This course combines the disciplinary approaches of intellectual history (Professor Wolff) and medical humanities (Professor Klass) to offer a new way of thinking about the relation between texts and ideas. Just as the fundamental texts of the humanities, dating back to the Renaissance in Europe (and even further in East Asia and the Middle East) have generated new ideas about childhood, those ideas have also produced new texts—medical and pediatric texts—that have further elaborated on the understanding of childhood in different cultural contexts. Intellectual history brings the historian’s sense of social context to bear upon the evolution of ideas, and the medical humanities brings the physician’s understanding of the human body to bear upon changing ideas about health and development. This course stresses the importance of both cultural and medical texts for thinking about ideas of childhood, and attempts to explore how ideas about ourselves—the human subject—both shape and are shaped by the social forms and facts of childhood across cultures and across centuries.

How are children and childhood viewed in different texts from different cultures and centuries? To whom do children really belong—the parents, the state, the world? Whose responsibility is it to educate, feed, and care for children? Is a child a “blank slate” or a prepackaged set of emotions, intellectual abilities, and behaviors? This course emphasizes historical, medical, and cultural perspectives on childhood, exploring common themes and cultural variations, as reflected in literary texts and artistic representations in America, Europe, and China: Confucian analects, Italian European Renaissance painting, Montaigne’s essays, John Locke’s philosophy, Rousseau’s educational ideals, English Romantic poetry, German Romantic Lieder, Freud on the dynamics of childhood, parenting advice texts from classical Chinese pediatrics to Dr. Spock and children's literature texts from Puritan tracts to Dr. Seuss. We will explore the
history, medicine, and sociology of childhood, including issues of infant and child mortality, education and pedagogy, child labor, children in cities, children and war, and the changing historical nature of the family in China, America, the Middle East, and Europe with a particular focus on Italy as the site at which the course will be taught. Every society cares deeply about its children, but every society cares for its children differently. This global examination of children will employ texts from around the world to discuss common themes and cultural variations. We will discuss education and health in global perspective, looking at children in the urban world of the 21st century, with museum trips and a visit to the Ospedale degli Innocenti (one of Europe’s first foundling homes for abandoned children). Each student will report to the class on some particular theme of childhood, using texts in comparative cultural perspective, and this class will provide a unique opportunity for students to think about texts and ideas, with different ideas, textually expressed, shaping different ways of thinking historically and culturally about childhood and human development.

INSTRUCTOR DETAILS:
Larry Wolff, Professor of History
Executive Director, Remarque Institute
Co-Director, NYU Florence

Perri Klass, MD, Professor of Journalism and Pediatrics
Co-Director, NYU Florence

EMAIL:

DESIZED OUTCOMES:

Students who successfully complete this course will be able to:

Describe and analyze changing cultural and historical views of childhood, parent-child relations, and the role of children in society based on the interpretation of texts and artistic representations.

Critically examine the depiction of children in art, fiction, movies, advertising, and memoirs in cultural and historical context.
Reflect in written and oral form on encounters with families, professionals, and institutions providing care, services, and entertainment to children.

Analyze essential textual representations and social indicators of child health and well-being.

Analyze comparative cultural perspectives on childhood and education. Consider the relation between social structure, literary texts, and artistic representations, with reference to childhood.

Critically examine in comparative ways the impact of socioeconomic factors, cultural practices, and policy on child nutrition, child literacy, and child health.

ASSESSMENT COMPONENTS:
1. Regular attendance; completion of all the assigned readings; active participation in class discussions. (20% of final grade)
2. Eight short journal entries (1 or 2 pages each) on assigned texts, films, field trips, or personal experiences. Due Monday night before class by 10 pm, as assigned, throughout the course. Journal response papers due September 9, September 16, September 23, September 30, October 7, October 21, November 11, November 18 (25%)
3. One essay or article (3 or 4 pages), discussing one of the class texts in relation to experiences and observations in Italy, set in the context of what you have learned about childhood in Europe. Due October 23 at 5 pm. (10%)
4. One short research project and presentation (8 to 10 pages) concerning some aspect of childhood discussed in the texts for the course, considered in comparative cultural perspective, and using some additional materials. Reflect on some of the historical, cultural, journalistic, and medical perspectives on childhood based on the texts that have been studied in this course. To be presented on Friday November 27. (20%)
5. Students will receive feedback on journal entries and more general feedback concerning class participation and written work; individual conferences and workshop sessions will help students develop ideas for their projects.
6. There will be a final exam with essay questions during the exam week. (25%)

ASSESSMENT EXPECTATIONS:
- Grade A: The student’s work demonstrates an understanding of the subject that goes beyond assigned course readings. The student writes essays/exam questions that are an original synthesis of source materials, demonstrating the ability to evaluate source material critically. Written arguments are clear, well-organized and well-presented; oral presentations are concise, incisive and supplemented by appropriate visual materials. The student has distinguished himself/herself throughout the course of the semester for his/her contributions to class discussion.
- Grade B: The student’s work shows a clear understanding of assigned readings and materials covered in class. The student writes clear, well-organized and
well-presented essays/exam questions; oral presentations are concise, incisive and supplemented by appropriate visual materials. The student is prepared in class and asks relevant questions.

