

**The Ohio State University  
First-Year Seminar Program  
Course Proposal**

**Course Information**

1. Attach a syllabus that includes the following (sample syllabi can be found at <http://firstyearseminars.osu.edu>):

- the course goals
- a brief description of the content
- the distribution of meeting times
- a weekly topical outline
- a listing of assignments
- grade assessment information (A-E or S/U)
- required textbooks and/or reading list
- the academic misconduct and disability services statements (sample statements can be found at <http://ascas.osu.edu/curriculum/asc-syllabus-elements>)

**Instructor Information**

2. Attach a brief biographical paragraph that includes the current research interests, teaching awards and honors, and undergraduate courses taught by the participating instructor(s). The paragraph will be included in materials for first-year students.

Mary Thomas, Women's, Gender and Sexuality Studies

Proposer's Name and Primary Academic Unit (please print)

The Girl Heroes of Dystopian Worlds

Proposer's Title

[thomas.1672@osu.edu](mailto:thomas.1672@osu.edu)

Proposer's e-mail Address

Feb 22, 2019

Submission Date

Shannon Winnubst

Approval of Department Chair of Academic Unit (please print)

**Please return this form and any attachments to First-Year Seminar Program, 100 Denney Hall, 164 Annie & John Glenn Avenue, ATTN: Todd Bitters or e-mailed to [bitters.4@osu.edu](mailto:bitters.4@osu.edu).**

# **The Girl Heroes of Dystopian Worlds**

## **Arts & Sciences 1138.28, Freshman Seminar**

**1 Semester-hour Credit**

**Autumn Semester**

**Thursdays, 2:15-3:40pm**

Professor Mary Thomas  
308E Dulles Hall  
Office Hours: Thursdays, 4-5pm  
[thomas.1672@osu.edu](mailto:thomas.1672@osu.edu)

### **Course Description**

A dystopia is a world in which suffering is ever-present, persistent, and often follows from societal or environmental collapse. Recently, a proliferation of dystopian fiction has taken up the girl hero as a character who comes to the scene, fights for justice, and strives to organize chaos into order. The quest is in service for a better future – a way out of dystopia. Along the way, she typically meets a boy, signaling her straight, feminine identity. The girl can get a boyfriend *and* save the world.

Dystopia pervades so much young adult fiction these days because dramatic climate change and other planetary environmental problems are in the front of our minds: on TV, on the news, in political struggles, and in our consciousness as a crisis unfolding. Cli-fi – climate fiction – is one example in fiction that portrays imaginations of what will happen after the climate has changed so much that there is no turning back. Cli-fi is therefore a genre of writing, TV, and film that portrays futuristic ideas about what the world will be like during and after climate change or massive global upheaval occurs.

In this course we will consider how examples from dystopic cli-fi rely on adolescent girl characters that play heroic roles in overcoming, persevering, or surviving planetary upheaval, climate change, and societal collapse. We will consider how these examples reinforce an assumption that girls, through their ingenuity or ‘girl power’ tough attitudes, can counter planetary geo-physical forces. The course will therefore particularly examine how the girl in recent TV, film and fiction serves as an epitome agent of earthly force, as someone who can uniquely fight forces well beyond her control. But why a girl or young woman? Why are so many of these girls Black and Brown in recent film and TV adaptations? The course will help us understand how age, gender, sexuality, nationality, and race-ethnicity of these heroes signal something about the present moment of fear, hope, and endurance in the face of catastrophic planetary change. We will analyze how these identities – age, gender, sexuality and race – affect assumptions about human capacity for action and survival on a changing planet. Finally, the course challenges you to analyze the effects of girl hero-emphasis in fiction on real present-day political and social movements related to climate change. Who is meant to save us from the predicament of massive environmental change and the collapse of life “as we know it”? Why at this moment in time is that “who” a girl or young woman, often a girl of color?

The course requires you to read one book of YA fiction and watch one full-length film or several TV episodes (fiction or documentary) outside of class that has the figure of the girl child as a hero. You will then do a three minute creative assessment of the works in class presentations. Otherwise, being in class every week, on occasion doing short readings to prepare for class, and engaging in lively conversation with your peers is all you need to do to pass the course.

### **Texts**

You do not need to purchase any texts for the course. Readings will be uploaded to the course webpage or linked in this syllabus, and the other material required (the book and film) should be easily accessible through the library system or online streaming services. (You may need to pay \$6-10 to stream a film, however, depending on what you choose!) I will provide a list of books and films the first week or two of class, and we will expand this list together.

### **Course Policies**

- You may miss one class only and still pass the course. You may NOT miss any student presentation classes. These are mandatory for everyone to attend. I do not accept doctor's notes. If you have a university-excused absence planned for a class meeting day, please be sure you plan ahead and use your one allocated absence for that day.
- Contributing to class discussion will be a core aspect of our course's success. I will do my best to create a lively and engaging classroom that is friendly and informal for class discussion. I expect you to match my energy and interest with your own!
- There are no written assignments for this class. You will do two creative, 3 minute presentations (of one book and one film) over the course of the semester. I will distribute instructions about the format and purpose of the presentations by the second week of class. I will also provide an initial list of possible titles for you to read/watch, which we will all add to over the course of the semester.

