

T ♦ H ♦ E
ALAN
REVIEW

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ABOUT THE ALAN REVIEW. The ALAN Review is a peer-reviewed (refereed) journal published by the Assembly on Literature for Adolescents of the National Council of Teachers of English. It is devoted solely to the field of literature for adolescents. It is published three times per academic year (fall, winter, and spring) and is sent to all members, individual and institutional, of ALAN (The Assembly on Literature for Adolescents of NCTE). Members of ALAN need not be members of NCTE.

THE ALAN REVIEW publishes reviews of and articles on literature for adolescents and the teaching of that literature: research studies, papers presented at professional meetings, surveys of the literature, critiques of the literature, articles about authors, comparative studies across genre and/or cultures, articles on ways to teach the literature to adolescents, and interviews of authors.

AUDIENCE. Many of the individual members of ALAN are classroom teachers of English in middle, junior, and senior high schools. Other readers include university faculty members in English and/or Education programs, researchers in the field of adolescent literature, librarians, authors, publishers, reading teachers and teachers of other related content areas. ALAN has members in all 50 states and a number of foreign countries.

PREFERRED STYLE. Manuscripts should usually be no longer than fifteen double spaced, typed pages. A manuscript submitted for consideration should deal specifically with literature for adolescents and/or the teaching of that literature. It should have a **clearly defined topic** and be scholarly in content, as well as **practical and useful** to people working with and/or studying adolescents and their literature. Research studies and papers should be treated as **articles rather than formal reports**. Stereotyping on the basis of sex, race, age, etc., should be avoided, as should gender specific terms such as "chairman."

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Include a self-addressed stamped envelope to which return stamps are clipped. The manuscript cannot be returned if the envelope and stamps are not included. Articles submitted only by facsimile or e-mail cannot be considered, except when sent from overseas.

REVIEW PROCESS. Each manuscript will receive a blind review by the editor and at least two members of the editorial review board, unless the length, style, or content makes it inappropriate for publication. Usually, authors should expect to hear the results within eight weeks.

Manuscripts are judged for the contribution they make to the field of adolescent literature, clarity and cohesiveness, timeliness, and freshness of approach. Selection also depends on the manuscript's contribution to the overall balance of the journal.

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Upon publication, the author will receive two copies of *The ALAN Review* in which the article appears. Publication usually occurs within 18 months of acceptance.

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DEADLINES. Please follow these deadlines if you wish to have your article considered for a particular issue of *The ALAN Review*:

FALL ISSUE Deadline: JULY 15

WINTER ISSUE Deadline: OCTOBER 15

SPRING ISSUE Deadline: MARCH 15

Please note that the journal will be organized to reflect the following focus in each issue, but that the focus will not restrict attention to other issues:

Fall Issue: Authors, Issues, and Concerns in YA Literature for High School Readers

Winter Issue: Authors, Issues, and Concerns in YA Literature for Middle School Readers

Spring Issue: Authors, Issues, and Concerns in Using YA Literature for Interdisciplinary Instruction

A Note from the Editor

For most of us, winter is giving way to spring about now. It is an appropriate time for us to think about changes, not only in the natural world, but in our profession, too. We mourn the passing of Robert Cormier, who helped raise young adult literature from its infancy, through its own awkward adolescence, into its adulthood. But we also celebrate the influence he has had on readers and writers, the indelible signature on the genre and its readers that he has left us. The essays by John H. Ritter, John S. Simmons, and ReLeah Lent and Gloria Pipkin that introduce this issue are a tribute to the impact of Robert Cormier. I believe that they speak beautifully for the many varied voices of ALAN.

In addition to these tributes, the issue is graced with the voices of four authors whose books are reaching adolescents and their teachers in powerful ways. Rod Philbrick, best known among us for *Freak the Mighty*, discusses what he learns from often blunt and amusing letters and comments that he receives from readers across the country. Ann Turner shares her poignant and inspiring personal story regarding the experiences that are presented through the poems of *Learning to Swim*. Jack Gantos talks about the sources of his stories, and about his life as a writer for kids and teens, in an engaging interview with Gail Gregg. Martha Brooks urges us to think about the impact that adults have on adolescents' lives, and to take our responsibilities to them seriously, as she discusses her life and art in the print version of her ALAN Workshop presentation—a presentation that left the crowd of 300 literally speechless at its conclusion.

Also in this issue, we learn from colleagues about new ways of viewing some familiar and some less known YA books. Mary McNulty discusses the roles of females in adolescent novels set in the middle ages. In a piece that resonates with the essay by poet Ann Turner, junior high school teacher Kathy Cline suggests a framework for reading YA novels that deal with the theme of resiliency and survival. Middle school teacher Elizabeth Mascia demonstrates how we might read *Holes* with an eye toward traditions in folklore, an idea that complements the

article by media specialist Diane Tuccillo, who, along with the teen readers with whom she works at Mesa Public Library, proposes the reading of fairy tales for today's adolescents. Kathy Bucher and M. Lee Manning help readers who aren't convinced that they like science fiction to look at it from a different perspective. Jim Charles uses the novels of Virginia Driving Sneve at the center of his argument that we give more attention to literature by American Indian writers in our middle and high school curricula. Jean Dimmit explains a new Printz literary award, then discusses the merits of the books that were recognized with the inaugural awards. And Jeff Kaplan and his team provide us with enticing reviews of recently-published young adult books, perhaps helping us begin to think about our summer reading lists. It is an issue that is rich in resources and authors' voices. I think you will enjoy it.



Pamela Sissi Carroll

To close, I would like to note another sign of change in the field of young adult literature. Ted Hipple has chosen to step down from the post of ALAN Executive Secretary, a position that he has held for 18 years. I doubt that there is anyone who has attended an ALAN Breakfast or Workshop in November who has not had at least a quick conversation with our gregarious leader; he has always been easy to identify: the man with the wild tie, orange mesh book bag, and handful of breakfast tickets. But more, he has been easy to identify as one of the nation's strongest proponents of young adult literature and of the fact that the genre belongs in classrooms and school libraries, as well as in bookstores and public collections. Ted has had an enormously positive impact of those of us who work in the field of young adult literature. He has taught us to take our work as teachers and researchers and media specialists seriously, but also to laugh at ourselves; he has reminded us to enjoy and respect adolescents as thinkers and as humans. He has pointed us toward great writers for young people, and encouraged us to continually search for and publicize emerging talents. As an ALAN member, I would like to thank Ted—for all of his work on our behalf.

ROBERT CORMIER

1925 - November 2000

Novels for adults:

Now and at the Hour (1960)
A Little Raw on Monday Morning (1963)
Take Me Where the Good Times Are (1965)

Short story and column collections:

Eight Plus One: Stories (1980)
I Have Words to Spend (1999) [compiled by Constance Senay Cormier]

Novels for young adults:

The Chocolate War (1974)
I Am the Cheese (1977)
After the First Death (1979)
The Bumblebee Flies Anyway (1983)
Beyond the Chocolate War (1985)
Fade (1988)
Other Bells for Us to Ring (1990)
We All Fall Down (1991)
Tunes for Bears to Dance To (1992)
In the Middle of the Night (1995)
Tenderness (1997)
Heroes (1998)
Frenchtown Summer (1999)

Robert Cormier was honored by ALAN in 1982 with the ALAN Award, for “his significant contributions of the field of adolescent literature” and his “innovative creativity.” This issue of *The ALAN Review*, which is filled with articles by wonderful writers and teachers of the genre that he has done so much to define, and which includes tributes by some who knew not only Cormier—the writer, but also Cormier—the human, is dedicated to his memory.

A Reflection Upon the Death of Robert Cormier

John H. Ritter

Editor's Note: This reflection, John H. Ritter's letter to Joan Kaywell, was read aloud by Dr. Connie Zitlow, ALAN President, at the ALAN 2000 Workshop in Milwaukee. When I asked for, and received, permission from John to publish his letter in The ALAN Review, he also sent along some background information which I thought would be of interest to readers. Reprinted here is an excerpt from John's note to me, plus the original messages on the passing of Robert Cormier from Dr. Zitlow, forwarded by Joan Kaywell, past president of ALAN. Finally, we have John's letter, which brings to mind somewhat a newspaper editor's response years ago to a young girl's heartfelt question. You may remember his reassuring and universal letter included the words, "Yes, Virginia."—psc

From: John H Ritter < HeyJohn@JohnHRitter.com >
To: Pamela Sissi Carroll
Date: Thu, 11 Jan 2001 12:20:42 -0800

Dear Sissi,

...Since I'd heard earlier from Chris Crutcher that Bob was seriously ill, I'd had a few weeks to let my emotions and my beliefs kick around in my brain. Part of my response to Joan Kaywell came from seeing Chris' face when he told me the news and reading the reflective look in his eyes. Death is just a tough thing for us to handle.

So when I received Joan's note of sadness, I felt inspired to hit "Reply" and write her back. But as I wrote, I began to sense that the letter was not just between us. That is, I felt I was writing the words to myself, as well as to anyone else who may at some point need the sentiment behind them...

...Here is the original e-mail I received from Joan:

Mon, 6 Nov 2000 08:25:37 -0500 (EST)

Dear Friends,

It is with sadness that I'm forwarding this message from Connie Zitlow in regards to Bob Cormier, but I thought that you all would like to know.

Sincerely,

Joan F. Kaywell, Ph.D., 1999 ALAN President

> ---Original Message---

> From: Connie S. Zitlow

> Sent: Friday, November 03, 2000

> Hello all,

> I am very sad to convey some very bad news to all of you. Robert Cormier died yesterday morning, November 2. I knew he was ill and had to cancel his part in the ALAN workshop, but I had hoped he would recover. There is no one who can replace him in my heart as a favorite YA author, one who wrote such gripping and artistic books and spoke so eloquently about his readers.

> Connie S. Zitlow, 2000 ALAN President

And my response to her:

From: John H. Ritter,
HeyJohn@JohnHRitter.com

To: Joan F. Kaywell

Date: Tue, 7 Nov 2000 11:08:06

Subject: A Reflection Upon the Death of Robert Cormier

Dear Joan,

I appreciate your sending along the news of Robert Cormier's death. Chris Crutcher had told me a few weeks ago that Bob was quite ill. I remember thinking what a shame it would be to lose his wonderful voice from our chorus. Still, I'm not so sure that this is a time for sadness.

All my life I've known that our culture does not

handle death well. We typically see it as horrible and devastating, rather than as the natural and proper event that it is. Beyond that, our overwhelming fear of death is really at the heart of many sad and oppressive things we do to ourselves and others. Racism and rigid religious practices, to name a few.

When I was four years old my mother died of breast cancer. And probably because I was so young, I never felt a jolt. I never cried at her sudden disappearance. I truly felt no loss. As a quiet country boy, already prone to walking the hills, I felt her presence everywhere. On the mountain. On the meadow. I spoke with her often. I listened. And sensing our bond, I went out into this rugged world and did my best.

Last summer I introduced myself to Bob Cormier while he was in Los Angeles to receive the LA Times Book Prize for *Frenchtown Summer*. As all who had met this humble and gentle man seem to report, it was instant friendship. He praised the idea behind my first novel. And he accepted my praise for his work with a gracious laugh. I left that evening feeling a bond between us, too. A bond, I think, that lives on.

Every year the leaves of summer fill the sycamore trees in a nearby canyon. Every autumn those leaves turn orange and yellow, glimmer in the noonday sun, then drop to the earth in the early winter winds and rains.

By December, the sycamore trees stand bare like frozen bolts of lightning. The days grow darker and tell me that winter will soon be here. And by then I long for that joyous solitude of winter.

Sadness and grief are founded in fear. That's what I learned from my mother's death. That's what I learned from the adults around me and from the pity they poured on a motherless boy.

But how could they've known what I knew? They were too old. Too grown. Too removed from the resourcefulness of children to understand.

Death is not a time to be afraid, to walk and wallow in our grief. To me, that's like fearing the winter, like mourning the absence of wildflowers, sunshine, and autumn leaves.

We need our winters. We need the changes winter brings. I love the drizzly whisper of wool gray days, the cozy warmth of fire and friends. I love to hunker at home on thundery nights and reflect upon the lightning strikes.

Bob leaves. I walk to my bookshelf. He comes back.

He speaks. I listen. I rejoice today as I did twelve years ago when I first tripped upon his work. Nothing for me to do now, but go out into this world and do my best.

And I think Robert Cormier would understand.

I see us all as leaves on a sycamore tree. Budding from bare branches in our early springs, growing green and full in our summers. Only our years are different. Sometimes they run long, sometimes they are cut short. But eventually we reach our autumns and our wintery winds and rains.

And we all fall down.

It is the rhythm of life. It is a good thing. All is well.

Love,
John

You Dared, Bob; Thank God You Dared

John S. Simmons

In my undergraduate years, as I was just beginning to sense the personal impact of literature, I began a reader's love affair with the poetry of T.S. Eliot. That sentiment led me to commit to memory, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock." It was almost thirty years later that I met Jerry Renault and witnessed him opening his locker at Trinity School, which revealed a poster inscribed with, "Do I Dare Disturb the Universe?" We now know that Jerry dared and failed, but the true message I gleaned from that incident, that novel, and the whole panoply of writings by Robert Cormier, was that to dare in life as well as art is to fulfill one's *raison d'être*.

In the decades before Robert Cormier began to produce his young adult novels, the style of the great majority of texts in that genre was narrow and predictable. Sequences were regular and dominated by outer action. The thoughts and feelings of narrators were clearly identifiable. Interior monologues, unexpected flashbacks, and other such stylistic ventures were minimal. But with the publication of *The Chocolate War*, *I Am the Cheese*, and *After the First Death*, Bob Cormier changed all that. He presented young adult readers with narratives that challenged them even as they intrigued and sometimes frightened them. Simultaneously, he provided upper-grade teachers with texts that involved students in an intellectual/emotional struggle—a struggle that was well worth the fight. It is no exaggeration to state that Cormier changed the landscape of approaching fiction for teachers and readers everywhere. And the path on that landscape led upward.

Back to Jerry Renault and the poster in his locker. The Eliot quote encapsulates a telling theme that Cormier introduced to the YA reading audience: the struggle between the individual and those institutions that are creatures of our culture. In this author's most memorable works, the individual's jousts with ostensibly benevolent, but often sinister, social instruments end in defeat. The playing out of those contests is replete with pathos, fear, and stark realism. Empathetic readers most often combine admiration for the individual's courage with an inescapable realization that the powers of the institutions are insuperable. The author, however, has created an engrossing human drama in each of these adversarial engagements. Readers of all ages admire and suffer with the Jerry Renaults, the Adam Farmers, the Ben Marchands, the Kate Foresters, the Barney Snows, the Buddy

Walkers, *et al*, as they fight the odds—and go down. In contrast with the melodramatic, often contrived endings of earlier YA novels, Bob Cormier provided a refreshing—and riveting—change of pace.

In his persuasive 1959 doctoral study of the young adult novels of his era, Stephen Dunning labeled the great bulk of them "consistently wholesome and insistently didactic" and further stated that they avoided taboos with painstaking care. Robert Cormier, however, dared to disturb that universe; he saw the teenage years for what they truly are, and described them in kind. As a result, *The Chocolate War* stands as one of the most censored books in 20th century American fiction, with *I Am the Cheese* close behind. Moreover, sexual episodes, violence, cruelty, murder, criminal activities by religious agents, suicide, and above all, pain and suffering, abound in his novels. A measure of the author's status is the ongoing conviction by most of his critics that these inclusions are not there to titillate, to disgust, or to sensationalize.

Instead, they contribute to the tell-it-like-it-is human perspectives their author has created.

The symbolic tales of Robert Cormier will undoubtedly last for a long time and affect readers far beyond the hamlets of central Massachusetts. For all you have dared, dearest Bob, we the teachers, young readers and observers of the

human predicament owe you; you have blazed new trails in our sensibilities and have left us lastingly in your debt.

Work Cited

Dunning, A. Stephen. *A Definition of the Role of the Junior Novel Based on Analyses of Thirty Selected Novels*. Unpublished Dissertation. Florida State University, June, 1959.

John S. Simmons is a professor of English Education and Reading at Florida State University. He served as Robert Cormier's host during the author's visit to schools in north Florida in the late 1980s, and has often worked in defense of Cormier's books when issues of censorship have emerged, including the case discussed by ReLeah Lent and Gloria Pipkin in this issue.

We Keep Pedaling

ReLeah Lent and Gloria Pipkin

Editor's note: The censorship case described in this article by primary participants, ReLeah Lent and Gloria Pipkin, gained national attention in 1987. The January 4, 1987, issue of The Washington Post Magazine, contained a story on the events, using the headline, "A Chilling Case of Censorship," and the opening statement, "Last year, teachers in Panama City, Florida, got an award; this year they are getting death threats." The teachers have been nationally recognized and awarded for their strong support of students' and teachers' rights against censorship. —psc

We first came to know and love Robert Cormier through his books. Colleagues and collaborators in a junior high English department that worked hard to engage students as active readers, we read young adult literature avidly, always looking for books to add to our classroom libraries, and for the special ones that merited whole-class study. ReLeah was the first to bring Cormier into the curriculum.

ReLeah Discovers *I Am the Cheese*

People refer to themselves in many ways, but as cheese? Strange title, I thought when my sister, a high schooler and voracious reader, first told me about a young adult novel titled *I Am the Cheese* that she thought my seventh grade students might like. "It's fascinating," she said, and I knew from experience to trust her evaluation.

I read it aloud to my husband on a long trip to my parents' house in North Carolina. I could hardly stop reading when we stopped for gas or to make mandatory bathroom breaks for our small son. It was fascinating, but even more than that, it was different, spicy, challenging. It wove a narrative amid a question-and-answer style interview that kept me alert for signals and, like a tugboat captain peering through the fog for the next buoy, I strained my faculties trying to see what was ahead. Even when I finished, I wasn't sure of what I thought I had seen, so I started over, taking the time to snugly fit the pieces of the puzzle securely into place.

With the educational buzz-phrase "critical thinking skills" dominating teacher circles, I knew I had found the perfect critical-thinking tool to help my students achieve those skills. I introduced the book to my classes of honors seventh graders, students who were used to the young adult genre—and used to having extended time in class to read and discuss. They were interested when I showed them the title, more interested as I described how I read the book out loud all the way to North Carolina, and positively enthusiastic when I mused who might be the first to figure out what happened at the end.