- Grade C: The student’s work shows a basic understanding of the subject treated in assigned readings and covered in class. However, written and/or oral work is deficient in one or more of the following areas: clarity, organization or content. The student’s work is generally in need of improvement.

- Grade D: The student’s work shows occasional understanding of the subject treated in assigned readings and covered in class. Written and/or oral work is deficient in one or more of the follow areas: clarity, organization or content. The student does not participate in class discussion and has not frequented the instructor’s office hours.

- Grade F: The student’s work does not demonstrate understanding of the subject treated in assigned readings and covered in class. Written and/or oral work are either insufficient or are not submitted. The student appears unprepared in class and has not frequented the instructor’s office hours.

Grading Policy:
Please refer to Assessment Expectations and the policy on late submission of work

Academic Accommodations:
Academic accommodations are available for students with documented disabilities. Please contact the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities at 212-998-4980 or see the Moses Center for further information.

Students with disabilities who believe that they may need accommodations in a class are encouraged to contact the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities at (212) 998-4980 as soon as possible to better ensure that such accommodations are implemented in a timely fashion. For more information, see Study Away and Disability.

Attendance Policy:
Study abroad at Global Academic Centers is an academically intensive and immersive experience, in which students from a wide range of backgrounds exchange ideas in discussion-based seminars. Learning in such an environment depends on the active participation of all students. And since classes typically meet once or twice a week, even a single absence can cause a student to miss a significant portion of a course. To ensure the integrity of this academic experience, class attendance at the centers is mandatory, and unexcused absences will be penalized with a two percent deduction from the student’s final course grade. Students are responsible for making up any work missed due to absence. Repeated absences in a course may result in failure.

For courses that meet once a week, one unexcused absence will be penalized by a two percent deduction from the student’s final course grade. For courses that meet two or more times a week, the same penalty will apply to the number of class times over a single week.
Excused Absences:
In case of absence, regardless of the reason, the student is responsible for completing missed assignments, getting notes and making up missed work in a timely manner based upon a schedule that is mutually agreed upon between the faculty member and the student. The only excused absences are those approved by the Office of Academic Support; they are as follows:

**Absence Due to Illness**
- If you are sick, please see a doctor. Contact the Office of Student Life for assistance.
- For absences that last for two or more consecutive days, a doctor’s certificate, “certificato medico” is required. The doctor will indicate in writing the number of days of bed rest required. Please note these certificates can only be obtained on the day you see the doctor and cannot be written for you afterwards.
- Absences can ONLY be excused if they are reported WITHIN 48 HRS of your return to class via the online [NYU Florence Absence Form](#).
- OAS will not accept a student email or telephone call regarding an absence due to illness.
- OAS will only notify faculty of absences REPORTED on the ABSENCE FORM.
- The Office of Student Life, when assisting you in cases of severe or extended illness, will coordinate with the Office of Academic Support to properly record your absences.

**Due to Religious Observance**
- Students observing a religious holiday during regularly scheduled class time are entitled to miss class without any penalty to their grade. This is for the holiday only and does not include the days of travel that may come before and/or after the holiday.
- Information regarding absences due to religious observance must be provided at least SEVEN DAYS PRIOR to the date(s) in question using the online [NYU Florence Absence Form](#).

- Please note that no excused absences for reasons other than illness can be applied retroactively.

**Due to a class conflict with a program sponsored lecture, event, or activity**
- All students are entitled to miss one class period without any penalty to their grade in order to attend a lecture, event or activity that is sponsored by the academic program.
● Information regarding absences due to a class conflict must be provided at least SEVEN DAYS PRIOR to the date(s) in question using the online NYU Florence Absence Form
● Please note that no excused absences for reasons other than illness can be applied retroactively.