### **Grading**

This course has a Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory (S/U) grade. You must attend class (only one absence allowed, but not during class presentations when attendance is mandatory), come prepared by reading ahead of time, and bring your voice to our conversations. If you do these three things, you pass the class!

### **Academic Misconduct**

It is the responsibility of the Committee on Academic Misconduct to investigate or establish procedures for the investigation of all reported cases of student academic misconduct. The term "academic misconduct" includes all forms of student academic misconduct wherever committed; illustrated by, but not limited to, cases of plagiarism and dishonest practices in connection with examinations. Instructors shall report all instances of alleged academic misconduct to the committee (Faculty Rule 3335-5-487). For additional information, see the Code of Student Conduct <http://studentlife.osu.edu/csc/>.

**Students with Disabilities**

The University strives to make all learning experiences as accessible as possible. If you anticipate or experience academic barriers based on your disability (including mental health, chronic or temporary medical conditions), please let me know immediately so that we can privately discuss options. To establish reasonable accommodations, I may request that you register with Student Life Disability Services. After registration, make arrangements with me as soon as possible to discuss your accommodations so that they may be implemented in a timely fashion. SLDS contact information: [slds@osu.edu](mailto:slds@osu.edu); 614-292-3307; [www.slds.osu.edu](http://www.slds.osu.edu); 098 Baker Hall, 113 W. 12th Avenue.

## **Weekly Schedule**

Please read the assigned titles before coming to class, so that we may have a lively and informed conversation about them.

### **Week 1 (Aug 22) – Introducing the girl heroes of dystopia**

In class viewing and discussion.

Discuss examples of texts so that you can choose a novel by week 3 to read.

### **Week 2 (Aug 29) – Part I: Who is a hero? What does it have to do with hope?**

Raffaella Baccolini, “The Persistence of Hope in Dystopian Science Fiction” *PMLA* 119(3): 518-521 (May 2004)

### **Week 3 (Sep 5) – Part II: Who is a hero? What does it have to do with politics?**

- Rodge Glass, “Global warning: the rise of ‘cli-fi’” in *The Guardian* (Friday, May 31, 2013)  
<http://www.theguardian.com/books/2013/may/31/global-warning-rise-cli-fi>
- David Holmes and Dan Bloom, “‘Cli-fi’: could a literary genre help save the planet?” *The Conversation* (February 20, 2014)  
<http://theconversation.com/cli-fi-could-a-literary-genre-help-save-the-planet-23478>

### **Week 4 (Sep 12) – Thinking about age, gender, sexuality, race-ethnicity and nationality**

A.O. Scott and Manohla Dargis, “A Radical Female Hero from Dystopia” *The New York Times* (April 4, 2012) <https://www.nytimes.com/2012/04/08/movies/katniss-everdeen-a-new-type-of-woman-warrior.html>

### **Week 5 (Sep 19) – The Girl With All the Gifts – an example**

Short excerpt from the book and in class viewing of scenes from the film adaptation

### **Week 6 (Sep 26) – Class presentation prep: how to give a three minute thesis**

Guidelines distributed in class. Prof. Thomas will model a three minute thesis of *Girl With All the Gifts*.

### **Week 7 (Oct 3) – Class discussion of novels**

Let’s discuss all the novels you are reading! Think about common themes, common characteristics of the heroes of the books, and the location of the action.  
Bring your chosen book to class.

### **Week 8 (Oct 10) – Autumn Break**

### **Week 9 (Oct 17) – Students present their novels as three minute theses**

Attendance is mandatory for all students

### **Week 10 (Oct 24) – Students present their novels as three minute theses**

Attendance is mandatory for all students

**Week 11 (Oct 31) – Can film educate the public about climate change?**

Maria Sakellari, “Cinematic climate change, a promising perspective on climate change communication,” *Public Understanding of Science* 24(7): 827-841

**Week 12 (Nov 7) – Personal loss and heroic overcoming in climate film**

Philip Hammond and Hugh Ortega Breton, “Bridging the political deficit: loss, morality, and agency in films addressing climate change” *Communication, Culture & Critique* 7(3): 303-319

**Week 13 (Nov 14) – Students present their shows/films**

Attendance is mandatory for all students

**Week 14 (Nov 21) – Students present their shows/films**

Attendance is mandatory for all students

Course wrap-up

**Week 15 (Nov 28) – Thanksgiving Break**

*Classes end Wednesday, December 4.*

*Some titles to consider for three minute presentations [we will build this list together!]*

The Passage (the TV adaptation)

The Girl With All the Gifts (book, film)

The Hunger Games (books, films)

The Wrinkle in Time (especially the recent film)

Divergent (books, films)

Shatter Me (book)

Under the Never Sky (book)

Outrun the Moon (book)

Prescient (book)

The Retreat (book)

The 5<sup>th</sup> Wave (book)

Legend (book)

Vampire Academy (book)

Snowpiercer (film)

Mary Thomas is Associate Professor of Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies at Ohio State University. She loves teaching a range of classes and recent examples include courses on the following themes: girlhood in the US, the experiences of women and girls in US prisons and detention facilities, Native American feminist theory, and global sexual politics. She is eager to teach this class on climate change, because her new research examines fossil fuel extraction in North Dakota's Bakken oil formation. She also volunteers at a men's prison where she teaches courses on climate change, feminism, and science fiction. In 2019, she received the Ronald and Deborah Ratner Distinguished Teaching Award.