We developed reading circles and they recorded questions and thoughts in their response notebooks. They pondered, predicted, argued, sometimes in small groups, sometimes with

the entire class. They became pensive as they read about Adam's family, frustrated as the chapters seemed to follow no logical progression, thoughtful as they listened to others unravel the mystery.

I knew I had found it. *I Am the Cheese* was the perfect book to hone skills, but more importantly, it provided my students with a reading experience they would never forget. My hunches were confirmed as I read their final responses:

While reading it, I developed a new sense of respect for Mr. Cormier...I like the sessions between "T" and "A." They were just another example of Mr. Cormier's talents; they showed the forcefulness and pressure of T, and the pain in remembering for Adam.

Another thing I liked was the ending. It was neat how he used everybody in the institution, such as Whipper & the two wise guys, Junior Varney, who always stole things, and Arthur. One other reason I liked the ending is because of how Adam was going to start his life all over again with the same paragraph that he used at the beginning of the book.

The book has an ending that makes you know that it hasn't ended and may not ever end.

Gloria's Students Choose *The Chocolate War*

During the 1983-84 school term, my eighth graders argued persuasively that they should be allowed to select one of our class novels, since I had chosen the others. Students made nominating speeches for books they wanted to study and campaigned for their personal choices before the class voted. Two classes chose *The Chocolate War*: Many of my students had studied Cormier's *I Am the Cheese* with ReLeah, as seventh graders, and they wanted to try another Cormier book.

Knowing that Cormier was at the top of the national lists of most frequently challenged authors, and that this novel in particular often drew censors' fire, I first talked to our principal about the book and my plans for using it. With her approval, I wrote to parents and told them that their children had chosen a book with strong themes and language. I urged them to read the book for themselves, to respond in writing if they wished, and to join us in class for our final day of discussion. I also reminded them of our department's alternative selection policy, which ensured their right to opt for another book.

I took all parental responses and typed them up anonymously, as the basis for our culminating discussion of the novel. One of the letters was from a parent who said that reading the novel made her "extremely concerned about the material our children are being given in the school system." Why didn't we read more classics, like *Huck Finn*,

she wanted to know. She objected to the language and to the lack of adult role models in Cormier's book, although her tone was more thoughtful than threatening.

On the final discussion day, the mother who wrote this letter was the only parent to attend the discussion. As students read the handouts with parents' comments, they zeroed in on the one described above, not knowing it was written by the parent in the room. Berrin Beasley, a tall, dark-haired girl who had delighted me all year with her insight and her passion, squared her shoulders and spoke out from her seat with the confidence of a seasoned public defender. "First of all," she began, "we've already read *Huck Finn*, and if you want to talk about role models, we could start with Pap, who beats Huck and leaves him alone for months at a time. And then there's Miss Watson, who sells Jim away from his family."

The mother's eyes never left Berrin's face, even when an exuberant kid across the aisle from her cheered Berrin on with a raised fist and a sharply exhaled "Yes!" When the defense rested, there was nothing left to say. *The Chocolate War* had been acquitted, without my saying a word. If I had written the script, I couldn't have presented a more eloquent summation.

The next day the class received an open letter from the parent:

I'd like to thank you and your third period class for a most interesting and well spent hour this morning. It is very encouraging to hear teenagers being encouraged to express their ideas and feelings. As you know, parents don't often have the chance to know what other teens are thinking. We seem to always hear our own teen, but I sometimes find myself not "listening." My opinion (#11) of *The Chocolate War* has not changed, but I definitely have changed my view or thinking, as to the children's (teens') response. When I read the book and wrote you my response I was giving a very biased, parental view.

Even though I do not care for the book, I found it refreshing to know that the class could read the book and not be as close-minded as I had been. Yes, teenagers, you can teach parents and adults something. Thank you for such an enjoyable lesson.

This fairy tale ending wasn't, however, a portent of things to come. A few parents launched a campaign against young adult literature in general and Robert Cormier's work in particular. Our chief critic took out a half-page ad in the Sunday paper, featuring disemvoweled excerpts from *I Am the Cheese* and *The Chocolate War*: "Life is s h _ t," followed by a page number, was typical of the quotes ripped from context. The ad's headline read: "YOUR CHILD'S TEXT-BOOKS—HAVE YOU READ THEM?" A coupon invited parents to petition the school board to remove "obscene" books from the school system.

One parent took the invitation seriously and filed a formal complaint against *I Am the Cheese*. She objected to the theme, which she characterized as depressing, to "vulgar lan-

guage," and to "inappropriate sexual references." In keeping with our department's longstanding policy of providing choices for all readers, we left the decision to the families of our children. Those who found the book objectionable for whatever reason would be given other options.

We were devastated when, despite the fact that 91 of 95 parents gave informed consent for their children to read and study *I Am the Cheese* with ReLeah, the superintendent banned the book anyway. There was never any question that we would defend our program, young adult literature, the challenged books, and our students' right to read. ReLeah

wrote to Robert Cormier, whom we had spent the evening with a few months before at the fall conference of the Florida Council of Teachers of English. He responded immediately, offering support and providing a much-needed boost to our beleaguered department. He wrote:

I'm writing to you so you'll know that I am very concerned about what is going on at Mowat Junior High School and that I'll do my very

best to help.

The material you sent me shows that you have done a terrific job in defending your position. In fact, it seems to me you've gone beyond what anyone could expect in amassing positive statements. At the same time that letter from Mrs. C _____ reveals how weak her position is. And yet, it's chilling because so many people apparently feel that way. A case on Cape Cod has just concluded although it involved *The Chocolate War*. (This is the first time *I Am the Cheese* has been under attack and those out-of-context pages circulated by the opponent would seem to clinch our case and be self-defeating for them).

Cormier stayed in touch with us, and his offers of support were not just empty words. With the help of our public library, we put together a series of seminars on young adult literature, which we billed as "A Family Reading Experience." I led the first session, an overview of young adult literature, and then each of the four remaining seminars was devoted to a specific book, ending with *I Am the Cheese*. We asked Cormier to join us for the evening, and he didn't hesitate. ReLeah was the moderator.

Cormier Reaches Through the Fire

I couldn't wait to introduce Cormier to these Bay Countians, many of whom had signed petitions against his books, to show them his gentle spirit, his wise and tempered words reflecting an introspective life. I was nervous, but it was an excited anxiety, as if I were about to introduce Gandhi. I trusted him to calm the masses, to face narrow-minded fear with honest openness. And, indeed, as the auditorium filled beyond capacity, as people stood in the aisles looking at this man who had "started this whole mess," they seemed a bit pacified. Then, like Moses coming down from the mountain, he spoke and they listened. He spoke about how writing a book is both terrible and wonderful, about how he went to a boys' school and wrote what he knew, about how life isn't always bright and glorious; the darkness exists even as

He spoke about how writing a book is both terrible and wonderful, about how he went to a boys' school and wrote what he knew, about how life isn't always bright and glorious; the darkness exists even as we "dare to disturb the universe."

we “dare to disturb the universe.” His words seemed to diffuse the hostility and I could see many of those who had prejudged him drinking in his tonic of reason. They had confronted the monster and he turned out to be a gentle, kind man with appropriately large owl glasses, speaking about his Catholic upbringing and how we all experience the same emotions: fear, love, insecurity. As he spoke, it was clear that he was perplexed as to how his words had ignited such a burning controversy. Robert Cormier sparked a connection with the audience just as he had connected with millions of readers. Gloria and I looked on with pride and hope.

After the program, Cormier came to my house for a gathering of those who had been supportive of his books. One of my fondest memories, one I passed along to his wife Connie after his death, was a small slice of life I will never forget. It is one of those moments encapsulated, as a snowman in a Christmas glass ball, and I often turn the memory over to watch it come alive. He needed to use the phone to call his wife, but it was too noisy in the front of the house, so I offered the one in our bedroom where our five-year old son, Aaron, had been relegated while the adults were talking. Aaron was in his pajamas, watching television with his favorite blanket when he and Cormier met. After the phone call, Aaron apparently told Cormier he was hungry. Soon, the famous author was in the kitchen, filling a plate with all kinds of goodies and returning with it to the bedroom to share with Aaron.

He left soon after, and although we corresponded, I never saw him again. While I still mourn his passing, his brilliant words, his compassion, and his courage will mean that, at least for me, I will never be the cheese.

Cormier’s Legacy of Hope

It took five years and a federal law suit to get the banned books restored. In the process, I (Gloria) made two more appeals to the school board on behalf of *I Am the Cheese*. The superintendent and our chief critic marshaled their strongest arguments, including the claim that the book left the reader without hope. Hope is in the heart of the beholder, I told the school board, and the crowds that packed the meeting room. At the end of the novel, when Adam Farmer gets back on his bike once again, I am flooded with hope and inspiration. If a mere child, with incredible institutional odds arrayed against him, can keep pedaling, so can I. So can I.

ReLeah Lent teaches English, speech, and debate at Bay High School, Panama City, Florida. She and Gloria Pipkin, a former public school teacher, have written At the School-house Gate: Lessons on Intellectual Freedom and hope to see it published next year.

Patty Campbell, nationally known young adult literature critic, editor, and author, is presenting an all-day workshop on “What’s New in Young Adult Literature” for the Bureau of Education and Research. In her lively talks, Campbell evaluates hundreds of recently published YA books, both fiction and nonfiction, and discusses practical techniques for interesting teens in YA literature. Participants also get free lunch and a 100-page handbook of camera-ready annotated bibliographies and resources. For dates and locations, and to make reservations call 1 800 735-3503, or register online at:

www.ber.org

Listening to Kids In America

Rodman Philbrick

A year or so ago a teacher wrote to me. *You don't know me*, she began, *but there's no one else I can turn to*. She went on to describe an eleven-year-old boy who suffered from a rare, debilitating brittle bone disease. Touch him and his bones shattered. His dad was in prison, his working-class mom was struggling to support him, and the kids in school, and the school itself, had no use for him. 'Daniel' was more than difficult, he was impossible. Too angry, too outrageous, too ill-behaved to be tolerated. He'd been banned from class, sent home to stew in his own juices, and his only contact with the outside world was through a young, impassioned tutor who was desperately trying to get through to him.

I read him your book, she wrote to me, *and he likes it. He wants to know what happens next*.

There is no greater compliment for a writer than to have pleased a troubled child. So I wrote to Daniel and he wrote back, enclosing a photograph of himself. I pinned it above my desk. In the picture Daniel is smiling. He has very round cheeks, a very round body, and round glasses. He's reclining in his wheelchair, and his left arm is in a sling. I know from what his tutor told me that there's scarcely a bone in his body that hasn't been fractured. But in the photograph he's smiling quite blissfully. Why is he smiling, this boy with brittle bone disease, this boy who has been exiled from school, deprived of a normal life?

Daniel is smiling because he's covered in kittens. A kitten nestles in the sling that supports his damaged arm. Another crouches on his shoulder. He holds another kitten with his good hand, and if kittens could smile, that kitten would. There's another kitten crouched above his head. Kittens all over him, from head to foot. Kittens so soft and light they can't possibly hurt him, or break his delicate bones. Kittens placed there, I'm certain, by his long suffering mother, as a gift, a reminder that there are soft things in his life, and creatures that love him exactly as he is.

That photograph of the boy who was covered in kittens got me thinking about what had happened, to put me in a

position where I got letters and pictures from kids like Daniel, and from many other children as well, most of them happy and healthy and enthusiastic about life, if not about reading books.

...

As a young, ambitious novelist, writing for kids never crossed my mind. Why would it? If the world of authors was reduced to a classroom, the children's writers would be in the corner, wearing goofy-but-cute dunce caps, passing notes to the similarly despised writers of comedy. My models were 'difficult' authors like Joyce and Faulkner. Undisputed geniuses who wrote tough, demanding stuff that fit into what my college professors called 'literature of the highest level.'

That was thirty years ago, but not much has changed. Mark Twain hasn't been elevated into that pantheon, and neither has Kipling. Both wrote popular books intended for kids, and if that wasn't bad enough, Twain sometimes tried to make his readers laugh. I mention Twain and Kipling because they were two of the 'popular' storytellers who helped illuminate my childhood, and stimulated my desire to become a writer.

In those early days, writing draft after draft on my ten dollar Underwood, I knew no other published writers. I'd written to novelists I admired, and to numerous editors, but none had ever written back.

Over the years I wrote and submitted eight or nine novels and never got more than a standard rejection letter. But eventually, in my late twenties, an agent took pity on me, and finally one evening the phone rang, and he said: 'They like your book.'

All writers dream of that moment. It's what sustains us through the embarrassment of failure and the daily despair of repeated rejection. We survive by dreaming of fame and fortune and seeing our books displayed in bookstore windows. We dream of big checks and gleam-

ing limousines, and chartered flights to Stockholm to receive the Nobel Prize. We dream of being stopped on the street and asked for autographs from beautiful people we don't know.



My father said it was good news I'd sold a book at last, and then in the very next breath asked if I would mind stopping by the house: they were having a problem with the septic tank and I was, as he said, always good with plumbing.

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Almost none of that dream ever comes true, even for quite successful writers, but thankfully I didn't know that at the time.

I did get an inkling of how little being a published author would actually change my day-to-day life when I called my long-suffering parents with the news. My mother, bless her, was over the moon. My father said it was good news I'd sold a book at last, and then in the very next breath asked if I would mind stopping by the house: they were having a problem with the septic tank and I was, as he said, always good with plumbing.

It's true. I've always been good with plumbing, and was more than familiar with that particular septic tank, which had a habit of backing up when the ground froze. So, the day after my 'first' novel was accepted, I arrived, somewhat under the weather from celebrating, and was soon hard at work, using a chainsaw to chop through the frozen waste, unblocking the discharge pipe.

I remember thinking, get used to it pal, this is what life is all about: one day you're on top of the world, and the next you're cutting through frozen turds with a chainsaw.

There's only one sensible response in a situation like that. I laughed like hell, finished the job, and then went home to write my pages.

...

Over the next dozen years I wrote a lot of mystery, thriller, and suspense novels, and managed to publish fifteen of them, several under a pseudonym. In all of this I was supported, every minute of every day, by my wife Lynn, who always worked, and who for many years never earned less than I did.

Then one day, while on a long, boring highway trip, I began daydreaming about a character who would be the unlikely hero of a book for young readers. A smart-alecky kid with a body so small and bone-crippled that he needed the help of a friend to get around.

The idea didn't come out of ether—it was right there in my own experience. Lynn and I had known a kid in that situation, a boy born with Morquio Syndrome, a rare and debilitating form of dwarfism. Like the character I was imagining, the real boy was exceptionally bright, physically courageous, inexhaustibly curious, and possessed of a vocabulary that far exceeded my own.

I'd known the kid for years, had seen him grow up (his mother and stepfather were friends of ours) but the idea of using him in a story had never occurred to me until then. It was his life—his body—and he'd have been profoundly embarrassed, if not offended, to see any part of himself in print. The only reason the notion ever entered my head at all is because the boy—a young man by then—had died the previous year, and somehow that made it okay. As if death freed me to borrow an ember of his unique personality, and use it to light a fire under my own imagination.

Even at the moment of conception, before I'd formulated the story, already there came a persistent twinge of guilt. What right did I have to appropriate part of someone else's life and turn it into a book? Death didn't make it okay. The only thing that would make it okay—or so I rationalized—was if

the story itself was completely fictional, in the sense that all of the events in the narrative would be invented by the author, without encroaching on the actual events of the real boy's life.

If you're troubled by that rationale, so was I—but it didn't stop me from inventing a narrator who was naive enough not to understand that 'Freak' was a cruel nickname. That gave me a title, too, because I knew my narrator would somehow help my little hero overcome the demeaning cruelty of that nickname, and transform it into a chivalrous, knight-like hero called 'Freak The Mighty'.

...

Bonnie Verburg, the young editor who bought *Freak The Mighty*, told me that writing for kids would change my life. I

chuckled and said, 'oh sure', but didn't believe it for a second. Books and stories had given me a life, for which I was grateful, but it seemed impossible that one particular story could change my life. At the time I hadn't the faintest idea of what it meant to publish a

book for kids. It certainly never occurred to me that kids would want to write to the author, and talk to him.

And never in my wildest imagination did I think some of them would assume I really was Maxwell Kane, a boy their own age.

Soon after publishing a book for kids, my mailbox began to fill with letters from children all across America. Not because my novels for young readers are bestsellers—they're not by a long shot—but because today's kids love to write to authors.

Most of the letters make me smile.

Dear Mr. Philbrick, your book was phenomenal. Also very interesting. It made no sense at all. Other than that, it was an awesome book.

Dear Mr. Philbrick, your book made our teacher Mrs. Troxell cry at the end, which the whole class thought was funny. Thanks.

Dear Mr. Philbrick, my opinion of your book is fantastic because the book is great. I would give it four thumbs up.

Dear Mr. Philbrick, your book was very suspended, it had me on the end of my seat.

Dear Mr. Philbrick, We just read Freak The Mighty. There were some parts that made our entire class laugh. Then there were parts that made them fall asleep.

Dear Mr. Philbrick, your book was kind of long but you had some good words.

Dear Mr. Philbrick, why did you have to pick a crippled kid when you could have picked anyone to be in your book? What were you thinking?

Dear Mr. Philbrick, thanks for visiting our school. I thought when you came I would be nervous like before a football game when sometimes my stomach makes me throw up. But when I met you, I didn't throw up.

With kids, there's no higher compliment than not making them throw up. In fact I recommend it to writers in all genres,

including the most literary: try to not make your readers throw up. This is, I believe, very sound advice, and possibly more helpful than anything taught in creative writing classes.

Dear Author

Your book was really funny especially the part when Max tried to sneeze a hotdog through his nose. I have one question was this book a true story that Max wrote and gave to you?

sincerely,
Jonathan Sanchez

Is Max related to you or how did you find a pretty good brain to write such a long book?

Yours truly,
See Tawsing

Okay, I'm aware that kids are taught to use the phrase 'your friend' as the closing of a letter, but there's something about seeing it hand-printed in pencil that makes you think they mean it. That, having read a book, they consider the author a friend.

...

One of the things that most impressed me about the kid letters that started arriving was how deeply some of these kids thought about books, and not just my books but all books.

A seventh-grader from Portage, Indiana wrote at length, trying to explain exactly what parts of my story appealed to her. Finally it boiled down to this: In most stories people have a big house to live in, but in your stories (at least the ones I have read) they live like real people do, in an unknown city that you could name yourself if you wanted to.

