

WELCOME TO

**FAIRY TALES &
POPULAR CULTURE
GMST 121**



WHEN & WHERE

Winter Term 21 2025-2026

Asynchronous, Online via Canvas

This course examines selected folk and fairy tales from the German-speaking tradition and their adaptations in English and in English translation. It, therefore, does not require any prior knowledge of the German language. This course will also introduce and cover the pertinent historical, political, and cultural contexts as they become relevant. **There are no prerequisites.**



YOUR INSTRUCTOR

Dr. Elizabeth "Biz" Nijdam (biz.nijdam@ubc.ca)

**Assistant Professor of Teaching & Director of Undergraduate Studies,
German, Department of Central, Eastern, & Northern European Studies
Director, UBC Comics Studies & Pop Culture Clusters**

Hi! My name is Dr. Biz Nijdam. I've taught German language, media, and popular culture at UBC since 2019. I received my PhD from the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor in 2018, where I wrote my PhD on feminist comics and graphic narrative.

My research interests include comics and graphic novels, video and analog games, and popular culture.



WHAT WE'LL NEED:

1) Canvas will be used for accessing course materials, completing assignments and coursework, and participating in class discussions. To log in to Canvas and learn more visit: <https://students.canvas.ubc.ca>. You can direct all technical questions to the Learning Technology Hub: It.hub@ubc.ca. **Most readings will also be provided in PDF form on our Canvas site.**



2) Because this is an online class, course texts not posted on our Canvas site will be available for purchase via Amazon and Google Book.

3) Unless otherwise stated, films will be required to be viewed outside of our asynchronous class sessions. They are available online through UBC's Kanopy streaming video service for free or available for purchase through Google Play, Apple TV, or Amazon. **Disney films are available through a subscription to Disney's streaming service.**



4) Digital games will be available online for free or for purchase on various platforms, including laptop and desktop computers as well as Android and iOS devices.

WHAT WE'LL LEARN



This course examines selected folk and fairy tales from the German-speaking tradition, primarily those collected by the Brothers Grimm, and their adaptation in popular culture. We will locate the texts in the 18th- and 19th-century cultural contexts of their origins and then follow how they have evolved into perennial favourites internationally across various media, including film, video and tabletop games, and comics. Students will thus explore how fairy tales have changed over the centuries to meet new political, cultural, and social demands while adopting innovative formal and narrative strategies with the emergence of new technologies.

Course readings will be supplemented by short introductory lectures on a variety of disciplinary approaches to fairy tales, such as feminist and critical race studies perspectives as well as media studies theory.

HOW WE'LL LEARN IT

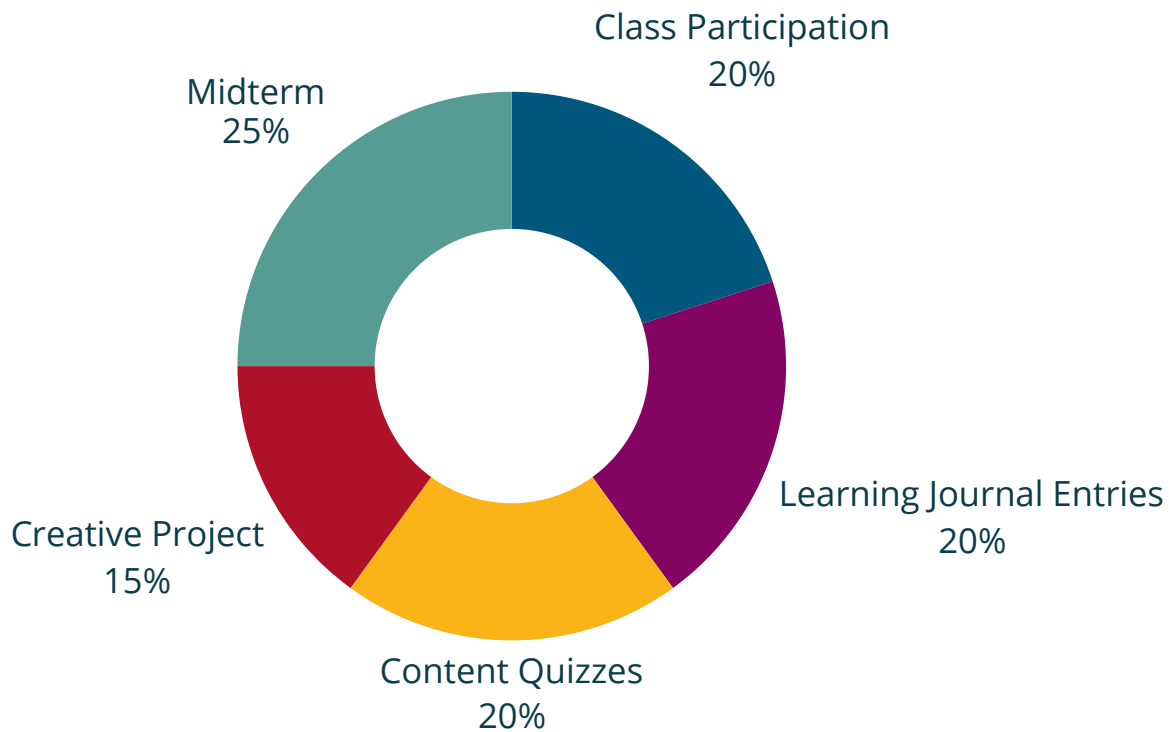
Coursework will include regular readings and/or viewing to prepare for our class sessions, online and/or in-class class participation, and low-stakes and high-stakes assignments. Every session, students will complete a short content quiz (5 multiple choice questions) to encourage them to keep pace with our class preparation and foreshadow the important content for that class session. Every week, students will produce a 350-word Learning Journal Entry to be submitted through Canvas. Our course's Midterm Exam will test Modules 2-6 and take place midway in the semester. Our class's final project will be a Fractured Fairy Tale Creative Project that asks students to adapt a Grimms' fairy tale to the contemporary moment, reconceptualizing the "moral of the story" in light of important themes, issues, and problems facing society today. No artistic skills are required, but creativity will be encouraged.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Through our coursework, materials, and online activities, students will develop the ability to:

- Critically analyze literary texts through close reading, with attention to narrative structure, language, symbolism, and themes in folk and fairy tales from the German-speaking tradition.
- Identify and contextualize the historical and cultural origins of selected fairy tales, particularly those collected by the Brothers Grimm, within their 18th- and 19th-century socio-political frameworks.
- Interpret contemporary adaptations of fairy tales in various media (e.g., film, video games, board games, comics) using appropriate analytical tools from media studies and cultural criticism.
- Apply interdisciplinary critical approaches (including feminist theory, critical race studies, and media theory) to explore the shifting meanings and functions of fairy tales over time.
- Evaluate how fairy tales respond to and reflect changing social, political, and technological contexts, both historically and in the present.
- Develop and articulate well-supported arguments about the transformation of fairy tales in popular culture, in both written and oral formats.
- Collaborate effectively in group discussions and projects, contributing thoughtful insights and respecting diverse perspectives on course material.
- Produce original creative work that imaginatively reframes or "fractures" a traditional fairy tale, demonstrating an understanding of genre conventions and critical engagement with course themes.
- Reflect on their own learning and analytical growth through regular Learning Journal Entries that integrate personal insight with scholarly analysis.

WHAT ABOUT GRADING?



CLASS PARTICIPATION (20%)

To be successful in this course, you must be prepared for our class sessions and participate actively in all assigned course activities. Good participation will take the form of regular contributions to class discussion and the completion of "in-class" short essays assigned via Canvas as part of our weekly coursework. Creative assignments will include class time, but assignments to be completed outside/independent of our asynchronous sessions.

Because this is a high-enrolment course, students will be divided into groups for some elements of their coursework and discussion activities. Students will be participating in class discussion within these groups and share their Learning Journal assignments with each other via these groups. Restricting class discussion to groups will support students in community-building within this class, which is essential in cultivating the kind of trust and vulnerability needed for this kind of learning.

*Students are expected to attend class regularly. Students may not miss more than 40% of the course's class sessions and assignments, regardless of whether their absences are avoidable or unavoidable. In the event that a student misses 12 or more hours of class time, they may be considered unable to meet the "learning outcomes" of the course and may therefore be excluded from the final assessment. Those students who are unavoidably absent from online class sessions or miss multiple class sessions and their associated "in-class" assignments must **report their absence to me immediately** or upon their return to participating in class in order to establish how they should proceed in catching up on missed material. Students may be granted a concession for their absence, in the case of an extended absence, by the Academic Advising Services of the Faculty of Arts.*

CLASS PARTICIPATION (CONT.): SHORT ESSAYS

Participation will be graded through Canvas "in-class" writing assignments. These assignments will be completed during class time (whether in person or asynchronous) and will take the form of short essay questions that will engage the course material, readings, and lectures of a given class session. During our class sessions, students will take 5-7 minutes of in-class time to write 150-350 words in response to a prompt. These short essays offer students the opportunity to reflect on the course material prior to participating in other activities, such as a discussion thread, and moving on to other material.