Students with questions or needing clarification about this policy are instructed to contact a member of the Office of Academic Support located in Villa Ulivi or to email florence.academicsupport@nyu.edu

Late Submission of Work [Please use this standard text]
● All course work must be submitted on time, in class on the date specified on the syllabus.
● To request an extension on a deadline for an assignment, students must speak to the professor one week prior to the due date.
● To receive an incomplete for a course at the end of the semester, two weeks before final exams, both the student and the faculty member must meet with the Assistant Director of Academic Affairs to review the request and if granted, they must both sign an Incomplete Contract detailing the terms for completing missing coursework.

Plagiarism Policy
PLAGIARISM WILL NOT BE TOLERATED IN ANY FORM:
The presentation of another person’s words, ideas, judgment, images or data as though they were your own, whether intentionally or unintentionally, constitutes an act of plagiarism.

In the event of suspected or confirmed cases of plagiarism, the faculty member will consult first with the Assistant Director for Academic Affairs as definitions and procedures vary from school to school.

Writing Center:
The Writing Center, located in Villa Ulivi, offers you feedback on any type of writing, at any stage in planning or drafting; very rough drafts are welcome. Sign up for a consultation at the Writing Center’s website and submit your working draft or ideas at least six hours in advance to NYU Florence Writing Center. You can drop in for a consultation M-Th, but remember that appointments are given priority. Please also note that the Writing Center does not correct or “fix” your writing but prompts you to think and work. The aim is to create stronger writers in the long term, not necessarily perfect papers in the short term.

PRINCIPAL READINGS: TO BE READ IN SUBSTANTIAL PART OR ENTIRE
Peter Stearns, *Childhood in World History* (available as ebook)
Elena Ferrante, *My Brilliant Friend*
Marjane Satrapi, *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood*
Carlo Collodi, *Pinocchio*

Copies of each textbook are available for consultation and short term loans in the [Villa Ulivi Library](#). Extra copies of some textbooks are also available for semester long loans.

**SOME BOOKS TO BE READ IN EXCERPTS—POSTED ON NYU CLASSES**
- Rousseau, *Emile*
- Mme de Sevigné, *Letters*
- Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*
- Larry Wolff, *Paolina’s Innocence: Child Abuse in Casanova’s Venice*
- Jian Ping, *Mulberry Child: A Memoir of China*
- Giovanni Boccacio, “Griselda” (14th Century)
- Loris Malaguzzi, *Loris Malaguzzi and the Schools of Reggio Emilia*
- *The Museo degli Innocenti*, ed. Filipponi, Mazzocchi, Sebregondi
- Pier Paolo Pasolini, *The Ragazzi*
- JM Barrie, *Peter Pan*
- Richard Wright, *Black Boy*
- Maya Angelou, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*
- Henry Louis Gates and Maria Tatar, *Annotated African-American Folktales*
- Elizabeth Fernea, *Remembering Childhood in the Middle East*
- Plus additional short texts, excerpts, articles, poems, and musical selections

**FILMS:** Weijun Chen, *Please Vote for Me*
- Vittorio De Sica, *Bicycle Thieves*
- Walt Disney, *Pinocchio*

**TRIPS:** Villa La Pietra Collection
- Ospedale degli Innocenti/UNICEF
- Uffizi Museum

**WEEK ONE: September 8**
Introduction to the course. We will discuss the main themes of the course and the principal issues for thinking critically about childhood in society. We’ll discuss some basic texts for thinking about children in history, and some of the fundamental ideas for the history of childhood. We will stress the importance of correlating social structure with systematic thought and the history of ideas. Images from the history of childhood. We will discuss history of childhood by looking at images of how children have been represented in art and culture, and how those representations have changed over the course of the last 500 years.

**WEEK TWO: September 15**
Childhood in the Italian Renaissance. We will discuss the particular context of Florentine for evolving ideas about childhood, making use of textual material and artistic works from the Florentine and Italian Renaissance. We will consider the idea of a “discovery” of childhood taking place during the Renaissance, and will particularly discuss the emergence of children’s portraits in the fifteenth and sixteenth century. images of how children have been represented in art and culture, and how those representations have changed over the course of the last 500 years.

MUSEUM VISIT: Villa La Pietra, Collection, Images of Childhood

READING:


Montaigne, essay on “The Affection of Fathers for their Children”

(Stanford pp. 278-293)

Peter Stearns *Childhood in World History*, chapters 1 and 2

*Chinese Classic of Filial Piety* (Xiao Jing), ac. 400 BC  (first 4 pages)

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WEEK THREE: September 22

Childhood and Politics. We will discuss the effects of huge revolutionary social transformations on family structure and how overarching social and political systems produced new ideas about childhoods.