Yes, exactly. That was my intention, and twelve-year-olds are just as capable of 'getting it' as graduate students.

Not all the letters I get are complimentary, of course.

A kid from Indiana wrote to let me know that your book had a big impression on my life, because it made me no longer want to be a writer.

And the boy who wrote from Petoskey, Minnesota was probably trying to be nice when he wrote I enjoyed your book. It was filled with action, sadness, and stupidity. Then again, when another, slightly older kid sends me an e-mail stating that 'your book doesn't suck as bad as most books, but it still sucks' I'm pretty sure it isn't exactly a vote of confidence.

Some of the kids who write me are doing so at the behest of teachers, as in Dear Mr. Philbrick, my English teacher wants me to write you a letter. She said you would take this seriously, so you better for her sake.

I'm fortunate in that my books seem to attract as many boy readers as girl readers. This is considered important nowadays because so many boys are categorized as 'reluctant readers'. This distaste for reading is not always the result of a learning disability. Boys who are asked to empathize with characters in a book often do so with great reluctance.

Boys know they're supposed to be tough and unemotional (a hour on the playground teaches them that) and the characters I write about tend to be demanding and needy, even if they, like the boys who read the stories, won't admit it.

Here's a letter from a fifth grader in Meredith, New Hampshire: I felt bad for Kevin because everyone at school made fun of him. Don't think I am a sissy. I just felt bad for him, even if he's just a character. *Hmm. I read that letter and thought, right, you're barely ten years old but already you're expected to react like a mini-version of Clint Eastwood, studying human misery with a squinty gaze.*

Some things have changed since I was in fifth grade, but that part hasn't.

...

Dear Mr. Philbrick, Hi, I'm Megha Ghia. I'm in the sixth grade and in Ms. Gauweiler's class. She made us read your book. I saw the cover and thought it would be boring, but later I started to like it. How did you become a writer? Was it because you were forced to write in school and then you began to like it?

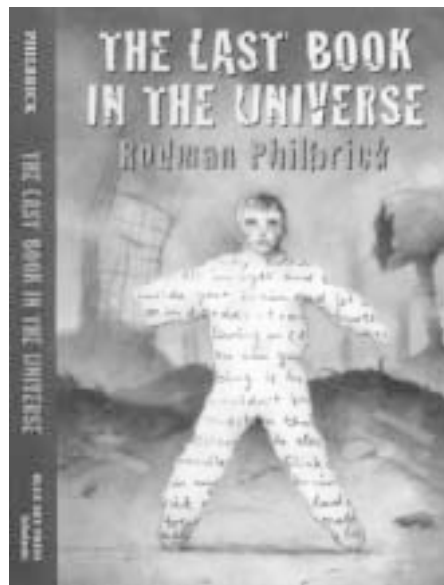
Well no. I was never forced to write. At least I was never forced or even encouraged to write fiction. Creative writing wasn't in the curriculum at my school when I was in sixth grade. I had a wonderful teacher we all loved—Mrs. Bowditch. Mrs. Bowditch instilled in us a love for books and for being curious about the world. She encouraged us to think and to use our imaginations, but the idea that sixth graders might be able to write fiction never occurred to her because it never occurred to much of anybody in 1962. Writers of fiction were adults, and adults became writers because

they had been forged in the fires of adult experience—Hemingway, James Joyce, Pearl S. Buck—all became writers because of experiences that changed their lives, and sixth graders simply didn't have the experience to even think about writing fiction. In those days almost nobody seriously believed creative writing could be taught to children.

Schools and teachers get a tremendous amount of scrutiny and criticism these days. For all I know, some of it may be deserved. But one thing I do know: today teachers all across the land are encouraging their students to write, and the students are responding. We're educating and encouraging and guiding a whole new generation of writers. Not all of them will become professional authors, chain-sawing their way through the frozen sewage of a writer's life, but from what I can see, those who do emerge as

writers may well be the finest generation of writers that the human race has ever produced.

This is cause for celebration. Kids in America almost never ask me if I'm going to write another book. They ask if I'm going to 'make' another book. They think of it that way because in 5th grade they've already made books with their own hands. As a former boat builder and carpenter, who made boats and houses with his own hands, and who yearned to make books, I say hurray, hurray, hurray.



Book jacket illustration by David Shamon used by permission of Scholastic Inc.

...

A postscript: last spring I finally met Daniel, the boy who was covered in kittens in that photograph I hang above my desk. I'd dedicated a book to him, and wanted to give it to him personally.

He and his mother and I agreed to meet at a shopping mall. Daniel was back in school and doing reasonably well, considering all the time he missed with broken bones and hospital stays. He lived in a motorized wheelchair, but it didn't seem to bother him—having a souped-up motorized wheelchair meant he could out-race everyone, zooming around and honking his horn and creating as much havoc in a busy shopping mall as a whole gang of teenagers. His mother and I had to chase him around the mall, and we were both out of breath by the time we caught up.

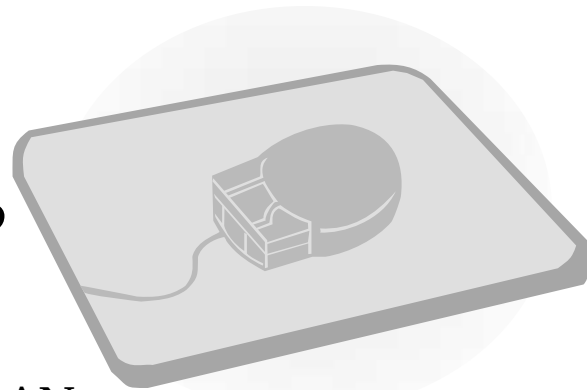
I asked his mother if he was like that all the time and she said yes, except when he was asleep. Then I asked if it wasn't dangerous for a boy with brittle bone disease to be racing

around a mall in an electric wheelchair. She looked at me and said, 'Everything is dangerous for Daniel. He just wants to run with the other kids.'

If you think about it, isn't that what we all want?

*This article is taken from an address that Rodman Philbrick gave as part of the Author Strand workshop at the NCTE convention in Milwaukee, in November, 2000. He is the author of award-winning books for young people, including *The Fire Pony*, *Freak the Mighty*, and *Max the Mighty*, and *The Last Book in the Universe*. *Max the Mighty* was made into a 1998 Miramax feature film, *The Mighty*; it stars Sharon Stone. An audio version of *The Last Book in the Universe* is now available through Listening Library.*

Have you tried these Web sites yet?



ALAN:

<http://english.byu.edu/ALAN>

The ALAN Review:

<http://scholar.lib.vt.edu/ejournal/ALAN/alan-review.html>

National Council of Teachers of English:

<http://www.ncte.org>

The ALAN Review Web site has recently been recognized by researchers at Lightspan's StudyWeb as "one of the best educational resources on the Web." It will be featured on studyweb.com in the near future.

Writing from the Broken Places

Ann Turner

Approximately two years ago, on a rather cold and blowy February morning, I was talking with Tracy Mack, my editor at Scholastic. She mentioned that she loved my way with words (always a fine inducement for a writer), that she was struck by my ability to wrap words around images and feelings, and would I like to do some poetry for her?

I fidgeted, made agreeable sounds, and waited to hear her bid. “How about a book of poetry about death?” she asked cheerfully.

I paused, then countered and upped the ante. “How about a book of poetry about sexual abuse?”

She didn’t miss a beat. “Well, sure,” she answered, or something to that effect, encouraging me to do it.

A day later I sat down and proceeded to write what would be the core collection for *Learning to Swim* in about two-and-one-half hours.

“Ann!” my agent, Marilyn Marlow, reprimands me. “Never, ever tell people you wrote that in 2 and 1/2 hours!”

I try to restrain myself, and be politic, but it doesn’t work. It never does. For this was a writing experience like no other. I have nothing to compare it to. It almost wasn’t like writing. It was possession. I was utterly taken over by the experience of being sexually abused, reliving what it was like to be six years-old, a small, skinny child with wildly curly hair, large brown eyes, and scarred knees.

I would write a poem, sob, blow my nose, write another, sob, blow my nose, and so on. You get the picture. Of course, those twenty-two poems were not the whole collection, and I spent well over another year revising and expanding the book. But it was the beginning. And I knew it came from a source different from my other writings and would be different from anything I had ever done before.

We can call it, “WRITING FROM THE BROKEN PLACES,” a poetic title for an experience so painful that I told Tracy it was like eating ground glass.

But sometimes, to get to the other side of an experience, you have to eat ground glass, you have to go down into the darkness. The only way up to the light is through the darkness, I am convinced.

It is not hard to understand how I came to be sexually abused. My dad was away all day at work, drinking at night, while my mother juggled three young children (one at the dangerous age of three) and attended to her own parents in our wonderful vacation house.

The collection begins with the summer Annie looked forward to, where she would learn to swim without her ring, because now she was big enough to do it on her own.

Then comes the cloud on the horizon, the smell of danger wafting towards me—and you, the reader. Up the road lived a shabby, angry family with parents who shouted and three large children with the cruel eyes and fingers of predators.

It was my editor’s idea that I divide the collection into three sections. The first, “Sailing” would reflect the hopes and joys at the beginning of that summer. The middle period would be “Sinking,” which covers the time from the start of the abuse to its end, when I told my mother. The final section, “Swimming,” talks about the end of the abuse, the beginning of Annie’s healing, and the wonder of her learning to swim.

Kenny, the real name of the “perp,” must have been clever. He figured out that if he offered to read to me—in our hose

where everyone worshipped books—he could safely be alone with me.

In writing these poems, I went back into the landscape of abuse and fear. I was so small I could barely reach the top of the table. My legs were so skinny my shorts flapped around them. Normal life was bedtime and stories, teddy bears, ice cream from the store, good night kisses, and watching thrilling thunderstorms from our porch.

But I had slipped out of everyday life; I was lost, in a new and horrible territory, the country of fear. Fear was the bed I

slept in. Fear was my blanket, brought up over my mouth to protect me, but ending up suffocating me. And the language of the collection is that of a

frightened six year-old, confiding in her dolls, whispering to her baby brother what has happened.

But—and this is an astonishing BUT—the wondrous gift of this collection was the healing it offered me. By allowing myself to go down into the darkness, to relive all over again the terror of that summer, the journey became a balm of sorts.



*The only way up to the light is through
the darkness, I am convinced.*

As I wrote, my heart and soul sent up the images I needed, tossed up the metaphors that would allow the grown up six year-old to speak about the unspeakable. The whole metaphor of swimming—Annie's confident start, the help she received from her beloved Daddy—took me through the book. After the abuse starts, her swimming falters; she sits on the sand, won't go in without her ring, and clutches at a bewildered Daddy.

I believe that writing from the broken places takes a special kind of courage. First you must go back and experience that brokenness; then you must write from that place with a fierce and honest language. There cannot be one false word. There cannot be a shred of false emotion or you are lost.

But we cannot leave ourselves and our readers in that darkness—we must bring them up into the light with us. In "Swimming," the third section, Annie begins to feel her anger, to sail out on it. She finally tells her mother, and I can remember the rigidity of my mother's body as she leaned against the kitchen counter when I told her what had happened.

This child is not alone, and the teenagers we write for, I hope, are not completely alone. I was surrounded by the love of my grandparents. My mother stayed close by me for the rest of that summer, watching and caring for me. I re-entered normal life again, became a child again—although unalterably changed—and I learned to swim.

The power of words to heal. The power of language to make a road someone can walk on. If we—as writers—lay down words as honestly as we can, without thought for what they will bring us, we can make a path for others who have suffered as we have.

The poet and undertaker, Thomas Lynch, author of the recent book *Bodies In Motion and At Rest*, talks about the power of poetry.

He says that poets and undertakers both bear witness to life, to all the parts of a person's life.

He says that poetry speaks of the unspeakable. I would add—through images and metaphors, we make painful things visible and bearable. By naming them, they are made bearable.

He writes. . . . "seeing is believing; knowing is better than not knowing; to name the hurt returns a kind of comfort; the grief ignored will never go away."

I hope I have done that in *Learning to Swim*. I hope that even in the midst of its brokenness, it offers healing to its readers and the knowledge that we can survive. Not broken but whole.

Entering that dark territory has changed me and the way I

write. I don't know if I can ever go back to writing the kinds of books I used to. Suddenly, last November, this BOOK came pushing out, rushing out, sending my fingers flying over the keyboard. And dammed if it isn't about another broken place! I thought I was done with that, but apparently I'm not. This novel, called *Catch Me If I Fall*, is about a troubled family—a girl who is falling apart, is being broken along with her family, by a family secret that has been kept under wraps for seven years. The family secret—which is autobiographical—

is that the girl was shot in a gun accident by her sister years back, but it was never spoken of and the girl has repressed the memory. But going fishing in the darkness one day, I brought up dripping and shining this new revelation—it is the Dad's alcoholism which allows the accident to happen. Then, of course, I had to confront my own father's drinking and its impact on the family. I did not want to go there, but I could not

write the book without walking there.

In a dinner scene, the fourteen year-old girl, Kate, who drinks just a tad too much, is about to tell of an event at school, but here sister, Sophie, tells it first:

"You! Why didn't you let me tell it first?" I aim a kick at her under the table, but I don't really mean it, and it isn't very hard or anything, only I kick Dad accidentally and he looks up at me with drowned eyes.

I stop talking. I couldn't push a word out of my mouth if my life depended on it. His eyes are like black pools, sliding out, slopping over the eye sockets. His mouth has slipped sideways. His cheeks sag, just like a Picasso painting. At first I think I'm going crazy, and I cough, hugging my arms around my chest. It feels thin and sharp as a polished knife.

"Wha's that?" Dad asks.

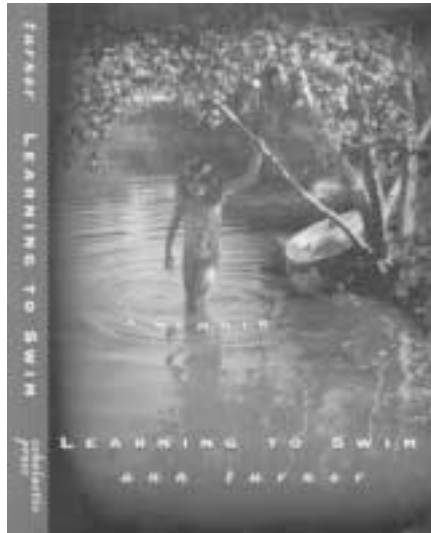
Never before, never at dinner has he been smashed, but he is now and everyone is pretending it's not happening. Mom eats tiny bits of her chicken and talks rapidly.

". . . such a funny story about the Boy Scouts. Mr. Antill told me they were up on stage, some of the kids hiding in a cardboard tree, and they started fighting and the entire tree crashed onto the stage!" She whaps her hand on the table, and Dad jumps, looking up foggily. I can see him smushing his lips around the

words, trying to make them come out right. I know the feeling.

The words have started out small, then they got fat and slippery, like someone blew them up and rolled them in grease, and they are rolling around the inside of his mouth and his tongue can't push them out. He tires. His moth bunches out, his face glistens, and he says,

I believe that writing from the broken places takes a special kind of courage. First you must go back and experience that brokenness; then you must write from that place with a fierce and honest language. There cannot be one false word.



Book jacket, designed by Marijka Kostiw with a photograph by Marc Tauss, used by permission of Scholastic Press.

“ ‘ . . . shold car doday, Carol, shank God.’ He takes a deep swig of his water and clatters it onto the table. The water slops over the edge and widens in a pool. I am drowning in it.”

A colleague of mine recently said she didn’t find the writing in YA novels to be particularly beautiful. Deeply annoyed, I answered, “Maybe it isn’t always as lyrical as some adult novels, but this is what happens; when you write from that deep place, without pretence or artifice, the language takes on its own beauty and rhythm because it is so honest.”

Again, I expect to receive healing on this journey, on this path, moving from the darkness into the light. And I hope to hold out a promise of hope and healing to my readers.

I am lucky, indeed, to be writing for the world’s most honest people—teenagers. I will continue to offer my best to them, who deserve nothing less; to give words to the unspeakable, and to make a road for the unbearable, so that the teenagers we respect and honor will have a tongue to speak about their broken places, and a path forward for their feet.

Ann Turner is the author of 35 books, including *Learning to Swim*, Scholastic, 2000.

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The Girls' Story: Adolescent Novels Set in the Middle Ages

Mary H. McNulty

Ever since Caxton printed Malory's *Morte d'Arthur* in 1485, many adolescents have been reading with delight about the adventures of medieval knights. The glory of quests and tournaments has appeals to the young as well as the old. In the late nineteenth and into the early twentieth century, writers for children, such as G. A. Henty and Howard Pyle, have drawn on juvenile interest in the romance of the Middle Ages and have written about the adventures of knights, crusades, and armed combats. Girls as well as boys read these adventures. During the 1940's, the Newbery Award was given twice to historical novels with a medieval setting: to Elizabeth Gray in 1942 for *Adam of the Road* and to Marguerite de Angeli in 1949 for *The Door in the Wall*. Although the interest in historical fiction about the Middle Ages declined in the 1950's, in more recent decades, the adolescent historical novel set in the Middle Ages has had great popularity, especially because of the ability of writers such as Rosemary Sutcliff and Mollie Hunter to bring the past to life. It is interesting to note, however, that despite the fact that these two twentieth century

writers are women, the protagonists in all of their novels are young boys who have exciting adventures. Girls and women in these novels have secondary, shadowy roles. They stay close to the hearth and speak very few words.

Beginning in the late 1980's, however, some adolescent novels about the Middle Ages have reversed this pattern. While there are yet many new books about male adventures set in medieval times, strong female protagonists are beginning to emerge. Most noteworthy of these are Karen Cushman's Newbery Award winning *The Midwife's Apprentice* and Newbery Honor book, *Catherine, Called Birdie*, and Juliana of *The Striped Ships* by Eloise McGraw. There are also Teresa Tomlinson's novels featuring the adventures of Maid Marian, several novelizations of the life of Joan of Arc, and the *The Ramsey Scallop* of Frances Temple. Young female readers can now find their medieval counterparts as appealing central characters.

