

AMERICAN GIRLHOOD

GNDR_ST 361 & ENGLISH 378

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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 girl is deployed as a figure making and remaking claims about the nation. We will read Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* and Laura Ingalls Wilder's *Little House on the Prairie*—texts which fantasize about being universal texts of American girlhood while in reality putting forth a vision of whiteness—against contesting visions of girlhood found in texts such as Harriet Wilson's *Our Nig*, the first novel published by an African-American woman, and Zitkala-Ša's *American Indian Stories*. We will pair these texts alongside critical readings from scholars in childhood studies.

Ilana Larkin

TTh 11am-12:20pm

Kresge Hall 3-410