

AMERICAN GIRLHOOD

GNDR_ST 361 & ENGLISH 378

WINTER
2023



What does it mean to be an American Girl? The phrase itself has spawned a lucrative line of dolls and other merchandise, but long before the rise of American Girl dolls, authors used the figure of the 'girl' to make claims about the imagined future of the nation. What kinds of ideas about race, gender, sexuality, and class underpin these fantasies about who the American girl is? How does literature about the 'American girl' further white, colonial ideas of nation building or protest against these norms? In this class, we will study key texts about American girlhood from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to examine how the figure of the girl is deployed as a figure making and remaking claims about the nation. Beginning with Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* and Laura Ingalls Wilder's *Little House on the Prairie*, we will move to contesting visions of girlhood from Black and Indigenous authors, including Harriet Jacobs' *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* and Zitkala-Ša's *American Indian Stories*. We will pair these texts alongside critical readings from scholars in childhood studies.

Ilana Larkin

MW 11am-12:20pm

Univ Hall 112