The Problem of Authenticity

With the increase of medieval heroines comes the problem of authenticity. While certainly the equal portrayal of both genders is needed in children's books, we can ask if the demand for spunky, resourceful fictional girls in realistic historical novels has led to characterizations which would not be authentic for their times. In reality the medieval young

woman of nobility was married in her early teens, often to a man considerably older than she was. Having no choice concerning a spouse, she was only a political pawn in a patriarchal society, her worth measured by the dowry she would bring and the offspring she would produce. Although the feudal society did not give her much freedom, the young woman of the lower classes usually had more voice in her world. She married by choice. She was destined for a life of work, either in the fields, in the kitchen, or in the market stalls of the villages. Women of all classes were expected to know how to sew and embroider, to cook, and to take care of the sick. The ability to read and write was unusual for a woman of the upper class and extremely rare in a woman of the lower end of society.

Are authors today assigning literacy and latitude to those in whom it would be unthinkable in their own age? The

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following is an examination of the female protagonist in some recent adolescent novels set in the Middle Ages in regard to the authenticity of the feminine role, voice, and power. The books under consideration are Eloise

McGraw's *The Striped Ships* (1991), Karen Cushman's three novels: *Catherine, Called Birdie* (1994), *The Midwife's Apprentice* (1995), *Matilda Bone* (2000); Robin McKinley's *The Outlaws of Sherwood* (1988); and Teresa Tomlinson's *The Forest Wife* (1993) and *Child of the May* (1998).

The Striped Ships

The first of these books in terms of historical setting is *The Striped Ships* of Eloise McGraw. Juliana, a daughter of a minor Saxon lord, was only eleven on the day that she watched the striped ships of the Norman army come ashore on the beach by her village near Hastings. This event changed the security and certainty of her life and forced her to find her place in a greatly altered society. She who formerly had servants to comb her hair and prepare her meals was now a slave and had to perform even lower tasks for the conquerors. She had to face the fact of the death of her father and the youth to whom she had been betrothed. Her family is broken up, and it is only by luck that her younger brother Wulfric finds her.

The novel follows Julianna over a period of two years, as she escapes from the Normans and takes Wulfric to the safety of a monastery school in Canterbury. Once in Canterbury, Wulfric can follow his dream of becoming a scribe. He finds his place in the altered world of the Norman Conquest.

Juliana, however, finds herself no better than when she was as a slave of the Normans. She is still ill-fed, cold, and homeless. To stay alive, she does grueling, menial work. But even at her lowest point, Juliana has the determination and drive of Scarlett O'Hara:

But I'll have no more of alms or almshouses. As God lives, I will sleep in the meadow, rather, with the woolmonger's sheep! But I will sleep somewhere, I will eat somehow, they shall not defeat me again. . . I will find a future. I will make one! Here, then, if so God wills it! (119)

As a kitchen drudge in the monastery of St. Augustine, Juliana learns about the great project underway in one of the monastery workrooms. Two monks and several women are at work on a piece of embroidery of tremendous width. The figures on the cloth depict the events in England and in Normandy that preceded the Conquest. More designs will be added. Juliana has skill in embroidery, a skill she learned as the daughter of a Saxon thane. When she discovers that the thread girl, the young woman who winds the threads and gives them as needed to the stitchers, is leaving to be married, she asks for the job and is given it. From there she has the opportunity to work her way up to be an embroiderer and a participant in the history-recording project. The project is, of course, the Bayeux Tapestry. Juliana is able to help Brother Alain, the artist who sketches the design of the embroidery, with the details of the Norman landing, since she was an eyewitness.

When several months later her mother, newly wedded to one of the hated Normans, comes to Canterbury to take Juliana to their new home in Winchester, she refuses to go. Juliana is determined to continue to lead the life she has found for herself as an independent woman in Canterbury. She rejects the more comfortable but dependent way of life, saying that she is now "more than her mother's daughter." This stance may appear unlikely for an unwed female of that age, but as Rebecca Barnhouse (2000) states, "By situating her heroine in a time of enormous social unrest and change, McGraw avoids the problem so many writers encounter of giving a female character in the medieval period too much power and control over her own life" (Barnhouse, 51).

Historically, it is quite plausible that the Bayeux Tapestry was embroidered in England by Saxon needlewomen, since it bears similarity to other embroidered wall-hangings done in the pre-Conquest era. There is also a strong opinion by scholars that it was done in Canterbury at the monastery of St. Augustine. Placing Juliana, a young woman of noble Saxon birth, in Canterbury and engaging her in this project is credible. For a young reader, following Juliana's trials may make this important artifact of the early Middle Ages come alive.

Catherine, Called Birdy

Karen Cushman's novel *Catherine, Called Birdy* is set in the England of 1290. A spirited and head-strong Birdy speaks through diary entries written during her fourteenth year. The fact that she can express herself so forcefully by means of the written word and the fact that she steps outside the boundaries of expected feminine decorum raise questions concerning her authenticity as a character.

Like Juliana of *The Striped Ships*, Birdy is the daughter of a minor noble. She has the many of the disadvantages of high-born women, such as being a pawn in marriage nego-

tiations, yet she does not have the luxury and leisure of the wealthy. Like Juliana, she is in training to become adept at needlework, but Birdy lacks the patience and the skill. In her frustrations, she sometimes stuffs her ruined work down the privy.

She says,

If I had to be born a lady, why not a rich lady, so someone else could do the work and I could lie on a silken bed and listen to a beautiful minstrel sing while my servants hemmed. Instead I am the daughter of a country knight with but ten servants, seventy villagers, no minstrel, and acres of unhemmed linen. It grumbles my guts. (Birdy, 5)

Although Birdy has some of the privileges of the upper class, her self-esteem is low and she sees herself as chattel.

Since she has reached the marriageable age, her father searches for eligible suitors without regard to her feelings. On September 24 her diary reads:

The stars and my family align to make my life black and miserable. My mother seeks to make me a fine lady—dumb, docile and accomplished—so I must take lady-lessons and keep my mouth closed. My Father, the toad, conspires to sell me like cheese to some lack-wit seeking a wife.

What makes this clodpole suitor anxious to have me? I am no beauty, being sun-browned and gray-eyed, with poor eyesight and a stubborn disposition.

Corpus bones! He comes to dine with us in two days' time. I plan to cross my eyes and drool in my meat. (Birdy, 5-6)

Birdy's skill with words as she composes her diary is a bit unconvincing. The fact that Birdy is literate is explained by the lessons given her by her brother Edward, who has since left home to become a monk. She uses pieces of skins and ink left over from her father's household accounts. She also teaches Latin to Perkin the goatboy. Books are more common in this novel than they would be in an actual household near the end of the thirteenth century. Brother Edward sent three books to his family for Lenten reading, and prior to that, the abbot of her brother's monastery sent a book of saints to Birdy's illiterate mother—hardly likely in an age when only rich men had modest libraries.

In addition to plying her needle, Birdy is often called upon to doctor the ailments of the members of her household and the village. In this role she is more at ease and responds to people's needs without complaint. She improvises when the ingredients for a cure are not readily at hand. She helps to deliver her baby sister and doctors her mother as she suffers postpartum fever. This role is quite authentic in an age when only the very wealthy employed a doctor and most of the care of the sick fell to the woman of the manor.

It is Birdy's spunk, however, that appears strikingly contemporary. She loves her mother and barely tolerates her father. One brother is a friend and the other an abomination. She speaks her opinion and openly defies male authority. As a contemporary teenager would, she questions tradition, flirts when she can, and sulks when she does not get her own way. She plots to get rid of her suitors and runs away from home when marriage to a dirty old man seems inevitable. Is the outspokenness of Birdy unusual for her age? According to Margaret Wade Labarge, "Medieval women, to the discomfiture of many men, had quick, sharp tongues

which they delighted in using to deflate male pomposity" (37). Birdy's verbal skill is thus much more convincing than her writing skill, and Birdy's character is much more in the spirit of the Wife of Bath than a romantic heroine from the novels of Sir Walter Scott.

Birdy, when marriage could no longer be averted, rebels and runs away to her uncle's house. There she observes firsthand how her uncle's wife tries to escape from reality by pretending to be someone else. It must be noted also that Birdy by writing in her diary grows in her attitude toward herself and an acceptance of her role in life.

She decides to return home and face the marriage and make the best of it. Birdy says, "and it came into my head that I cannot run away. I am who I am wherever I am" (Birdy, 202).

The Midwife's Apprentice

Cushman's second novel, *The Midwife's Apprentice*, is set in approximately the same time period as *Catherine, Called Birdy*. However, its protagonist is in a much lower stratum of society than Birdy. At the beginning of the novel she has no livelihood, no home, no name. In the course of the novel she acquires each of these and gains dignity and purpose as a human being. Alyce, as she eventually names herself, has none of the restraints suppressing Birdy. She is not in training to become a noble's wife; she has the freedom of the lower class. Although a midwife takes her in and gives her a home of sorts, this is not done out of charity but practicality. She needs a girl to do her drudgework. Given a chance, Alyce realizes her own worth. She learns some of the midwife skills from observing her employer, gains the respect of some of the villagers, and rescues a young boy from the homeless misery she had formerly experienced by providing him with a name and a safe place to live.

Alyce has her setbacks. After she runs off from the midwife because she has grown overconfident and failed in a complicated delivery, she doubts herself:

'I am nothing,' she whispered to herself. 'I have nothing, I can do nothing and learn nothing. I belong no place. I am too stupid to be a midwife's apprentice, and too tired to wander again. I should just lie here in the rain until I die.'
(Midwife's, 72-73)

She goes on, however, and finds work in an inn. There she learns the rudiments of reading and writing from an old scholar, a permanent resident. When the old man asks her what she wants of life, she thoughtfully replies: "A full belly, a contented heart, and a place in this world" (Midwife's, 81). She has a realistic dream, one that can only be fulfilled by hard work and determination, and she realizes that she must pursue it. Alyce returns to the midwife, and when the midwife does not open the door to her, she persists in her request to be allowed in. The midwife finally relents and opens the door because Alyce has shown that she will not easily give up.

Alyce's aspirations are realistic for a young woman of the lower classes in rural England. She could not become a lady in a society where one's social class is determined from birth. She can, however, become an independent, skilled practitioner in a world where roles for women were limited. Although Alyce never reaches the level of literacy that Birdy has, Cushman clearly depicts young women for whom reading

and writing are doorways to self-worth and empowerment.

Mary Erler and Maryanne Kowaleski (1988) in the introduction to their collection of essays, *Women and Power in the Middle Ages* (1-13), point out that although women had no legal authority in this time, they did have power. The power came from the use of their gifts and skills as young woman, wife, mother, and widow and the influence they held over others, both directly and indirectly in these roles. So too Julianna, Birdy, and Alyce use their skills in the society in which they find themselves to acquire dignity, respect, and even some limited power.

Matilda Bone

In Cushman's more recent novel, the protagonist, Matilda Bone, is so named because she is apprenticed to a bonesetter in a small English town. The orphaned daughter of a clerk, she was raised on a country manor and educated by the local priest. At age fourteen her lessons in Latin and sanctity end abruptly when she is left at the doorstep of Red Peg, who needs a healthy young woman to assist her in her practice. Matilda does not adjust easily to her new way of life, and she lets her new mistress know that she prefers reading, writing, and praying to the menial tasks that she is given.

Like Alyce of *The Midwife's Apprentice*, Matilda finds herself in a profession assigned to women. But unlike Alyce, Matilda believes herself superior to her mistress and does not hesitate to tell her so. The neighborhood of Blood and Bone Alley is repugnant to her. In her mind, the profession of the physician, a man who reads Latin and consults books, is far superior to the methods of illiterate women who rely on practices handed down by word of mouth and their own common sense. Matilda eventually discovers the goodness in Red Peg and her fellow practitioners. The skill and experience they have, she finds, is much more effective in healing injuries than the astrological computations of the rich physician. Matilda finds her own self worth as well. Although it is fine and sometimes helpful to read and write, it is most important to be generous and loving to one's fellow human beings. Matilda thus accepts the constraints of her social condition, as Birdy and Alyce do.

The Outlaws of Sherwood

One of the strongest female characters that has come down to us from medieval legend is Robin Hood's Maid Marian. It is not surprising, therefore, that she appears in recent versions of the familiar story. In Robin McKinley's *The Outlaws of Sherwood*, Robin Hood, the central character, is almost overshadowed by his Marian. The only child of a minor noble, Marian uses her connections to aid Robin and his outlawed band. Despite her aristocratic upbringing, Marian is an excellent archer, better in fact than Robin. Her spunkiness results in mortal danger when she poses as Robin at the sheriff's archery contest and becomes gravely wounded. By the end of the novel Robin's social status has been so improved that marriage with Marian, unthinkable before, is now possible.

Another strong female character in the novel is Ceceily who, in order to escape an arranged marriage, disguises herself as a young boy and joins Robin's group. She fools even Little John into accepting her as a male member of the company. Although neither Marian nor Ceceily is the central character of the book, each is a young woman who success-

fully, if not unrealistically, avoids the future that her aristocratic background offers her.

The Forest Wife

In the novels of Theresa Tomlinson, *The Forest Wife* and *Child of the May*, Maid Marian is the strong central character. Tomlinson gives Marian an unusual role and a voice not found in any other version of the legend. Set in the last decade of the twelfth century, *The Forest Wife* combines the Robin Hood legend with that of the Green Man. Although not strictly historical fiction, the novel depicts the lifestyle and roles of nobility and peasants at the end of the 12th century. Marian is a young woman who with her nurse runs away from her uncle's manor in order to avoid a hateful arranged marriage. They take refuge deep in the forest in the hut of the Forest Wife, a woman to whom the poor and the outlawed came for help and healing. Upon discovering that the woman is dead, the nurse, Agnes, takes on the role of forest wife; later Marian discovers that the fearless outlaw Robin Hood is her son. Marian becomes known to the people of the forest as the Green Lady, the female counterpart to the Green Man, the representation of verdant vegetation and renewal of life. Each May Day, she dances around the Maypole with "the hooded one," the Green Man, who is Robin himself. Although she falls in love with Robin, Marian declines to marry him because she is the Forest Wife in training, and the woman who holds that position must be either unmarried or widowed. Surprisingly, Robin Hood takes a back seat in the story. Marian's reputation and power come from her womanly role in caring for the poor and sick, not from her association with Robin's band of thieves.

Child of the May

The sequel, *Child of the May*, takes place ten years later. Marian is now Forest Wife, and another teenage girl is in training for the position, Magda, the daughter of Little John. Just as Marian had rebelled against an arranged marriage, Magda sees her life in the forest as constraining and yearns to get away from it. After she disguises herself as a boy and has some hair-raising experiences with her father and Robin Hood, Magda is happy to return to Marian, only to be caught up in an adventure with the women of the forest who together rescue the daughter of a nearby landowner. The women win, not by use of arms and strength, but by subterfuge and networking, a not uncommon way of women gaining power. By the end of the novel Magda is willing to stay with Marian and eventually take on the duties of the Forest Wife, a life that is not without its own power and adventure.

Tomlinson's novels present readers with assertive female characters, characters who take on leadership roles and prove themselves man's equals in coping with food gathering and defense in a primitive setting, yet their way of life and their adventures are distinctly different from those of the men. Marian and Magda demonstrate that they can be independent of men, yet complimentary to them.

In these recent novels centered on young women they are given a voice that they previously lacked in adolescent novels set in the Middle Ages. For the most part they are given roles that are suitable and realistic for their time and social class. In all of them, the female protagonist suffers low self-esteem from the oppression that comes with her state in life. In all of them, she uses her determination and courage and also her traditional womanly skills to face the situation she finds herself in and come to terms with it, and thus she gains empowerment. She comes nowhere near the equality and independence of the young woman of today, but she does demonstrate that she too has a story to tell.

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Jack Gantos: On Domestic Craziness and Big-Hearted Kids

An Interview with Gail P. Gregg

It was summertime and baseball season was in full bloom when the idea for this interview was conceived. Perhaps that was what Jack Gantos was thinking of when he responded to my request for an interview, “You come up with the questions and I will take my best swing at answering them!” Thus, we began our e-mail conversation.

GG: Can you tell me what it was like growing up in your family?

JG: I grew up with two younger brothers, an older sister and a mom and dad. It was a fairly typical arrangement on the surface, but as a family we had our ups and downs. We moved a lot. I went to ten different schools in twelve years. My dad was trying to earn a living in the construction business, and so he moved us about in search of better jobs. Some of the places we moved to, like Barbados, Puerto Rico and Cape Hatteras were great – others, were not so great. Due to the housing boon in Florida, we lived all over Miami and Ft. Lauderdale – mostly in new developments with “instant culture” – which meant strip malls. Still, we were quite clever and there were always dozens of kids to play with so we were never bored. Three of my “Jack” books are set in South Florida.

GG: So, as a youngster, how did you spend your time?

JG: I spent most of my time out of the house. Being at home meant being at work – there was always a long list of chores. Sitting in the living room reading a book meant to my parents that I was wasting my time, and instead should be mowing the lawn or scrubbing floors or washing the car. I read in the garage, which was much more peaceful (to this day, I love the smell of gasoline), and I always seemed to find a library to hunker down in and immerse myself in reading.

GG: Who was the disciplinarian in your family?

JG: It breaks down this way – my mother used her petite motor skills, and my father used his gross motor skills. Neither was enthusiastic about punishment – and whatever we received, we probably earned. As for the finer qualities of discipline, i.e., do your homework right after school, set goals to be reached step by step, practice musical skills daily, develop patience, balance artistic, intellectual and physical pursuits, don’t eat in bed, dress as if you owned a mirror . . . this sort of discipline was mostly over-

looked for lack of parental maintenance and child disinterest.

GG: Sounds similar to the way I was disciplined. Moving on from family to school – what kind of student were you in middle school?

JG: I was a poor student in middle school. I would not have been in a “gifted and talented” program. I was smart, but entirely unmotivated. I think by the time I arrived in middle school we had already moved several times. I didn’t have any close friends, and ended up being on the fringe of “nice kid groups” (which was no fun), or else I was like a “spot” friend for the continuous cycle of kids who were always in trouble (this was more fun, but slightly dangerous). I belonged to no organized group – like sports or scouts. At home, my parents were struggling to make ends meet, so they weren’t around for a lot of tea and sympathy.

GG: Any favorite teachers?

JG: I had one teacher in middle school whom I secretly admired: Mr. Adolina. He was my Latin teacher and he knew that I was a bit of a lost soul – in fact, the entire Latin class was made up of lost souls!