READING:

Marjane Satrapi, *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood*

Jian Ping, *Mulberry Child: A Memoir of China* (chapters 8 and 9)

European Commission, “The 2019 country-specific recommendations on child and family policy”:

https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=89&furtherNews=yes&langId=en&nwsId=9466

“Dear Mrs. Roosevelt: Cries for Help from Depression Youth”

http://www.socialstudies.org/sites/default/files/publications/se/6005/600505.html

“A Child in the Hitler Youth”


FILM: Please Vote for Me (2007)

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WEEK FOUR: September 29

Global child health: an introduction. We will review some of the basic ideas about children’s health and how “health” is understood as a concept across cultures. We will
consider the indicators used to track child health and well-being over time and to compare countries and cultures around the world. We will discuss basic concepts of pediatrics and child development. We will review important cultural, nutritional, health, and safety practices which have major impacts on child health. We will also review some of the changes in children’s health and mortality over different centuries in global history. We will consider textual representations of sick children and childhood mortality.

Josephine Baker, from *Fighting for Life* (excerpt)
Black et. al. “Reproductive, Maternal, Newborn, and Child Health” (2016)
Atul Gawande, “Medical Dispatch: The Mop-Up” (New Yorker)
Klass, “Coronavirus Vaccine Dreams”
https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/16/well/family/coronavirus-vaccine.html
Klass, “Hoping for a Covid Vaccine and Recalling the One for Smallpox”
Sean Fleming, “Cash for Babies: How Europe is Tackling its Falling Birthrate”
“China’s Two-Child Policy” (2020), Washington Post

WEEK FIVE: October 6
Philosophy of Modern Childhood. This class will discuss the most influential Western philosopher of childhood, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and his famous eighteenth-century study of childhood, *Emile*. We will then consider how this influenced modern ideas about childhood in Europe and America, and how those ideas both differed from and resembled ideas about children and childhood in other societies and other religious systems, including Confucian philosophical ideas about childhood in China. We consider how ideas shape society, and how social contexts condition the articulation of ideas.

Stearns, Chapters 3 and 4
Locke, excerpt pp. 21-42, from *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*
Rousseau, *Emile*, Book 1 (Basic, pp. 37-74)

WEEK SIX: October 13
Child care and education. Building on the previous discussion of ideas about pedagogy in Europe, America, and China, we will discuss contemporary debates and issues of child care and education. We will discuss the role of the state in different political systems, and how different states establish and implement their educational priorities. We’ll discuss the impact on educational systems of recent ideas in psychology and early brain research.

READING:
Maria Montessori, excerpt from *The Absorbent Mind*
A.S. Neill, excerpt from *Summerhill: A Radical Approach to Child Rearing*
Hernandez, “China Tries to Redistribute Education” (NY Times)
https://www.nytimes.com/2016/06/12/world/asia/china-higher-education-for-the-poor-protests.html
Elisabeth Rosenthal, “Testing, the Chinese Way” (NY Times)
Peter Stearns, *Childhood in World History*, chapters 5 and 6

**WEEK SEVEN: October 20**

Education and Society in 20th-century Italy. This week focuses on the contemporary classic of Italian literature, *My Brilliant Friend*, set in the context of postwar Italian literature and culture, with an emphasis on Italian ideas about education.

FILM: Vittorio De Sica, *Bicycle Thieves* (1948)

**READING:**

Elena Ferrante, *My Brilliant Friend*, Chapter 1-17 (up to page 155)

**WEEK EIGHT: October 27**

Children’s food and nutrition: historical and contemporary. This class will discuss basic texts in the history of child nutrition. Issues explored will include the history of nursing, infant food practices, malnutrition and obesity, the recent controversy on bottle feeding in the developing world as a medical, political, and journalistic phenomenon. How are ideas about eating and nutrition affected by social and economic factors in different societies and systems? How do basic texts reflect children’s and family’s concerns with food?

