes of "Snow White" in the young adult novel Speak. ("Cinderella, Marie Antoinette, and Sara: Roles and Role Models in A Little Princess," The Lion and the Unicorn, 22:2 (Spring 1998), 163-187 and "Saving Cinderella: History and Story in Ever After and Ashpet." Children's Literature 31 (2003), 142-154.)