So instead of drilling us full of Latin, he took us to every museum, play, concert, snake farm, parrot jungle, botanical garden and cultural activity (including a visit to a Seminole Indian village where we watched alligator wrestling). Although he knew we were smart, he felt that if we continued to be ignorant of the culture around us we would soon shut down and become high school losers with a degree in beer drinking. In his classroom, we watched movies all week – *Ben Hur*, *The Robe*, and *Spartacus* – any movie with a Latin connection. I loved him.

GG: Did any of your teachers encourage you to write?

JG: No, none. We never talked about creative writing, never had a section on creative writing, never met any writers, and never discussed writing as a career.

GG: As an English educator I find that very disappointing. I read that you kept a journal as a kid. Did your teachers ever know of your journaling habit?

JG: In middle school guys believed that keeping a diary would be a respectable activity for girls only. I wrote privately, which was okay because I avoided bad advice. I made my own mistakes and found my own idiosyncratic solutions.



GG: It has been reported that *Jack's Black Book* was based on journals that you kept while growing up. Was journal writing the only kind of writing (outside of school assignments) that you did during your youth?

JG: Yes, journal writing is where I did all my writing. If I wrote a poem, it was in my journal – and I can say the same for stories and such. The four “Jack Henry” books are all based on my old journals. The published stories are not word-for-word as I first wrote them. They are heavily reworked, but the “germ” for each “Jack Henry” story was first written in my childhood journals.

GG: Speaking of journal writing, what caused you to begin to keep a journal?

JG: Pure luck! My older sister was a great journal writer. I was a copycat and so I asked my mother for a journal. She bought me one and I was under way.

GG: As a kid, did you ever share your journals with family or friends?

JG: Never. I did not invite anyone into my creative world. I viewed everyone as a threat because I had a fear that if people made fun of what I was doing that I might make fun of myself. I guess I felt that I was too weak to resist self-loathing. Also, I realized early on that privacy equaled power. In other words, what people thought you wrote about them was more powerful than what you really did.

GG: How did you overcome your fear and finally decide to share your creative world with others?

JG: My resistance to sharing my journals with family and friends was mostly because I consider my journals to be entirely personal, and more creatively “raw” than not – just as to this day, I don't show the “raw” written pages to family, students or my editor. I never had, nor do I have trouble sharing my refined creative work (poems, stories, and plays) with teachers and other writing students. For me, it wasn't sharing that was at issue – it was “who” I was sharing with, and the refinement of the work. I had to feel confident that I was showing my best effort to someone who could provide a considered response.

GG: Do you think that the act of writing in a journal helped you with relations with your family or with personal relationships in general?

JG: It may have, but the journal to me was not a place I went running to each time I had a tiff with my family. The journal was not a crying towel or steam vent. It was a place I went to write – certainly about my life and family, and social ups and downs – but where I escaped into my own creative thoughts as well. The journal is a place where you naturally reflect on your thoughts and behavior, and I am sure that some of that reflection had a positive effect on my attitude and behavior toward my family.

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GG: So have you kept your original journals?

JG: I have them all – around two hundred of them.

GG: Did you take creative writing in college? If not, how and where did you learn your craft?

JG: I went to Emerson College in Boston for creative writing. I received a BFA and MA. Emerson didn't have children's book writing – I did that on my own. In my junior year I published my first picture book, *Rotten Ralph*. After I graduated the college hired me to teach writing and literature courses. While there, I set up the undergraduate and graduate children's writing and literature program, which has been discontinued since my departure to further my own writing. Emerson College has always considered children's writing to be beneath adult poetry and adult prose. Sadly, most college writing programs think children's writing is an activity practiced by garden gnomes who live under tombstones. I say “sadly” because there

is so much which is brilliant in children's literature. It is both academic and artistic. Condescension often keeps children's literature from being fully recognized on its own literary merits.

GG: A colleague of mine who is well versed in ADHD and special education read your book, *Joey Pigza Swallowed the Key* and stated that your portrayal of Joey was very authentic. How did you come to know so much about

hyperactivity, its treatment, medication, and so on? Were you hyperactive as a kid?

JG: No, I was not hyperactive as a kid but I knew many hyperactive kids—we all did. They were the kids that had separate desks in the school hallways—all the kids who were forever pacing around the principal's office and a lot of the class clown types. Of course, I also did research – read books and searched the internet on the topic of hyperactivity. I also spoke with classroom teachers and special education teachers, and looked into behavior and drug therapies used with hyperactive kids. There is a lot of information available on this topic.

GG: So what prompted you to focus on this particular disability as something to incorporate into the make-up of Joey?

JG: I seized on the hyperactivity because

I knew so many hyperactive kids when I was a kid, and then, as an adult, I seemed to observe them in schools everywhere. As a matter of fact, at one particular school visit a child blurted out in the middle of my presentation, “Teacher, I forgot to take my meds.” The teacher pointed to the open door and the child leapt out of his seat and ran down the hall towards the nurse's office. Somehow, all the knowledge and experience I had gathered about hyperactivity just manifested itself into that kid and I began the first “Joey” novel that night, while sitting in my hotel room. Also, I want to add that even though the book is



about a specific kid, Joey Pigza, with a specific problem, ADHD, the book in general addresses the subject of any kid, any person with a disability and how that person is perceived. I think that all people should be judged by the collection of their best qualities – and I think that Joey has some great qualities.

GG: Speaking of authenticity, the character, Joey speaks like kids really speak. Who was your model? Do you spend a lot of time listening and talking to middle school youngsters?

JG: Yes, from my school visits I keep up to date with how kids speak and dress, and behave. One can glean much information from spot observation.

GG: Goodness, with all of Joey's problems, why did you give him such a troubled mother?

JG: Everyone in Joey's family is at risk with one problem or another.

Part of the book is about how both Joey and his mother have to come to terms with who they are first, about their particular struggles, and then they can empathize with each other more completely – which they do by the end of the novel.

GG: Not only did you give him a rather troubled mother, you chose to give him an alcoholic father as well. Why?

JG: There is a lot of evidence that ADHD runs in families and evidence that as young people grow older the ADHD manifests itself in different behaviors – adults often become addicted to certain binge behaviors: gambling, chain smoking, excessive drinking and such. For Joey, Carter (his father) is who he may become if he doesn't manage his disorder. Of course, like any boy, Joey wants a relationship with his father, but he wants a responsible father – a father he can love without fear. Carter, however, is a bit scary so there is dramatic tension created with Joey wanting to have a deep relationship with his father while at the same time being afraid of him.

GG: In *Joey Pigza Loses Control*, you allow Joey to spend the summer with an alcoholic and dysfunctional grandmother both of whom Joey hardly knows—do you think that this was a good idea? Don't you kind of leave yourself open for criticism by doing this?

JG: I think that readers realize that Joey's family is not making textbook decisions. They are doing the best they can with what they have. In this particular novel, there is a window of opportunity for Joey to have a relationship with his father and so his mother takes a chance. After all, what if it works out? What if Joey has the opportunity to foster a relationship with his father? So, the mother takes a calculated risk and hopes that the potential for good is greater than the potential for what is negative.

GG: Don't you run the risk of your middle school readers getting very angry at Joey's mom for placing Joey in such a precarious environment for the summer?

JG: I don't think all middle school readers live in a world void of risks. I think they are mature enough to realize the dynamics of this family. Statistics say that 50% of all marriages end in divorce. Wouldn't that fact be enough to keep anyone from getting married? But it doesn't, because people are hopeful that they will be in the 50% that stick together – any Joey's mother is hopeful that Joey and his father will stick together. Middle school readers are very sophisticated. They understand that difficult choices are made because making a hopeful choice is often better than making no choice at all.

GG: A very prominent theme in the "Jack Henry" books as well as the "Joey" books is the father/son relationship.

Was your model your own relationship with your father? Talk a little about father/son relationships in general.

JG: In the "Jack" books, because they are autobiographical, the father was modeled after my own. As for speaking on the general subject of father/son relationships – I don't know if I can do it service. At present it is a subject that draws much attention, and most of it is common sense and applies to all children: Love them; spend time with them; set high standards and help them to achieve their goals; be interactive with interests and friendships; develop a consistent, ongoing relationship; and, model responsible behavior.

GG: What is the driving force behind your stories? Where do your ideas come from, especially for the "Joey" books?

JG: I don't think that I have a single driving force behind my stories. I do believe that all children are driven to make logic out of chaos, to seek unconditional love, and to complete the cycle between violation and redemption. Very often then, these forces drive my characters.

GG: You have written books for pre-adolescents, adolescents, and adults – which age group do you prefer to write for and about?

JG: I like them all. It is difficult to point to any exact preference. The "*Rotten Ralph*" picture books are so much fun to write – and even more to read to emerging and young readers. The "*Jack Henry*" books are satisfying because they are autobiographical and I get to revisit my past and refine the emotions and themes that puzzled and delighted me. For young readers, the domestic craziness of

those stories allows them to take a crack at writing about their own lives. Of course, I very much enjoyed writing the "*Joey*" books (and I have one more to compete). He is a character with a very big heart and charting that terrain is very challenging and thus satisfying.

GG: Can you speak a little about your writing process? Teachers like me are curious about your use of autobiographical subject material and first person narrative; your methods of researching topics; your revision process; your daily writing habits; your preference for pen and paper or word processor—almost every detail about how you compose your stories.

JG: I think I stick to the basics. Yes, I use personal experi-

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Kids have to make choices for themselves. In the books that I write, I try to have the young characters figure out the world around them, figure out the world within themselves, and try to live lives that fulfill some clear goals.

ences for inspiration. I like writing from the first person point of view because it is very immediate and also you run less a risk of condescending toward the reader if the voice in the story is the voice of the young character. But the first person demands spot on accuracy. Every word from dialog to description must be true to the character. Usually I write the first draft in long hand and then I type it into my computer. I make changes, print it out, and mark up the copy. I repeat this process several times. Generally, everything that I publish has at least twenty drafts beneath the surface.

GG: Your works use a subtle approach to guide characters toward positive outcomes. Can you discuss your philosophy relative to guiding kids towards positive endeavors, given today's environment?

JG: I don't think that I have a philosophy. I can say that adults can't make all the decisions for young people. Kids have to make choices for themselves. In the books that I write, I try to have the young characters figure out the world around them, figure out the world within themselves, and try to live lives that fulfill some clear goals. Literature maps the human heart and if young people know themselves they will know what decisions to make according to the circumstances.

GG: Someone once said that authors are the "unacknowledged legislators" of the world. In light of the books that you have written, do you think that this term fits you?

JG: Well, I think the greatest conflict I see in humans is the struggle between being "who you are" and "who you want to be," which boils down to a struggle between yourself and inventing yourself. Books do help legislate this conflict in that they provide examples of human behavior – of choice and consequences – of triumphs and tragedies. But, books do not hand over decisions - they just give insight into the choices. Ultimately, you are responsible for legislating your own behavior.

GG: Now to wrap up, there are a few questions that I still would like to ask you of a personal nature – kind of non-literary type questions. First, what is your favorite word and why?

JG: Impunity. If I had it all my way I'd operate without it.

GG: Me, too! Second, if you weren't an author, what would you like to be and why?

JG: I wanted to be an anthropologist ever since I read, *Keep the River on your Right* by Tobias Shneebaum. I'd have loved to walk into the Amazon and lived with a tribe of indigenous people.

GG: Your favorite memory from your teen years?

JG: Cheap perfume.

GG: I can't let this one go by without asking for an explanation.

JG: Because sniffing it from a distance is about the closest I ever came to the opposite sex, and cheap perfume is about all they wore. To this day, the smell of cheap perfume means, "Don't touch." Some time ago I received as a gift a bottle of perfume (Tresor) signed by Isabella Rosalinni (who I've always had a crush on). I was thrilled. I opened it up – but it wasn't cheap enough. I gave it away. Good perfume is simply far too inviting. Cheap perfume, to me, will always be eternally teasing.

GG: A fascinating explanation from someone I am finding to be a thoroughly fascinating human being. One last question, what book are you reading now?

JG: The *Nick Toshes Reader*.

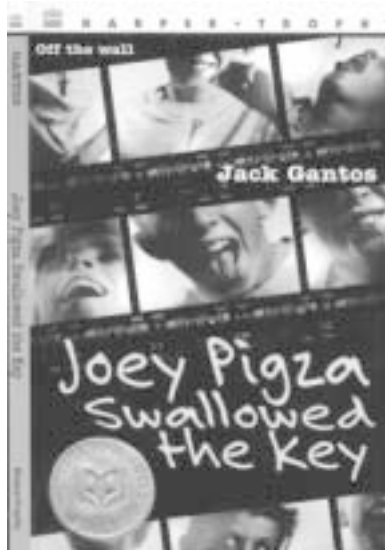
Much like Joey in *Joey Pigza Swallowed the Key*, I have the feeling that Jack Gantos spoke from a solid center of goodness when responding to the questions in this interview.

Note: Jack Gantos is the author of numerous works including *Jack on the Tracks: Four Seasons of the Fifth Grade*, *Jack's New Power: Stories from a Caribbean Year*, *Heads or Tails: Stories from the Sixth Grade*, *Jack's Black Book*, *Joey Pigza Swallowed the Key*. His latest, *Joey Pigza Loses Control* all published by Farrar, Straus, and Giroux.

The quality of Gantos' fiction is reflected in the variety and number of honors and awards he has received for *Joey Pigza Swallowed the Key*: A National Book Award Finalist for Young People's

Literature; An ALA Notable Children's Book; An NCSS-CBC Notable Children's Trade Book in the Field of Social Studies; A School Library Journal Best Book of the Year; A Riverbank Review Children's Book of Distinction; A New York Public Library Children's Book – 100 Titles for Reading and Sharing; A NECBA Fall List Title; California Young Reader Medal Nomination, Middle/Junior High School Category, 2000-2001.

Gail P. Gregg, the Assistant Editor of The ALAN Review, is an associate professor English Education at Florida International University. A former teacher of high school English, she teaches courses in young adult literature, multicultural ya literature, and in English methods, among others.



One Teacher's Book Hook to Introduce Jack Gantos' *Jack's Black Book*

Great Green Gobs of . . .

It all begins with a homework assignment to write a "G" rated, three paragraph story titled, "The Grossest Day." The next day, in front of the class will be a giant box (assembled from 3-4 refrigerator boxes). Painted on the front of the box will be the phrase "Gross-Out Contest brought to you by **Jack's Black Book** written by Jack Gantos!" The graphics on the box will be similar to the illustrations on the cover and throughout the chapter divisions. The teacher will have four poster board signs ("Ugh!", "Uww!", "Yuck!", and "Gross!"). The teacher will then ask each student to one at a time come up and read their story. After doing this, the teacher will hold up one of the signs and have the whole class make the appropriate comment from the poster board in unison. The student is told they now have the opportunity to enter the Gross-Out Contest. They are blindfolded and asked to enter the giant box. Inside is a baby pool filled with Jell-O and cooked spaghetti (variety of shapes). Also mixed into this are ziplocked bags that contain a copy of *Jack's Black Book*, a small black notebook, and a variety of trinkets (weird pencils and pens, erasers, stamps, stickers, and pencil toppers). Students are asked to feel around in the Jell-O until they can grab one of the plastic bags. After each student has grabbed a bag, they will be ready to clean up, then start the book. Assign the book to be read, and explain that you will talk about the journals (notebooks) later.

NOTE: Bring paper towels, hand soap, mop and bucket. This could get a little messy but not too bad if handled correctly.

ALTERNATIVE: Don't have the baby pool completely blocked off. Cut off the top of the box, so the other students can see the student's reaction as he/she fishes in the pool of grossness for a prize.

Scott C. Rogers
Language Arts Teacher
Deer Lake Middle School
Tallahassee, Florida

You Don't Know Me by David Klass
Frances Foster Books, 2001, 266 pp., \$17.00

Isolation/Identity/Family
ISBN: 0-374-38706-0

John, who claims that his father named him after a toilet, struggles to find a sense of belonging both at home and at school. He feels that his mother has chosen her new boyfriend, and is angry because she does not know that her boyfriend is abusing John. He struggles to find groups with which he belongs at school by playing in the band, hanging out with friends, and trying to ask girls to the dance.

Some teachers sense that something is going on with John, and his band director, Mr. Steenwilly, asks him about marks he noticed on John's arm. John avoids talking directly with adults, as many of his responses occur within his mind, and he repeatedly "thinks" variations of, "You don't know me."

While they may not directly identify with issues of abuse, many adolescents will identify with John's search for identity, and for a feeling that people truly know him and who he is on the inside. The language and structure of the novel are intriguing; much of John's conversation is internal, and he defines various situations through what they are *not*. While this difference may make the novel begin as a slow read for some, it quickly picks up the pace as John begins hanging out with friends at the mall.

Jennifer Dail, Florida State University, Tallahassee, FL

At the Sign of the Star by Katherine Sturtevant
Farrar, Straus, & Giroux, 2000, 137 pp., \$16.00

Growth to Awareness
ISBN: 0-374-30449-1

Twelve-year-old Meg Moore is the motherless only child of a bookseller with a thriving business in Restoration London – and that makes her an heiress.

This is the story of Meg Moore's growth to awareness. Set in a British era when women were subservient to men, this work looks at the life of a motherless girl, who is faced not only with a changing family, but with a society that is in the middle of defining new roles for women. Her experiences and her dreams take her to a new maturity that will help her control her future. And help her secure her deserved fortune.

As the story unfolds, Meg finds herself in a stepfamily that she mistrusts and a future that is uncertain. Seeking the advice of everyone from astrologers to literary scholars, Meg gradually learns to assert herself and her new found womanhood.

Sturtevant's story and characters are believable and realistic. Adolescent readers will not only be drawn into the characters' lives, but they will come away from the reading with a better sense of the Restoration.

Jeanne M. Gerlach, Arlington, Texas

Frenchtown Summer by Robert Cormier
Delacorte, 1999, 113 pp., \$16.95

Coming of Age/Poverty
ISBN: 0-385-32704-8

This exquisite novel, told in lyrical free verse, tells the story of Eugene's twelfth summer in Frenchtown, Massachusetts, sometime in the 1930s, when he falls in love for the first time, gets his first paper route, loses his favorite uncle, and connects with his emotionally distant father. Each chapter is a separate poem and the novel is episodic in structure. Although many of the events may seem minor, the poetry Cormier uses to show readers Eugene's life is unforgettable.