**READING:**

“The nurse, a poem. Translated from the Italian of Luigi Tansillo” By William Roscoe (poem 1534, translation 1798), excerpt

Betty Smith, excerpt from *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*

The Brothers Grimm, “Hansel and Gretel,” “Little Red Cap,” “The Juniper Tree”


Klass, “Do Parents Make Kids Fat?” (NY Times)

Bull & Willumsen, “Evidence to Prevent Childhood Obesity” (2019)

**WEEK NINE: November 3**

This class will focus on debates about the nature of childhood, the socialization of children, the role of children in the modern family, and the relation of children to political life in modern society. Through issues of memory and the texts of memoirs, we will consider how individual childhoods reflect prevailing social and cultural circumstances.
READING:

Freud “The Oedipus Complex” (Dreams of the Death) (excerpt)

Madame de Sevigné, Letters (excerpt)

Richard Wright, Black Boy (excerpt)

Maya Angelou, I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings (excerpt)

WEEK TEN: November 10

Parents and Children: historical and contemporary. We will discuss historical and literary texts that reflect the relations between parents and children across the centuries. Issues to be discussed include discipline and affection, the structure of family life, changing patterns of family size, sibling relations, and the extended multi-generational family. We will discuss the controversy over the “tiger mother” in contemporary American journalism. We will be particularly focused on how the social structuring of childhood within the family has been diversely developed and represented within different cultures, and we will consider basic texts that shaped and reflected the relations between parents and children.

READING:
Peter Stearns, chapters 9 an 13, "The Dilemma of Children's Happiness" and these short articles:
"Retreat of the 'Tiger Mother,' by Kate Zernike

"Who Is to Blame When a Child Wanders at the Zoo?" by K.J. Dell'Antonia
Be sure to check out the comments!

Perri Klass
"How Spoiled are Our Children? No Simple Answer"
"Parents, Stop Feeling that Everything You Do is Wrong"
WEEK ELEVEN: November 17

This week focuses on texts that elucidate the “discovery” of child welfare, child poverty, child abuse, and the social determinants of health. Discussion of the crucial United Nations text on Millennium Goals for children: how do international organizations or national governments attempt to set goals for the improvement of child welfare in the modern world? We will talk about UNICEF and WHO efforts ranging from clean water to literacy, and also about government programs from immunization to higher education.

READING:

Wolff, Paolina's Innocence, pp. 1-44, 141-52, 213-21

Wolff, The Battered Child Syndrome: 50 Years Later, Huffington Post
https://www.huffpost.com/entry/battered-child-syndrome_b_2406348

articles by Perri Klass
"Bedtime Stories for Young Brains," NYT 8/17/15
"The Merits of Reading Real Books to Your Children," NYT 8/8/16
"Screen Use Tied to Children's Brain Development," NYT 11/4/19

WEEK TWELVE: November 24

Children’s literacy and children’s literature. We will discuss the history of literacy over the last five centuries, and the history of reading. We will then discuss the struggle to combat illiteracy in the contemporary world, comparing campaigns undertaken in different countries and under different political systems, and considering the different challenges of learning to read in alphabetic and character-based systems. We will then discuss the emergence and development of children’s literature.

FILM: Pinocchio (Disney, 1940)
READING:
Barrie, *Peter Pan*, just selection on NYU Classes (opening 4 chapters plus final chapter)

Collodi *Pinocchio*, only chapters 1-10 (on Classes)

Twain, *Tom Sawyer*, only chapters 1 and 2; at this site: https://www.gutenberg.org/files/74/74-h/74-h.htm#c1

Burnett, *Secret Garden*, only chapters 12, 13, and 14 (whole book is available through NYU Classes)


WEEK THIRTEEN: Friday November 27 (MAKE UP TUESDAY)
Adolescence. We will discuss the historical evolution of ideas about adolescence and the way the concept was represented in literature and discussed in classical texts.
READING: Pasolini, *The Ragazzi* (excerpt)
Margaret Mead, *Coming of Age in Samoa* (excerpt)
Mozart, *The Marriage of Figaro*, selection
FILM: Pinocchio

WEEK FOURTEEN: Tuesday, December 1
What have we learned? Presentations

FINAL EXAM

Classroom Etiquette

- We will all be masked and distanced in the classroom.
- Eating is not permitted in the classroom.
- Cell phones should be turned off during class time.
- We recycle! So keep it green! Please dispose of trash in the clearly marked recycle bins located throughout the on campus buildings

Suggested Co-curricular Activities
Suggested optional co-curricular activities will be announced in class and/or via email by the professor throughout the semester

TEACHING METHODOLOGIES
Combining the perspectives of intellectual history and medical humanities to provide a new perspective on children and childhood and a new approach to thinking about texts and ideas.

Whole-group discussions focused on assigned readings, with individual students taking responsibility for preparing and leading discussions on readings of particular interest.

Focused lecture presentations including historical overview, images and art history perspectives, basic public health concepts, contemporary public issues concerning children and childhood.

Whole-group discussion following films, trips, and outside speakers.

Short student presentations throughout the course on topics of individual interest--may be linked to the readings or to students’ personal experience.

Review and analysis of readings, field trips, and films building on brief journal entries and observations.