These short "in-class" short essays will not be graded for grammar, spelling, punctuation, or syntax; instead, they will be graded for completion. They thereby function as a testament to student engagement with the course material and proof of their participation in class as well as form the foundation of class discussion and project work. **The use of AI technologies for this and other assignments is strictly forbidden.**

All short essay assignments should be completed in the order they are assigned. Making up short essays after the deadline will only be possible in extenuating circumstances, and extension requests will be considered on a case-by-case basis, so please email me if you become sick and require additional accommodation.

CONTENT QUIZZES (20%):

To ensure that students are keeping up with the assigned readings and to encourage close engagement with course materials, students will complete short content quizzes on each assigned reading. These quizzes will also function as a preview for the session's discussion of the material to help reinforce student understanding of key themes, characters, and plot points, ensuring that students are prepared for online class discussions and asynchronous activities.

LEARNING JOURNAL ENTRIES + GROUP DISCUSSION (20%)

Over the course of the semester, students will write one short (350 words) Learning Journal Entry per week in response to a prompt or activity that asks them to reflect further on our course texts, films, and themes. These assignments require students to demonstrate understanding and engagement with course material in greater depth than in-class discussion by responding to one particular concept, idea, or question.

Excellent responses will consist of coherent and comprehensible short texts that engage with the topic at hand, incorporate references to readings when applicable, and synthesize class discussions with individual responses and interpretations.

Learning Journal Entries will be submitted via the assignment's Canvas Discussion Thread by Sunday at midnight (11:59 PM PT). After submitting their Learning Journal Entry, students will participate in **Small Group Discussion (in groups of 6 students)** over the course of the following week, commenting on 2-3 of their peer's Learning Journal Entries before the following Sunday at midnight (11:59 pm PT). Each comment should consist of 150 words on their fellow student's Learning Journal Entry, while adding elements of their own observations.

Citations for referencing video or in-person lectures are not required. For in-text references to readings, films, or other media, please use MLA style. Bibliographies are not required.

MIDTERM EXAM (25%):

Halfway through the term, students will be assessed on their learning. The Midterm Exam will include multiple-choice questions and two short essay questions.

FRACTURED FAIRY TALE CREATIVE PROJECT (15%):

Students will work in groups to produce a short adaptation of a popular fairy tale to the contemporary moment as their Creative Project, reconceptualizing the “moral of the story” in light of important themes, issues, and problems facing society today. By incorporating a political, social, economic, or cultural critique into the core of the fairy tale’s adaption, students will modernize one particular fairy or folk tale, shifting its narrative agenda to address something relevant to students’ lives right now. Some potential themes include social justice and human rights issues, such as BLM, Every Child Matters or forced migration, environmental issues, such as climate change or natural resource extraction, and political themes.

For Creative Projects that are to be published online through a social media platform, such as Instagram or TikTok, please provide screenshots of the account and each post in a PDF document just in case the account is disabled or I can't access it for the purposes of reviewing and grading the Creative Projects.

COURSE POLICY ON GENERATIVE AI

The use of generative artificial intelligence tools is strictly prohibited in all course assignments unless explicitly stated otherwise. This includes ChatGPT and other artificial intelligence tools and programs.

Submitting work generated by AI tools is not only a form of academic misconduct. it also misrepresents your understanding and efforts within the context of our course, which is unfair to your TAs and your peers.

It's easy to rely on AI tools when you're participating in a class that require a lot of online work, but I hope you'll trust that you're capable of this work without the assistance of technology, especially since you're here to develop critical thinking skills, broaden your understanding of the role of popular media in our lives, and deepen your engagement with it, which AI can't do for you.

Moreover, many of these assignments are part of our grading contract, which was designed to afford students the opportunity to think and learn freely while taking chances in their interpretation of the Grimms and performance of literary, visual, and media studies analysis. This approach means that there are no "wrong" answers to these low-stakes assignments, so students should feel encouraged to engage thoughtfully and creatively without concern for the impact on their grades.

Finally, writing and critical thinking are essential skills that you will continue to use throughout your academic and professional careers. Practicing these skills now will benefit you in the long run.

For the policy on AI-generated images for the Fractured Fairy Tale Creative Project, please see the assignment description on our course's Canvas site.

OUR PLAN FOR THE TERM

Week 1

Module 1

Course Introduction

Week 2-3

Module 2

Introduction to Fairy Tales

Week 3-4

Module 3

The Politics of Fairy Tales

Week 5

Module 4

The Brothers Grimm

Week 6

Module 5

The Frog King

Week 7-8

Module 6

Snow White

MIDTERM

Week 9-10

Module 7

Cinderella

Week 11

Module 8

Sleeping Beauty

Week 12

Module 9

Little Red Riding Hood

Week 13-14

Module 10

Decolonizing Disney

FRACTURED FAIRY TALE

HMM... WHAT ABOUT A MAJOR OR MINOR IN GERMAN?