Cormier brings a long forgotten era to life with this book. Readers expecting his more typical explorations of the darker elements of humanity may be disappointed, but those who savor beautiful imagery and the evocation of past times will be thrilled. Eugene's story may not be catastrophic or life threatening, but it is eventful and thought provoking. Reluctant readers may be enticed by the brief text.

Ellen Greever, Milwaukee, Wisconsin

Young Adult Books In Review

Recently Published Titles

Jeff Kaplan, Editor
3x5 inches to "Clip & File"

<p><i>Play to the Angel</i> by Maurine F. Dahlberg Farrar, Straus, Grioux, 2000, 186 pp., \$16.00</p> <p>Historical Fiction ISBN: 0-374-35994-6</p> <p>Set in 1938 Vienna just before and during the Nazi takeover, this well-written, fast-paced first novel focuses on likable, admirable, and indomitable twelve-year-old Greta Radky as she pursues her dream of becoming a concert pianist. When Greta discovers that her widowed mother plans to sell their piano because she cannot cope with hearing it played after the death of Greta's brother, another promising pianist, Greta is devastated. However, with the help of a family friend and Herr Hummel, Greta's mysterious new piano teacher, Greta's mother relents and even consents to her performing in a prestigious recital.</p> <p>Dahlberg does a superb job in depicting the Nazi takeover, showing how many Austrian supporters – seemingly decent people – violently turned against Jews and those who wanted an independent Austria. Middle school girls, especially, will appreciate Greta's determination and her helping Herr Hummel flee to Prague, since he actually is a well-known German pianist whose anti-Nazi actions have marked him an enemy of the state.</p> <p>Bill Mollineaux, Granby, Connecticut</p>	<p><i>A Wizard Abroad</i> by Diane Duane Harcourt Brace, 1999, 339 pp., \$6.00</p> <p>Wizardry/ Fantasy ISBN: 0-15-201207-9</p> <p>Clearly fifteen year-old Nita's parents don't fully grasp what it means for their two daughters to be wizards. Misunderstanding the nature and intensity of Nita's relationship with Kit, her wizard partner, they bundle their daughter off to Ireland to spend the summer with her father's sister, Aunt Annie, unaware that the trip actually fulfills a much larger purpose than their own, and also that wizardry runs in the family.</p> <p>While in Ireland, Nita goes "on call" and is summoned to use her powers together with those of a group of Irish wizards to do battle with malevolent forces which, unchecked, would pull Ireland, Europe, and in fact, Earth itself into a time-space void where barriers between past and present, the physical and nonphysical, break down and dark chaos rules. Battles with the Formori (the early monster of Ireland) and the king, Balor of the Evil Eye, and the conversations with Tualha, the cat-bard, play easily alongside the everyday realism of contemporary rural Irish life.</p> <p>This well written book, fourth in Duane's Wizardry series, moves quickly and will undoubtedly please wizardry fans that have outgrown Harry Potter.</p> <p>Peter E. Morgan, Carrollton, Georgia</p>
<p><i>Lizzie at Last</i> by Claudia Mills Farrar, Straus, & Giroux, 2000, 160 pp., \$16.00</p> <p>Coming of Age ISBN: 0-374-34659-3</p> <p><i>Lizzie at Last</i>, a sequel to <i>Losers, Inc.</i> and <i>You're a Brave Man, Julius Zimmerman</i>, follows the middle school blossoming of Lizzie Archer. Lizzie self-consciously enters the halls of West Creek Middle School suddenly uncomfortable with her love of poetry, the old-fashioned white dresses she favors, reminiscent of her idol Emily Dickinson, and her reputation as a math whiz. Embarrassed by her parents, she looks to visiting Aunt Eispeth to take her shopping for jeans and t-shirts, and to popular Marcia Faitak to give her tips on fitting in and attracting the attention of Ethan Winfield.</p> <p><i>Lizzie at Last</i> is a predictable pre-teen novel for younger middle school students. While it does sympathetically explore the typical teen concerns about conformity and popularity, it's strictly light reading.</p> <p>Margaret J. Ford, Campbell, Ohio</p>	<p><i>The Transformation</i> by Mette Newth, translated by Faith Ingwersen Farrar, Straus, & Giroux, 2000, 195 pp., \$16.00</p> <p>Historical Fiction ISBN: 0-374-37752-9</p> <p>Set in fifteenth-century Greenland, this novel explores the relationship between a native Inuit woman and a young Irish missionary, both seeking answers to spiritual questions and struggling to survive in a harsh, frozen environment. Navarana saves Brendan's life when she finds him in a deserted church settlement, but Brendan is convinced he must save her soul from her "heathen" Shaman religion.</p> <p><i>The Transformation</i> is a new look, in a very ancient setting, at the need for religious and cultural tolerance. The beautiful descriptions of the Greenlandic landscape mixed with the mystical visions and awakenings experienced by the characters make for fascinating reading. This story would be especially appropriate for high school and mature middle school readers.</p> <p>Patti Cleary, Peninsula, Ohio</p>

<p><i>Jerome</i> by William Taylor Allyson Books, 1999, 95 pp., \$9.95</p> <p>Communication/Homosexuality ISBN: 1-5583-512-0</p> <p>Stylistically, <i>Jerome</i> is a surprising novel – beginning suspiciously like another <i>Catcher in the Rye</i> wanna-be, with considerably more reliance on the “F” word, then quickly moving to a tight FAX/E-mail dialogue between two friends, Marco and Katie. Their discussion and hence, the theme of this work, centers on two friends counseling each other about the unexpected suicide of a close mutual friend, Jerome.</p> <p>This talk between Marco and Katie becomes an analysis of Jerome’s character, leading eventually to a personal encounter between these two, during which is revealed that the deceased Jerome was unwilling to accept his homosexuality. Instead, Jerome chose to end his life rather than live it as a gay person and express his love for Marco.</p> <p>There are twists: during the e-mails Katie reveals that she too is gay, and a disbelieving Marco attempts to persuade her that she can’t be. Yet ironically, through this act, Marco discovers that he too has been repressing his own homosexuality and love for Jerome.</p> <p>This book is well worth the read for teachers interested in suggesting realistic fiction to those middle teens wrestling with these very tender issues.</p> <p>Michael Angelotti, Norman, Oklahoma</p>	<p><i>Calling the Swan</i> by Jean Thessman Viking, 2000, 147 pp., \$ 15.99</p> <p>Death/Separation ISBN: 0-670-88874-5</p> <p>The loss of a family member is always difficult for those who remain behind. Thessman explores the impact of an unanswerable question: what happened? Alexandria has been missing for three years – she simply disappeared one day while going to feed the swans in the local park.</p> <p>Skylar, her sister, wants to believe that Alexandria is still alive; she talks with her in Alexandria’s room, sees her on the street, and at school. The family is uncertain whether to proceed with life, based on the assumption that Alexandria could return, or that she is truly gone. Skylar’s mother fears her other children will disappear so she becomes overly protective, not wanting Skylar to go to summer school and interact with young people. Still, Skylar’s grandmother believes that the family must somehow put their lives back together and get on with living. She supports Skylar as she begins to make new friends.</p> <p>Thessman captures vividly the impact such an event can have on a family. The novel will stir powerful emotions and should be recommended only to mature readers.</p> <p>Charles R. Duke, Boone, North Carolina</p>
<p><i>The Queen of Attolia</i> by Megan Whalen Turner Greenwillow, 2000, 279 pp., \$15.95</p> <p>Fantasy/ Adventure ISBN: 0-688-17423-X</p> <p>The thief, with a reputation for being able to steal anything, seems to know the Queen’s castle and all its passages intimately. However, this time the Queen of Attolia, who has lost face because of him, knows he’s there and eventually captures and punishes him in a horrible, unthinkable way.</p> <p>Eugendies feels the gods have forsaken him and his recovery from this cruel, debilitating punishment is halting and difficult. But his loyalty and dedication to the Queen of Eddis causes him to embark on a mission to bring stability to his part of the world. He must steal a man, and steal the Queen of Attolia in order to steal the peace.</p> <p>This fast-paced, breath-taking sequel to the Newbery Honor Book, <i>The Thief</i>, has fabulous twists and turns which make this not only a wonderful story of adventure but also a story about life.</p> <p>Diana Mitchell, Williamston, Michigan</p>	<p><i>Lost and Found: Award-Winning Authors Sharing Real-Life Experiences Through Fiction</i>, edited by M. Jerry Weiss and Helen Weiss Forge, 2000, 217 pp., \$19.95</p> <p>Short Stories ISBN: 0-312-87048-5</p> <p>Here is a volume of thirteen short works guaranteed to inspire readers to read and writers to write. <i>Lost and Found</i> is the second short story anthology compiled by Helen and Jerry Weiss aimed at young adults.</p> <p>In David Lubar’s “Duel Identities,” sports and ethics spar as freshman Scot Tarbell defends his honor as a fencer amid a school of football players and wrestlers. Shelly Stoehr’s “The Book” is about Jesse, who discovers her old high school memoirs in her parents’ attic. Jesse learns – through her writings – of a long ago car accident that left her disabled and for which she still grieves. Adele Griffin tackles eating disorders in her prom story, “As Skinny Does,” and Mel Glenn looks at teens hanging out in “Kids in the Mall,” told in his traditional free verse.</p> <p>Each of the thirteen short pieces is a fast read – about fourteen pages in length. Highly accessible for both teachers and teens, this enjoyable collection brims with inspiring stories, revealing insights, informative biographies, and adaptable lessons.</p> <p>Lisa K. Winkler, South Orange, New Jersey</p>

<p><i>Spindle's End</i> by Robin McKinley Putnam, 2000, 422 pp., \$19.95</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Fantasy/ Fairy Tale ISBN: 0-399-239466-7</p> <p>Renowned fantasy writer Robin McKinley retells the fairy tale about the dreamy Sleeping Beauty. This time, she is called Infant Princess Rosie who is cursed by wicked Pernicia to die when she pricks her finger on a spindle on her 21st birthday.</p> <p>That very same day, though, a good peasant fairy steals her away and raises her concealing her royal identity from others, including baby Rosie herself. As she grows toward adulthood, our Infant Princess Rosie develops strength and insight through her many experiences in the forest and her communication with her animal friends.</p> <p>Hence, when our heroine Rosie approaches the ill-fated 21st birthday, she is, by now, powerful enough to thwart the destiny Pernicia intends. She avoids the spindle prick and receives, like Sleeping Beauty, a “spell-binding kiss,” from a most surprising source.</p> <p>McKinley’s rich storytelling - the fictitious countryside, the classic personification of good and evil, the magical elements, the humanized animals, the spunky peasant girl with a secret identity – work smoothly. The end result is a clever, suspenseful and highly moral fairy tale bound to please McKinley fans or any middle or high school reader who is in love with good fantasy.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Marjorie M. Kaiser, Louisville, Kentucky</p>	<p><i>Snail Mail No More</i> by Paula Danziger and Ann M. Martin Scholastic Press, 2000, 344 pp., \$16.95</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Teen Issues, Alcoholism ISBN: 0-439-06335-3</p> <p>Using the e-mail correspondence of two girls, popular children’s writers Paula Danziger (<i>The Cat Ate My Gymsuit, The Bat in Bunk Five</i>) and Ann M. Martin (The Baby-Sitters Club Series) let us in on the lives of Tara and Elizabeth and their families.</p> <p>Eighth grader Tara has moved to Ohio and begins to correspond by ‘snail mail’ (begun in their first book, <i>P. S. Longer Letter Later</i>) with her best friend since childhood, left-behind Elizabeth. As in the first book, we learn that bubbly Tara likes people and drama, while introspective Elizabeth writes poetry and serves as editor for a school magazine. Tara, as a typical seventh grader, gets herself grounded periodically as a result of the mistakes she makes in her “growing up” process. Elizabeth, the wiser friend, condemns Tara’s reckless behavior, while simultaneously dealing with her own problem – an alcoholic father.</p> <p>Funny and serious, this easy-to-read book addresses many of the problems and concerns that confront teeangers today—babysitting, boyfriends, dating, drinking, and even death. Although marred by a slow beginning, the story does achieve its own fun pace as the characters of these two girls are well revealed through the e-mails they send and the feelings they express.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Connie Russell, Chippewa Falls, Wisconsin</p>
<p><i>The Grave</i> by James Heneghan Frances Foster Books, 2000, 245 pp., \$ 17.00</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Irish Famine/Family Heritage ISBN: 0-374-32765-3</p> <p>Abandoned as a baby in a department store, thirteen-year-old Tom Mullen has spent all his life in neglectful, Irish foster homes. Such experiences have left him callused yet curious about his family heritage. It isn’t until after her is lured into a mass grave and mysteriously transported back in time to 1847 that he begins to piece together his family heritage.</p> <p>Tom is united with the Monagham family after her performs CPR on Tully Monagham, and the locals of Ireland deem him a “holy angel” because of his mysterious healing powers. Tom’s assimilation is quick and soon he finds himself engaged in the struggles of the Irish potato famine. It is during this historical time period that Tom learns what a true sense of family is and through the offering of a Claddagh ring, he is reunited with his real family in his own time period.</p> <p>Heneghan’s story is a good introduction for readers not accustomed to historical fiction. His blending of modern day with the events of the past will engage readers interested in historical struggles.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Jenny R. May, Mason, Ohio</p>	<p><i>True Believer</i> by Virginia Euwer Wolff Atheneum Books for Young Readers, 2001, 264 pp., \$18.00</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Coming of Age ISBN: 0-689-82827-6</p> <p>Eight years ago readers fell in love with the spunk, determination, compassion of fourteen-year old La Vaughn in Virginia Euwer Wolff’s <i>Make Lemonade</i>. Now fifteen, La Vaughn returns in <i>True Believer</i> as she continues to pursue her goal of someday going to college. Despite the poverty of her neighborhood and school, LaVaughn believes she is “lucky, born under a star, maybe,” but she finds out that growing up takes more than luck. LaVaughn’s compassion, beliefs, and intelligence are tested at school, in her changing relationship with childhood friends Annie and Myrtle, and in her new feelings for Jody, a boy who has returned to the housing project where LaVaughn and her mother live.</p> <p><i>True Believer</i> explores issues relevant to today’s teens in an honest and sensitive manner. Virginia Euwer Wolff gives readers a moving, beautifully written poignant story, well worth the eight year wait – a story that makes us true believers in LaVaughn and in the tenacity and resiliency of her spirit.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Joan Kopperud, Moorhead, Minnesota</p>

<p><i>Hope Was Here</i> by Joan Bauer G. P. Putnam's Sons, 2000, 186 pp., \$16.99</p> <p>Coming of Age/Relationships ISBN: 0-399-23142-0</p> <p>Moving from New York City to a small town in Wisconsin is the latest in a long string of disappointments for Hope. Abandoned by her mother and pining for the father she has never met, Hope yearns to stay in one place, but more importantly, to belong.</p> <p>Aunt Addie provides stability in Hope's life, but it is Hope's own sense of humor, her ability to relate to people, and her considerable skills as a waitress that forge her a place as an important citizen of Mulhoney, Wisconsin. In the process, Hope discovers integrity, romance, and a resolution to dreams she has long carried in her heart.</p> <p>Joan Bauer excels in using humor to address serious issues such as responsibility, political double-dealing and acceptance. <i>Hope Was Here</i> also offers a central character who, while plagued with adolescent insecurities, remains strong. This book is particularly recommended for the way it shows young people performing competently outside of school, at work, and in politics.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Beverly J. Jackson, Columbia, South Carolina</p>	<p><i>Ereth's Birthday</i> by Avi HarperCollins, 2000, 180 pp., \$15.95</p> <p>Animals/Fantasy ISBN: 0-380-9773-6</p> <p>Disappointed that friends have forgotten his birthday, the curmudgeonly porcupine Ereth skulks off through Dimwood Forest in search of his favorite food, salt. Along the way he discovers a mother fox caught in a trap. Obeying her dying wish, Ereth locates her three lively kits and reluctantly cares for them.</p> <p>When the kits' father returns, Ereth unwillingly recognizes his strong feelings for them: love and jealousy intertwined. Heading home, his journey almost comes to a premature end when he meets the fisherman who has stalked him since the beginning of the novel.</p> <p>Middle school readers may not be surprised by the final plot twists, but they will delight in the way that good is triumphant and love is rewarded. The predatory nature of the animals in the final scenes adds a bit of realism, yet does not overwhelm. <i>Ereth Birthday</i> is a fine sequel to <i>Ragweed</i>, <i>Poppy</i> and <i>Poppy and Rye</i>.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Kathy Pounds, Winston-Salem, North Carolina</p>
<p><i>My Grandfather Jack the Ripper</i> by Claudia Apone Heroidas, 2000 (English translation), 200 pp., \$19.00</p> <p>Mystery/Thriller ISBN: 1-928746-16-0</p> <p>What would it be like to find out that you might indeed be a descendent of the infamous Jack the Ripper? It's a painful discovery for Andy Dobson, a realistic teenager with unusual mental powers. Andy has the ability to touch an object and visualize its past.</p> <p>Growing up in a shabby boarding house built by his great-great grandfather has not been easy on Andy, although he realizes the significance of his fate when his grandfather, Bob, slips and reveals the mysteries still connected to this house. Things begin to unfold quickly when a young graduate student, Massimo, arrives to write his thesis on the Ripper murders. Massimo learns of Andy's powers and teams up with Andy to uncover the secrets that lie behind the door to Room 4, the site of Ripper's last murder.</p> <p>The novel gave me chills and kept me guessing until its very end, when the identity of Jack the Ripper is finally revealed.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Greg Hamilton, New York City</p>	<p><i>A Series of Unfortunate Events: The Miserable Mill: Book the Fourth</i> by Lemony Snicket Harper Trophy Publishers, 2000, 195 pp., \$ 8.95</p> <p>Fantasy ISBN: 0-06-440769-1</p> <p>The Baudelaire children were orphaned when their parents were killed in a fire. Violet (14), Klaus (12) and, the infant, Sunny, are being sent to yet another place (#4) in the hopes of securing a permanent home. Each adventure has them being tracked by the dastardly Count Olaf and his cronies, who want to swindle the children out of their substantial inheritance. The Miserable Mill was the Lucky Smells Lumbermill in the Finite Forest in Paltryville.</p> <p>The children live an unhappy existence. They have no breakfast, chewing gum for lunch, and a casserole for dinner. They must debark trees, saw planks, share the space of one bunk bed, and overcome adults who will not listen to them – because we all know that children “should be seen...” They find disaster and danger lurking everywhere. They just cannot win.</p> <p><i>The Miserable Mill</i> is written in the style of Dahl and Dickens. Although the story is predictable, the narrator (Lemony Snicket) keeps young readers guessing and giggling. The Baudelaire children are upbeat, smart, lovely, and optimistic. Readers become optimistic all the while predicting (optimistically) success for them.</p> <p>This is the fourth of a series of events that chronicle the eventful mishaps of the children.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Linda Broughton, Mobile, Alabama</p>

