

The Master of Arts in Liberal Arts and Sciences  
MALAS MA Comprehensive Exam | August 9, 2013

*The MALAS Comprehensive MA Exam questions allow students to demonstrate their familiarity with the specific works on the reading lists they have developed in conjunction with their faculty field advisors. As MALAS is an interdisciplinary studies program, graduate students should attempt to address phenomena in ways that demonstrate their mastery of ideas, theories, methods, and conventions associated with more than one field. Although students preparing for the exam will be encouraged to read as much of the relevant criticism as is feasible, they will not be held specifically responsible for knowing any particular criticism of individual works; that said, showing familiarity in the responses with dominant critical debates in and across fields is welcome.*

## Grading Guidelines

### I. Distinction: A superior exam

- is a clearly focused response to the topic in fluent, dynamic prose
- is well-organized and well-developed
- has unified and coherent paragraphs
- incorporates specific and appropriate references to texts that were part of the graduate students' MA exam list.
- demonstrates the graduate students' command with the subject matter in more than one specific discipline—in other words, the student shows strong familiarity with the material in ways that demonstrate a distinctive command of interdisciplinary studies and/or cultural studies protocols, practices, and traditions.

### 2. Pass: An adequate exam

- demonstrates a thoughtful response to the topic within an overall plan, even if the treatment of some points is only perfunctory
- logically develops ideas in ordered paragraphs
- may have lapses in providing transitions
- may occasionally rely on unsupported assertions and generalizations.
- demonstrates the graduate students' familiarity with the subject matter in more than one specific discipline.

### 3. Fail: An inadequate exam

- discusses the topic only generally or does not directly respond to the topic
- does not follow a reasonable or appropriate pattern of development
- lacks specific textual support for assertions and generalizations
- fails to develop appropriate examples
- demonstrates no command of the subject matter in more than one specific discipline.

Comprehensive Exam Reading List | Master of Arts  
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**AREA I** | Children in Survival Literature  
SUPERVISOR | ALIDA ALLISON

*Island of the Blue Dolphins*  
Scott O'Dell

*The Cay*  
Theodore Taylor

*Hatchet*  
Gary Paulsen

*My Side of the Mountain*  
Jean Craighead George

*Julie of the Wolves*  
Jean Craighead George

*Life of Pi*  
Yann Martel

**AREA I** | Wildlife Conservation  
SUPERVISOR: PAM FOX

*Loss of Biodiversity*  
Sharon L. Spray & Karen L. McGlothlin

*Hope for Animals and Their World:  
How Endangered Species Are Being  
Rescued from the Brink*  
Jane Goodall

*The Future of Life*  
Edward O. Wilson

*100 Heartbeats: The Race to Save Earth's  
Most Endangered Species*  
Jeff Corwin

*Life in the Balance:  
Humanity and the Biodiversity Crisis*  
Niles Eldredge

**AREA III** | Environmental Themes in  
Children's Picture Books and Films  
SUPERVISOR | WILLIAM NERICCIO

*The Great Kapok Tree*  
Lynne Cherry

*A River Ran Wild: An Environmental History*  
Lynne Cherry

*The Lorax*  
Dr. Seuss

*The Giving Tree*  
Shel Silverstein

*The Wump World*  
Bill Peet

*FernGully: The Last Rainforest*  
20th Century Fox

WALL-E  
Disney/Pixar

*Pocahontas*  
Disney

*Happy Feet*  
Warner Bros.

*The Rescuers Down Under*  
Disney

*Advocating Environmentalism: The Voice of Nature  
in Contemporary Children's Literature*  
Jennifer A. Wagner-Lawlor

*Overcoming "Ecophobia": Fostering Environmental  
Empathy Through Narrative in Children's Science  
Literature*  
Diane M. McKnight

*Children's Environmental Literature:  
From Ecocriticism to Ecopedagogy*  
Greta Gaard

*Movements That Are Drawn: A History of  
Environmental Animation from The Lorax to  
FernGully to Avatar*  
Nicole Starosielski

## COMPREHENSIVE EXAM

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Friday, August 9, 2013

Exam Question I: CHILDREN IN SURVIVAL LITERATURE, 8:30am to 10:20 am

You MAY, if you wish, use a laptop today, however, all connections to wi-fi **MUST BE DISABLED**--I have a thumb-drive to ferry your finished responses to my own workstation for printing. If your laptop does not have a USB-compatible port, you will be allowed to log-on to SDSU wi-fi at the end of each session to zap your responses to me (memo@sdsu.edu) for printing. You are also welcome to bring a blue book and several pens/markers. This is a closed-book, no notes examination—do not consult any other files on your laptop or in your possession during the exam.