There is so much to explore after German 200! Courses range from culture and film studies, to literature and historiography, philosophy and language, sexuality and gender, media, activism, and society.

Our professors are experts in fields ranging from Comics and Games studies and Queer Studies and Critical Race Theory. Our Honours students participate in community and capstone projects, including our annual undergraduate research conference and journal.

2025/26 GMST Courses



GMST 475: **Critical Approaches to Play in German Studies** (T2) (Dr. Biz Nijdam)



GMST 335: **German Cinema** (T2) (Dr. Jason Lieblang)



GMST 274: **The Frankfurt School** (T1) (Dr. Ilinca Iuraşcu)

These courses require no prerequisites. And don't worry! Many courses in UBC German (all GMST courses) are taught in English. Your new German knowledge will be a bonus!

Questions? Reach out to your instructor or to the director of undergraduate studies, Dr. Biz Nijdam, ubc.german@ubc.ca! She is a joy to be around and would love to chat with you.

You can also check out more information about courses offered this term and next on our Instagram [@ubcgermanstudies](https://www.instagram.com/ubcgermanstudies).

THE GERMAN PROGRAM HELPS YOU TO:

- Experience and contribute to our multilingual world
- Recognize how multilingual meanings impact people and processes—in complex, subtle, and profound ways
- Describe how monolingualism and linguistic nativism intersect with racism, nationalism, classism, ableism, and other forms of oppression
- Express what it means for you to be alive and human today
- Express what responsibilities you have to other people, communities, land, and ecologies
- Identify the complexities of historical, sociopolitical, and cultural processes that particularly affect German-speaking people and places

Undoing the effects of monolingualism, Anglocentrism, and linguistic nativism

- describe the means by which knowledge is made in diverse Germanophone contexts—including collaborative, historical, methodological, linguistic, social, aesthetic, creative, technological, material, and political processes
- interpret texts and narratives using various literary, linguistic, and multimodal frameworks
- help undo colonial processes of knowledge production—both those arising from Germanophone colonial modernity and in Canada's colonial past and present

Knowing—from a multilingual, Germanophone standpoint

- Speak, read, and write in German creatively and confidently, taking pride in the accents and heritage language proficiencies you came to the program with (English, German, Mandarin, Persian, Cree, etc.)
- Work across languages—through translation, interpretation, code-mixing, assistive technology, etc.
- Understand that language is constantly changing amid social and historical fluid

Enjoying using German—with confidence

Living and being alive in a volatile age

- Identify and describe how power works in the settings that matter to you and your communities
- Describe Germanophone societies' specific responsibility to redress genocide, eugenics, Nazism, colonialism, settler colonialism, and the ongoing effects of empire
- Use resources from cultural history and experiences of crisis from the 20th century and before to pursue justice and responsibility in the 21st century
- critique propaganda, linguistic deceit, obfuscation, linguistic racism, elitism, authoritarianism, hate, exclusionary purism, and various forms of fascism in linguistic, visual, and symbolic form

Aiming for planetary justice & public responsibility

- Strive to comprehend beyond your own personal experience and standpoint, through processes of listening, reflecting, conceptualization, analysis, and translation
- View knowledge and language as a commons, rather than a possession
- Identify the difference between the use of language and knowledge to manipulate or gain power over others, and the use of language to uplift and nourish others
- Identify how your experiences shape you differently than do those of a person of another gender, sexuality, race, religion, background, immigration status, ethnicity, language, accent, embodiment, age, language, and worldview

Modelling intellectual humility



UBC POLICIES AND HELPFUL RESOURCES:

The following policies and procedures are considered part of the class syllabus and policy. Feel free to talk them over with your instructor!

[Applying for Academic Concession](#)

[UBC's Academic Honesty & Standards](#)

[UBC's Communicable Disease Prevention Framework](#)

[Resources to Support Student Success](#)

[Accommodations for Religious Holidays and Days of Significance](#)

[Using Online Student Guidelines for Respectful Online Conduct](#)

[Use of Electronic Devices at UBC](#)

[Center for Accessibility: Support for Disabled Students](#)

UBC Calendar Entry for this course:

"Competence and fluency in everyday situations; ability to report and narrate past events fluently and to express opinions; familiarity with contemporary issues in the German-speaking societies."