Clip & File YA Book Reviews

<p><i>Shakespeare's Scribe</i> by Gary Blackwood Dutton Children's Books, 2000, 265 pp., \$15.99</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Historical Fiction ISBN: 0-525-46444-1</p> <p>In <i>Shakespeare's Scribe</i>, the sequel to the popular <i>The Shakespeare Stelaer</i>, Gary Blackwood leaps back in time once more to explore the life of Widge, an orphan struggling to survive in Elizabethan England.</p> <p>In the earlier book, Widge struggles against wicked men trying to use his skill of charactery. In the sequel, Widge's struggles are more with his own identity and with the vicious threat of the Black Plague tearing through the land. But, amid such absorbing issues, the teenager finds time to treat Shakespeare's broken arm and help the bard create some of the greatest lines from his plays.</p> <p>With touches of tragedy and humor, Blackwood walks us through effects of the deadly Black plague and a gritty view of life back then. While this book takes on a more soap-opera tone with the parentage issue of illnesses, Blackwood continues to offer a compelling and engaging lesson in history.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Lori Atkins-Goodson, Wamego, Kansas</p>	<p><i>Dreamland</i> by Sarah Dessen Viking, 2000, 250 pp., \$15.99</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Death and Drugs ISBN: 0-670-89122-3</p> <p>When sixteen-year-old Caitlin's older sister Cass runs away, Caitlin feels a great void in her life. She's lost the person in her life with whom she's been closet. Deciding she needs a major change, Caitlin enters into her first serious, romantic relationship. Rogerson is brilliant and charming, but also dangerous. He sells drugs and, as Caitlin soon learns, he is physically abusive to her – the legacy of the abuse he receives from his own father. Not having Cass around for the advice and support she needs, Caitlin retreats into "Dreamland," a half-sleep state where she can keep her problems at a safe distance.</p> <p>In her fifth novel, Dessen again demonstrates her astonishing talent at creating memorable characters with authentic voices and psychological depth, and her remarkable ability to craft subtle but riveting stories, exploring rich themes which young adult readers are sure to find compelling.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Ed Sullivan, Oak Ridge, Tennessee</p>
<p><i>Dancing With An Alien</i> by Mary Logue Harper Collins Publishers, 2000, 134 pp., \$14.95</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Science Fiction/Romance ISBN: 0-06-028318-1</p> <p>Tonia is seventeen and at a statuesque six feet, she is certain that she will never meet a boy tall enough for her. But she loves summer and swimming and when she meets a new and very tall boy at the lake, she begins to hope. Unbeknownst to Tonia, though, her knight in shining armor turns out to be an alien from outer space.</p> <p>Alien Branko, our alien in question, has come to Earth for a special quest—he is to find a female and convince her to come back with him to his home planet. Staying with a host family who has already sent their daughter to Branko's planet, this alien young man provides a funny and intriguing look at our world and human relationships.</p> <p>Logue's crisp and captivating narrative alternates between Branko and Tonia and focuses on how their feelings grow and become powerful. <i>Dancing With An Alien</i> is not exceptional science fiction but it is lovely and lyrical romance. Our teen protagonists come alive when they are with each other and their fate propels readers quickly to an unexpected ending. This is perfect for those who normally shy away from science fiction.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Jane Halsall, McHenry, Illinois</p>	<p><i>Mystic Uncle and the Magical Bridge</i> by Jeffrey Winters Writers Club Press, 2000, 105 pp., \$9.95</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Conflict/Friendship ISBN: 0-595-09746-4</p> <p>After violent trespassers invade the gentle planet Ahnu, Bobby and Jeremy are recruited to help save the parallel world. Mathen, a shape-shifting teacher who travels between worlds, instructs the boys in combat, breathing and utilizing fear as part of their warrior training. Mathen (nicknamed "Mystic Uncle") helps the boys explore family relationships, self-identity, and friendship while saving Ahnu.</p> <p><i>Mystic Uncle</i> uses realistic language and simple sentence structure appealing to reluctant readers. Most chapters are three pages in length and easy to read. This book may also appeal to fans of Madeline L'Engle and other fantasy novels. Using the archetypal "hero's quest," Winters' novel is formulaic at times, though always spirited.</p> <p>While geared at a young adult market, the unaffected language and didactic style of <i>Mystic Uncle</i> may be better suited for middle grade readers. Many chapters have "lessons" or morals that could also be the forum of a classroom discussion.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Joshua James Keels, San Francisco, California</p>

<p><i>No Cafes in Narnia</i> by Nikki Tate Sono Nis Press, 2000, 172 pp., \$4.95</p> <p>Relationships/Illness ISBN: 1-55039-107-0</p> <p>Thirteen-year-old Heather Blake’s world seems to be falling apart. She has moved with her family from the city of Toronto the small island of Tarragon in British Colombia. As a want-to-be-writer who refers to her alter ego as “writer girl,” Heather chronicles her attempts to make new friends, deal with serious family illnesses, and cope with others who know too much about her problems.</p> <p>Resilient Heather finds ways of coping in her world turned upside down. She joins a local creative writing group where she develops feedback on her writing and friendships. Although Heather is immediately intimidated by the group’s mystery writer, she recognizes a budding interest in Matt, who by chance knows information that Heather needs for a local criminal investigation that she and her neighbor have been examining.</p> <p>Spiced with quotes and journal entries, Nikki Tate creates a novel for middle school students who enjoy the art of writing, who are embroiled in dramatic life-changes, and who are coping with difficult family concerns.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Katherine McFarland, Shippensburg, Pennsylvania</p>	<p><i>The Effects of Knut Hamsun on a Fresno Boy</i> by Gary Soto</p> <p>Autobiographical Essays ISBN: 0-89255-254-9</p> <p>Persea Books, 2000. 224 pages. \$12.95</p> <p>Pensive, yet light-hearted, Soto chronicles tales from his childhood and adulthood. Childhood moments in time that take place in a Mexican <i>barrio</i> rich with music, food and emotion are intricately explored. Soto describes such moments as trying to help a starving dog, or getting a cheap, ugly green jacket with humor and reflection. Essays from Soto’s adulthood are just as fun, and beautifully explain the surface reality of life’s fragments while Soto gives his own perspective of the underlying story.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Lauren Groot, Florida State University, Tallahassee, FL</p>
<p><i>Battle Dress</i> by Ann Efav Harper Collins, 2000, 291 pp., \$15.95</p> <p>Coming of Age/Child Abuse ISBN: 0-06-027943-5</p> <p>Seventeen-year-old Andi Davis doesn’t know why she wants to be at West Point Military Academy, other than that she doesn’t want to be at home. But slowly, she’s learning.</p> <p>Like all new cadets, Andi Davis receives abuse from her regiment leader. Yet, she reasons, his abusive demeanor has a purpose – to help her develop character. At home, though, the verbal abuse and neglect she gets from her parents, she figures, is just that – abuse and neglect.</p> <p>Suddenly, she finds purpose in her military life during a storming, mud-soaked, twelve-mile hike to Lake Frederick. Exhausted, yet elated, she sees herself for the first time as belonging to a group – and a cause larger than herself.</p> <p>Amy Efav uses her own West Point experience to write this realistic, engaging coming-of-age story. The strength of this work – with its detailed look at preparing for army life – is its gripping self-reflective look at the central character’s growth. This book is for anyone who is struggling not just with the angst of surviving an abusive household, but for those who want to learn more about becoming a strong moral leader.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Ann Reddy Damon, North Baltimore, Ohio</p>	<p><i>The Boxer</i> by Kathleen Karr</p> <p>Sports/19th Century Farrar, Straus, & Giroux, 2000, 160 pp., \$16.00 ISBN: 0-374-30921-3</p> <p>Before Johnny Woods, fifteen, gains the name, “The Chopper,” he finds himself in jail for boxing illegally at Brodie’s Saloon in at Brodie’s Saloon in the New York City’s Lower East Side of the late 1800s.</p> <p>In jail, he meets Mr. O’Shaunnesey, who teaches Johnny how to train and box when he sees Johnny’s natural ability and determination. Once out of jail, Johnny struggles to provide for his mother and younger siblings, until as promised, O’Shaunnesey contacts Johnny. Johnny begins training at the New York Athletic Club. When Johnny finally wins a challenging professional fight arranged as the sport of boxing is gaining some prominence and regulation, he realizes the challenges in this sport include more than defeating one’s opponent</p> <p>This “rags to riches, turn of the century American dream” story provides believable and positive role models for young people struggling in today’s world.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Sheila Gullickson, Moorhead, Minnesota</p>

Clip & File YA Book Reviews

Before Wings by Beth Goobie

Orca Book Publishers, 2000, 203 pp., \$16.95

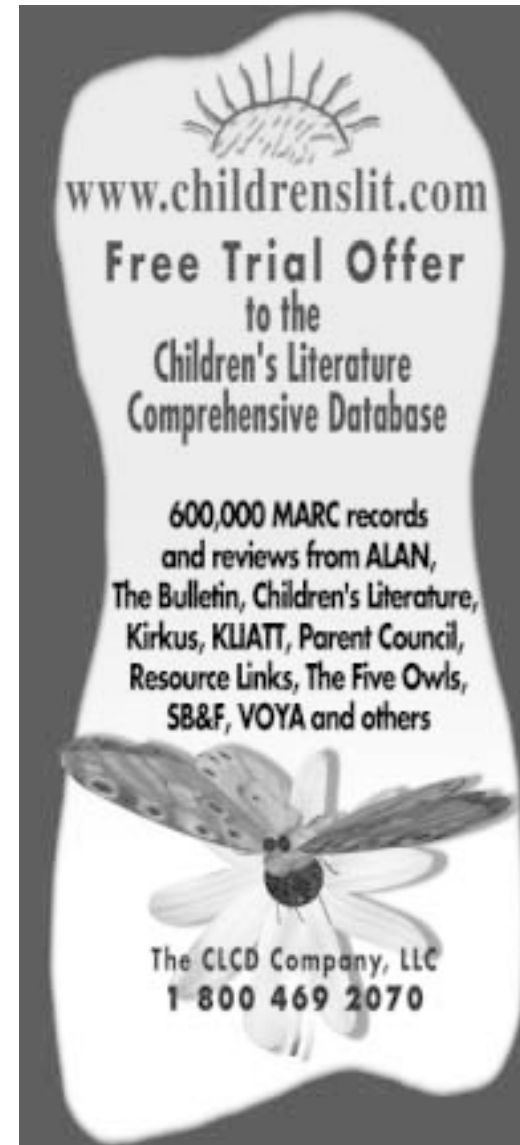
Confronting One's Own Death

ISBN 1-55143-161-0

Fifteen-year-old Adrien may have physically endured the brain aneurysm that almost killed her when she was thirteen, but the emotional effects of the trauma still haunt her. Hoping to lift Adrien out of her depression, her parents send her to spend all summer with her Aunt Erin, who runs Camp Lakeshore. Aunt Erin, a no-nonsense kind of manager, treats Adrien just like any camp counselor; nonetheless, each serves at the other's personal counselor of sorts.

In this captivating fantasy-mystery-story, readers will be reminded of the award-winning movie *Sixth Sense*, as Adrien sees "dead people" and befriends another teenager who shares his own sixth sense with her. Besides a good read, there is much to explore in this novel: depression, the afterlife, friendship, peer pressure, choices and consequences, first love, to name a few.

Joan Kaywell, Tampa, Florida



The advertisement is a vertical, white, rounded rectangular card with a dark background. At the top, there is a simple line drawing of a sun with rays. Below the sun, the website address www.childrenslit.com is printed in a sans-serif font. Underneath the website address, the text "Free Trial Offer" is written in a larger, bold, sans-serif font, followed by "to the Children's Literature Comprehensive Database" in a smaller, regular sans-serif font. Below this, there is a list of sources: "600,000 MARC records and reviews from ALAN, The Bulletin, Children's Literature, Kirkus, KLIATT, Parent Council, Resource Links, The Five Owls, SB&F, VOYA and others". At the bottom of the card, there is a line drawing of a butterfly with its wings spread, perched on a flower. Below the butterfly, the text "The CLCD Company, LLC" and the phone number "1-800-469-2070" are printed in a sans-serif font.

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“Hello,” I Lied (1997)

Blood on the Forehead: What I know About Writing
(1998)

Deliver Us from Evie (1999)

What Became of Her (2000)

Fell Omnibus (2001)

Taming the Alien Genre: Bringing Science Fiction into the Classroom

Katherine T. Bucher and M. Lee Manning

“Ten minutes to transport!”

After checking my personal laser defense system for the third time, I patted the pouch on my belt where Guardon had packed his latest communication gear. Although I’d left Central Command Space Depot for other stations, planets or star systems many times, I knew this trip was different. Sure, Commander Norlock had assured me that my protective suit would easily withstand any remaining radiation on Earth. But the radiation wasn’t the only thing that I was worried about. The reports from our satellites had shown unknown moving shadows beneath the radioactive clouds circling the abandoned planet but our sensors hadn’t been able to penetrate those clouds. Now, my two companions and I would be the first beings to set foot on Earth since the so-called accident. I wondered how much help a Sensenoid from the outer galaxy and a Fractum from Station B would be if we ran into Trouble.

Did the above scenario pique your interest or turn you off? Transporting readers to a world where science makes dreams and sometimes nightmares come true, science fiction stories appeal to many middle and high school students. Paperbacks, comics, and magazines combine with movies, television shows, and computer games to provide young adults with an opportunity to escape from the difficulties of every day life and to enter imaginative worlds of possibilities—worlds where readers or viewers can experience events based on known or imaginary science (Ochoa & Osier, 1993).

Unfortunately, many teachers do not share their students’ enthusiasm. In the young adult literature classes that we teach, both preservice and inservice teachers continually remind us that science fiction is their least favorite genre. “I’m too practical for science fiction; there’s no life on other planets so why even think about it?” “I just can’t relate to these science fiction books.” “There’s too much scientific information and I couldn’t understand the strange world the author describes.” These are typical of the comments that we hear whenever these teachers start reading science fiction books. We know, however, that, if teachers are not exposed to science fiction, they will be unlikely to read, recommend, or teach science fiction titles

to their own middle school and high school classes.

This attitude seems to prevail in spite of national figures which, on the surface, show an increased interest in what *Publisher’s Weekly* calls the combined SF/fantasy category of books. According to the annual figures compiled by *Publisher’s Weekly* which were reported in the June-July 2000 issue of *Science Fiction Chronicle*, there was a significant increase in the number of SF/fantasy bestsellers in 1999 when compared to the previous two years. This resurgence of interest has been driven, for the most part, by the phenomenal success of the Harry Potter series, which is fantasy rather than science fiction. However, there were also increased sales of science fiction titles, triggered by the 1999 release of a new *Star Wars* movie and the anticipated 2000 release of an *X-Men* film with accompanying books (“Rowling Dwarfs ‘Adult’ Titles in 1999’s Best Selling books,” 2000).

Definition of Science Fiction

Although science fiction is often considered part of the genre of fantasy literature, some writers label the broader category “speculative fiction” and break it into fantasy and science fiction (Card, 1990). Science fiction is nothing more than literature that is based on current science as well as trends and technology (Ochoa & Osier, 1993). Orson Scott Card is a writer of both science fiction and fantasy, and the only author to win both the Nebula Award and the Hugo Award two years in a row for the best science fiction novel (*Ender’s Game*, 1986; *Speaker for the Dead*, 1987). Card provides the following way to differentiate between science fiction and fantasy: “If the story is set in a universe that follows the same rules as ours, it’s science fiction. If it’s set in a universe that doesn’t follow our rules, it’s fantasy.” (Card, 22) He goes on to say that, while plot devices such as time travel can be found in both fantasy and science fiction, if the story contains metal, plastic, and/or heavy machinery, it is science fiction; and the reader can assume, until told otherwise, that the known laws of science apply. If the story contains talismans or magic, it is fantasy; and the reader must rely on the author to describe the natural laws that exist in this fantasy world (Card, 1990). Using this explanation, Card identifies

Figure 1: Settings for Science Fiction Novels

1. The future
2. An alternate world of the past where the events contradict the known facts of history
3. Other worlds
4. Prehistoric Earth with events contradicting what is known from archaeological information
5. Earth with a contradiction of some actual or theoretical law of nature

(Developed from Card 1990)

five possible settings for science fiction novels (Figure 1). In addition, science fiction may contain elements of time travel, space opera, alien invasions, post-holocaust worlds, alien worlds, alternative histories or realities, and gadget science fiction (Jordan 1995).

Thus, the opening scenario of this article illustrates many of the characteristics of science fiction. Set in our universe in a post-holocaust future, it relies on machinery, gadgets, and science, not magic or sorcery.

Reluctance to read or to teach science fiction

Traditionally using a paperback format, science fiction publishing began in earnest in the 1950s with authors such as Robert Heinlein and Ray Bradbury (Louvisi, 1997). Perhaps because much original science fiction is still published in paperback, some teachers dismiss science fiction as unworthy of any serious reader's time. Other critics point out that the stories are plot-driven or setting-driven (rather than character-driven), almost to the exclusion of believable and likeable characters. In addition, as George Ochoa and Jeffrey Osier (1993) indicate, literary science fiction demands a high level of scientific accuracy with the errors and inconsistencies found in many science fiction books ruining the credibility of the story. Still other readers may see the scientific information as detracting from the story. Then too, many science fiction books have lurid, pin-up style covers or contain steamy sex scenes. Finally, fearing censorship challenges such as those raised because of the wizardry in the Harry Potter books, some teachers may be reluctant to use novels that present alternative worlds, challenge the supremacy of life on Earth, or present alternatives to contemporary religious beliefs.

On the other hand, there are those individuals who maintain that science fiction can be a means of opening student minds and imaginations. Anne Devereaux Jordan (1995) stated that, "science fiction for both adults and young people has developed into a sophisticated literary form worth reading and worthy of study" (17). Because good science fiction is alive, vibrant and exciting, its use may yield unexpected dividends (Hughes 1992).