RESPOND TO **ONE** OF THE TWO FOLLOWING PROMPTS:

1. The dearth of contemporary stories for children about or in nature has been remarked upon by many critics. Indeed, the majority of books in the reading list for this section of your exam are from earlier decades. Only one, *Life of Pi*, is 21st century. Yet, in Martel's novel, the protagonist is, notably, without modern technological devices and must therefore rely on his personal resources the same as the other protagonists on your reading list.

In these survival stories, parents and adults in general are typically absent. Survival depends solely on the child/ teenager—or does it? While nurture does help in several cases in which the protagonist is already acquainted with nature, some are more prepared than others, yet each draws upon some kind of external aid to overcome, or at least ameliorate, the situation they are in.

Discuss three novels in which the preparation of the main character differs and explain how these differences play out in various stages of the survival experience. How do the protagonists come to realize the need for and then incorporate the external helper into his/her survival?

2. Karana and Julie wind up isolated from their families and communities for different reasons, yet their gender plays a crucial role in their ability to survive. Discuss the genesis of their having to survive on their own and the decisions they must make to stay alive, even at the cost of breaking taboos. Then discuss a male protagonist of your choice. Contrast the genesis of his isolation to the women's. Does he have similar societal restraints to his ability to survive? Finally, discuss the outcomes of the stories. Having survived, do the protagonists find different receptions upon their return and why?

## COMPREHENSIVE EXAM

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Friday, August 9, 2013

Exam Question II "Gender Play & Programming: Identity Politics and the Indoctrination of Children", 10am to 11:50am

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RESPOND TO ONE OF THE FOLLOWING PROMPTS:

QUESTION 1: Judith Butler said gender is a performance influenced by culture. How do your seven (7) theorists (writing as individuals: Orenstein; Smith; Schor; Eliot; Kane; or as a team: two women, Lamb/Brown; two men, Kindlon/Thompson) propose to combat the marketing/commercialization of gender in boys and girls? We know the problems, but what are the specific solutions, both short- and long-term in allowing American culture to accommodate a more broad spectrum of gender potential? What will you do as a mother, and as an activist in your community to put into practice the theories you have read about in this reading list?

OR

QUESTION 2: Cultural instability and economic turmoil bordering on anarchy would result from rampant individualism. We must teach boys and girls how to behave properly because telling young children “anything goes” and “just be yourself” is too confusing, and they may only end up being made in the image of (indoctrinated by) the well-intentioned reformer. Indoctrination (marketing, packaging, commercializing) is essential in a capitalist democracy to ensure a stable social contract that perpetuates a status quo. Either way, indoctrination will come in some form: from the conservatives (saying gender is fixed) or the reformers (saying gender is fluid). It is impossible for anyone to truly be an individual.

Consider the above statements and based on your seven (7) theorists, address the following: Is it really possible to avoid indoctrination from either end of the spectrum: from those who view gender as essential (as innate, encoded DNA from birth that determines whether a boy or girl acts masculine or feminine) or constructed (acculturated, learned, performed, artificially adopted because of environment)? What makes one side more right than the other?

COMPREHENSIVE EXAM

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Exam Question III: HYPER MASCULINE MASS MEDIA IDEOLOGY OF BLACK MALES,  
12noon-1:50pm

You MAY, if you wish, use a laptop today, however, all connections to wi-fi **MUST BE DISABLED** --I have a thumb-drive to ferry your finished responses to my own workstation for printing. If your laptop does not have a USB-compatible port, you will be allowed to log-on to SDSU wi-fi at the end of each session to zap your responses to me (memo@sdsu.edu) for printing. You are also welcome to bring a blue book and several pens/markers. This is a closed-book, no notes examination—do not consult any other files on your laptop or in your possession during the exam.

CHOOSE ONE OF THE TWO FOLLOWING PROMPTS:

Choose one of the two following prompts:

1. In your research for this exam you have studied a hyper-masculine mass media ideology of black male reading list. Based on this scholarship, analyze one critical issue currently defining the field. As you articulate theorists and theories on this topic, you should also clearly convey in your essay your own critical position on the topic.

OR

2. The reading and film list focuses on hyper-masculine mass media ideology of black males. Arguably, this scholarship is itself a “gendered conversation” or one that focuses specifically on black male identity construction in media. Is there not an implicit – perhaps at least symbiotic – relationship between black male hyper-masculinity and black female hyper-femininity construction in mass media ideology? In short, what is the relationship (if any) between the categories of hyper-masculinity and hyper-femininity among the “black sexes” in mass culture/media ideology? In addition to issues of race and sex, how might issues of class and power contribute to this conversation?