Its appeal comes from its imagination and vision of the past, present, and future. Imagination comes into play as science fiction challenges readers to first imagine and then to realize the future of not only the novel they are reading but, in juxtaposition, the world in which they live. Well-written science fiction both warns and teaches readers to build the future they want, based upon logical and knowledge, and does so in a pleasing and entertaining manner (Jordan 1995).

It is this emphasis on imagination and an escape from the demands and practicalities of the real world that appeals to many readers. No longer just "the good versus the bad," current science fiction reflects many topics such as future worlds, super-intelligent mechanical and human beings, time travel and altered historical events, robots, DNA experiments, nuclear holocaust and survival, toxic wastes, and germ warfare. In fact, a strength of science fiction is its diversity and appeal to a various reading and grade levels.

Selection and Use of Good Science Fiction

It can be very difficult for teachers to select and recommend good science fiction, especially if they, individually, do not enjoy reading novels in the genre. Fortunately, there are many resources that teachers can use to aid in the selection of quality science fiction titles.

First, there are awards and annual best books lists which feature science fiction. The two of the most prestigious awards are the Nebula Award, which is given by the Science Fiction Writers of America, and the Hugo Award, which is presented by the World Science Fiction Convention. Although the Hugo Awards (<http://www.wsfs.org/hugos.html>) are given in more categories, the Nebula Awards (<http://dpsinfo.com/nebulas/index.html>) have been called the academy awards of science fiction (Card 1990). Annual lists of both the Hugo nominees and the Nebula winners can usually be found in the June issue of *Science Fiction Chronicle*; the *Science Fiction and*

Fantasy Newsmagazine (DNA Publications, P.O. Box 2988, Radford, VA 24143-2988; <http://www.sfsite.com/sfc>). Also, this magazine issue usually contains information on the Arthur C. Clarke Award for science fiction published in Great Britain, as well as brief listings of a variety of other award winners and nominees such as the Prix Aurora Award

(www.sentex.net/~dmullin/aurora) for Canadian science fiction and fantasy. In addition its publisher, DNA Publications, produces a number of other magazines devoted to science fiction, including *Weird Tales*, *Aboriginal SF*, and *Absolute Magnitude*.

Another excellent source to help teachers identify outstanding science fiction books is the annual best books list published in the April issue of *Voice of Youth Advocates* (VOYA) magazine (Scarecrow Press, 4720A Boston Way, Lanham, MD 270706; <http://www.voya.com/>). Featuring fantasy and horror as well as science fiction, this annotated bibliography consists of excerpts from the reviews of highly rated titles that were published in VOYA in the previous year (June to April). One outstanding feature of this list is that, in addition to identifying the suggested grade level for each title (middle school through senior high), the reviewers rate each title for both popularity (1P to 5P) and the quality (1Q to 5Q) of the writing. Included on the list are adult-marketed titles that the reviewers recommend for young adults.

In 1999, *Science Books and Films*, a publication of the American Association for the Advancement of Science (<http://www.sbfonline.com/index.htm>), began to include science fiction reviews. With background in the pure and applied sciences, its reviewers are qualified to evaluate the scientific as well as the literary qualities of the novels (Gath 1999). Subscribers can view a database of reviews on line as well as in the traditional hard copy periodical format.

Other professional resources are available to aid in book selection. One helpful source is *What Fantastic Fiction Do I Read Next?* edited by Neil Barron (1998). Featuring over 4,800 fantasy, science fiction, and horror titles, this well-indexed volume includes best books of the 1990s. Suzanne Elizabeth Reid's (1998) *Presenting Young Adult Science Fiction* provides the historical background of science fiction as

well as individual chapters on authors such as Orson Scott Card and Octavia Butler with biographical information and bibliographies of their works.

Naturally, the Internet has become the home to a number of excellent sites with information on science fiction. Many of the Web-based magazines or "Webzines" can be located through *SF Zines WebRing* (<http://backinthe.ussr.net/sfzines>). Additional information about science fiction and a categorized list of links to sites throughout the world can be found at *Science Fiction Resources Guide* (<http://sflovers.rutgers.edu/Web/SFRG>).

Reviews and information on the major science fiction awards can also be found on the Internet. Author Orson Scott Card (<http://www.hatrack.com/osc/>) and *Omni* magazine fiction reviewer Ellen Datlow (<http://www.omni-mag.com/fiction/datlow/reviews/index.html>) both have large databases of reviews at their Websites. In addition to information on science fiction award winners, *The Internet Speculative Fiction DataBase* (<http://www.sfsite.com/isfdb>) indicates sources of reviews and contains information on both published and forthcoming books.

For information on science fiction authors, a good starting point is the SFF Net site (<http://www.sff.net/people>). With more than 1,200 members, the web site of the Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America (<http://www.sfw.org>) provides news, reviews, and information on writing speculative fiction. Promoting their publications, major science fiction publishers such as Del Rey Books (<http://www.randomhouse.com/delrey/>), TOR (<http://www.tor.com/tor.html>), HarperCollins (<http://www.harpercollins.com/hc/aboutus/imprints/collins.asp>), Voyager (<http://www.fireandwater.com/imprints/voyager>), and Penguin Putnam/Ace (<http://www.penguinputnam.com/>) also provide information at their Web sites.

Individuals who wish to evaluate individual science fiction titles on their own should apply many of the same standards used to evaluate any work of fiction. While the plot, setting and characters might be simpler in science fiction than in other genres, simplicity does not imply poor quality. Contrived plotting, stereotypical characterization and ineptly portrayed settings are weaknesses in any work of fiction (Harris 1992). As Jordan (1995) maintains, good science fiction must be believable. Readers will be skeptical and fail to believe the setting or events if the science fiction does not present a logical world or if the story shows poorly-research and

flawed science. A discussion of this important part of science fiction writing can be found in an installment of the National Public Radio Program *Talk of the Nation: Science Friday*, which appears on the Web at http://www.sciencefriday.com/pages/1998/Nov/hour2_112098.html. Figure 2 provides some additional suggestions for evaluating science fiction.

In addition, when selecting a science fiction book to use in a classroom, teachers must consider their purpose for using the work and the context in which it will be used. Certainly,

a novel which is taught for its literary concepts is judged differently than one which is taught for other concepts such as ecological or social awareness. Teachers must also determine whether the book meets the materials-selection standards of the local governing bodies for the school. Many of the early work of science fiction might appear sexist by today's standards, but the introduction of strong female characters has led to the inclusion of sexual situations which might cause

difficulties in many classrooms (Harris 1992).

Suggested Science Fiction Titles for Young Adults

To assist teachers in identifying current science fiction titles for adolescents, we have selected the following titles published within the last five years. In addition to some of our personal favorites, there are award winners, titles from best books lists, and titles recommended by young adults.

Anthologies provide good introductions to the science fiction. Edited by Jack Dann and Gardner Dozois, *Armageddons* (1999) contains 12 end-of-the-world stories. *Absolute Magnitude* (1997), edited by Waten Lapine and Stephen Pagel, is another excellent collection of science fiction short stories. Finally, a blend of history with current personalities is found in *Past Lives, Present Tense* (1999) edited by Elizabeth Ann Scarborough.

Two of the recent Nebula Award winners have featured strong characters who must evaluate their own moral views of right and wrong. In the 1998 winner *Forever Peace* (1997) by Joe Haldeman, a U.S. soldier fighting a remote-controlled war realizes that there is a way to bring universal peace to the world. Octavia Butler's 1999 winner *Parable of the Talents* (1998) continues the Earthseed series with a story told by Lauren and her daughter of survival in a post-apocalyptic world.

Popular realistic fiction writers sometimes create books in the genre of science fiction. In *The Dark Side of Nowhere* (1999) by Neal Schusterman, 14 year-old Jason finds out that

Figure 2: Checklist of Good Science Fiction

When evaluating science fiction books, look for:

1. Well-developed and plausible plots
2. Believable details
3. Accurate and well-researched science and/or technology
4. Rules for imaginary or invented science
5. Details that support the science
6. Strong themes that are basic to human existence and that do not rely on time or place
7. Non-stereotypical characters who believe in the science
8. Pleasing writing style
9. Escapist qualities
10. Consistency in the plot, characters and setting
11. A reliance on science, not on coincidence

Readers will be skeptical and fail to believe the setting or events if the science fiction does not present a logical world or if the story shows poorly-research and flawed science.

his parents and classmates are part of an alien invasion force. *Star Split* (1999) by Kathryn Lasky tells the futuristic story of thirteen-year-old Darci, an underground movement, and unauthorized cloning.

Science fiction authors often speculate about the effects that war has on people. In John Marsden's *Tomorrow When the War Began* (1996), Australian teenager Ellie and six of her friends return from a winter break camping trip to find their homes burned, their families imprisoned, and their country occupied by a foreign military force. Providing another perspective on the story that was told in *Ender's Game*, *Ender's Shadow* (1999) by Orson Scott Card presents the story of Bean, a classmate of Andrew "Ender" Wiggin, in the battle for the future of earth against the invasion of an insectile race of Aliens called the Buggers.

Movie tie-ins remain popular. One of the best is *Star Wars: Episode I, The Phantom Menace* (1999) by Terry Brooks, who is well-known for his Shannara fantasy titles. Another is Barbara Hambly's *Star Wars: Planet of Twilight* (1997), which features a kidnapping, plague, and a daring rescue mission.

There is plenty of science for the hard-core science fiction reader in several recent novels. Stephen Baxter's *Moonseed* (1998) charts the development of a geological lubricant that will lead to the destruction of Earth. An artifact from another dimension becomes the object of desire for several civilizations in our galaxy in Iain Banks' *Excession* (1997). Finally, *Antarctica* (1998) by Kim Stanley Robinson pits radical environmentalists against the corporations who are mining the wealth of the south pole.

Many readers enjoy the humor found in some science fiction novels. Kathy Mackel's *A Can of Worms* (2000) tells what happens when fictional stories about aliens become true. In *Anonymous Rex: A Detective Story* (2000), Eric Garcia writes about a world in which dinosaurs secretly make up 5% of the population. Wearing a human costume, Velociraptor Vincent Rubio, a down-on-his-luck dinosaur private eye, investigates a case and unmasks a number of famous "humans" who were really dinosaurs.

Finally, technology can play a central role in science fiction. The Christian science fiction novel *Fatal Defect: A Genetic Thriller* (1998) by Jefferson Scott features a computer war and terrorists with a lethal botulism plague. In Leo Frankowski's *The Fata Morgana* (1999), technology comes to an island that has been isolated for thousands of years.

Science fiction books can be a welcome addition to many middle and high school classrooms. Unfortunately, while they appeal to many middle and secondary school readers, teachers are not as familiar with these materials as they are with realistic and historical fiction and may be unsure about selecting these materials for classroom use. The solution to this possible dilemma is for educators to become familiar with the resources for selecting science fiction, to identify criteria to use when evaluating science fiction, and to read current, recommended science fiction literature.

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Bonding in the Broken Places

Kathy Cline

I have always believed that the most inspiring gift young adult literature has to offer is the opportunity to view the world through a sliding glass door. Regardless of where the door leads, there is always the promise of taking a walk in a different pair of shoes. As readers, youth are allowed to walk into the minds of individuals who may or may not be like them. Yet, many discover that there is a set of universal emotions that bonds all of us together. We all have the ability to experience joy, sorrow, love, uncertainty, success, and failure. Through problems and conflicts, literature allows young adults the catharsis for healing, rebuilding, and changing. Every individual has his or her own unique story, yet it is the impetus to survive that is the common thread for all of us.

I grew up in a middle class neighborhood in the suburbs of Chicago. My parents provided for me and attended my activities. My two older brothers encouraged me often. I had friends who supported my strengths; I excelled on sports teams where I felt accepted. Through music and church youth groups, I felt connected. In essence, I felt valued by those around me, surrounding me. No doubt about it, I was very fortunate.

In the first twenty-one years of my life, I had it all – or so I thought. In my senior of college, I had a break down. My subconscious mind had realized that I would soon be out on my own. My conscious mind had yet to accept this fact. All of my life I had depended on, counted on, and relied upon others to be there for me. I knew others valued me, yet I was too dependent on their judgment to make decisions for myself. I began experiencing terrifying anxiety attacks. At first I thought it was unfair. Why should I, a person who had it all, be suffering so much? Only *weak* people, or people with difficult circumstances, should have psychological problems. Not me!

Well, it took me two years to rebound...two years to overcome weaknesses... two years to expose the vulnerable places...and well over two years to strengthen the weak spots. However, through hardship, I emerged a much stronger individual. An individual who realized she needed to be an individual. It was crawling out of that deep, dark pit by myself that made me a survivor.

There are many survivors in our society, all from different walks of life. We find survivors of every age, of every ethnicity, and of every sex. They encompass every socioeconomic level, every familial unit, and every mental and/or physical capacity. The ramifications as well as the manifestations on the individuals will be different as well. What then is the quality that all survivors share? The one that comes to my mind is resilience – the “ability to bounce back from life’s challenges by learning how to value adversity, face failure fearlessly, make misfortunes meaningful, and emerge from catastrophe stron-

ger for the experience” (Hardy, February 1999).

In my own experience I know what led to my survival. However, it left me with a void that I wanted to fill. I wanted to know how others managed to survive, others with much more adverse circumstances than my own. This curiosity propelled me to my research on resiliency. I wanted to discover the common characteristics of young survivors. Through myriad readings, the following are the characteristics that resurfaced again and again:

- 1. Support From a Parent or From a Significant Other** – Resilient individuals usually have a relationship with at least one person who “truly cares about and respects that child as an individual” (Tarwater, 1993, p. 273). This allows the individual the “opportunity to express their feelings openly in a supportive and non judgmental atmosphere” (Grollman, 1995, p. 221). Feelings of positive recognition can be regenerative and often “act as protective factors that reduce risks amongst children living in disharmonious homes” (Ferguson, 1996, p. 282). The relationship provides a stable and consistent source of positive affirmation” (Baxley, 1993, p. 2).
- 2. Problem Solving Skills** – Resilient individuals “perceive their experiences constructively” (Tarwater, 1993, p. 272). They learn to face what has happened to them. By confronting and identifying their fears, they are able to “put them into perspective and allow them to diminish slowly while they focus on positive improvements” (Wright, 1997, p. 66).
- 3. Autonomy** – Resilient individuals often have “the ability to act independently and exert some control over one’s environment; to have a sense of one’s identity; and to detach from others engaged in risky or dysfunctional behaviors” (Berliner and Benard, 1995).
- 4. Tenacity** – Resilient individuals are “challenged to rebound from harm by experimenting, branching out, and developing their own resources. Over time, these self-protective behaviors develop into lasting clusters of strength...” (Project Resilience, July 1998).
- 5. Sense of Belonging** – Resilient individuals find value in themselves if they feel they are contributing to a whole. Sometimes these endeavors are found in athletics or found in the arts. Whatever the affiliation, the activities provide an escape or provide a creative outlet. “Being a part of a community instills a sense of comfort, respect and self-esteem and makes young people willing to go beyond what they think is possible for themselves” (Channel One Network Educator’s Guide, April 1998, p. 12).

The identification of these five characteristics led me to my final question: could I find examples of resilient youth in young adult novels? I began perusing young adult fiction

with a passion hoping to find those very characters that employed great resiliency. The characters I found were survivors of grief, neglect, physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual molestation, dependency, poverty, handicapping conditions, and general anxiety. Despite their circumstances, however, I found myself identifying with many of the characters. It didn't seem to matter if the characters were living in an impoverished environment so unlike my own; their motivations still centered on persistence in the face of failure. I empathized with many of these characters, but I was most impressed with three novels in particular. My extensive search led me to three dynamic characters found in:

Slam by Walter Dean Myers
Party Girl by Lynne Ewing
Hero by S.L. Rottman

Summary of *SLAM*

Slam is a book about making it in the inner city without self-destructing. Seventeen-year-old Greg "Slam" Harris is one slick ball player. When he's on the basketball court, he's got everything under control. Greg makes the team at Latimer, but not before getting off to a bad start with his coach. Earning respect in the hood is much easier than it is at his new school. Slam doesn't understand at first why he should show respect to others when they don't give him the same in return. His survival comes with the understanding that the game of life continues off the court.

Significant Others: In learning this new system of rules, Slam begins to listen to his assistant coach, Goldy. Though Slam's mother has always been in his corner, Goldy is the one who helps Slam put the pieces into perspective. Goldy knows that the head coach plays with Slam's mind, yet he also understands that Slam needs to become more of a team player. Goldy helps Slam earn the respect of the coach and teaches Slam what's important in life:

"The only difference between on the court and off the court is that *everyone* is in the game off the court. You *will* play, and you *will* win or lose. There's nobody on the bench, nobody sitting it out. You're in it whether you want to be or not. A lot of people fool themselves and say they're just not going to play. Believe me, it don't work that way." (p. 218)

Problem Solving Skills: Slam has the ability to take in his dangerous surroundings in the hood. Confronting these fears, however, takes time. He sees the young boys already starting their hoop dreams. He sees the slick dudes on the corner on their way to a jail cell. He sees the empty cardboard houses on the roof. He sees the people drinking hard to forget their problems. He sees the cops spreading sheets over guys in the hallway. He sees the crack heads out in the rain. He sees his father not always getting real, and it scares him:

"When something bothers me a lot I keep thinking about it, like I'm replaying a tape over and over. No matter what I do it stays in my heart." (p. 3)

All these things force Slam to analyze the maybe's and the could be's. It is actually through his girlfriend Mtisha, however, that he learns to face up to these fears. He learns that

he can hide neither from his math book nor from the truth that is edging in on him. He must accept the fact that his best buddy Ice is dealing drugs. When Slam stops observing life through the viewfinder, he is able to step out with a telephoto lens. Yes, all of these things are real. Yes, they're touchable...tangible...Yes, he must react to them, and in many ways he must step away from them. Slam comes to the conclusion that he will play the game of life.

Autonomy: Slam's sense of control is positive on the basketball court. Even though Coach Nipper doesn't appreciate his "stylin'" on the court there is no doubt that people value Slam's basketball ability. The pain that Slam feels, however, is the detachment from his pal Ice. It hurts Slam so much to realize that he has stepped beyond his friend:

"On the court I was good, maybe not as good as Ice, but I was getting there. I wondered how it would be to go up against him again. In my mind he was different, he had laid down when it was time to get up. He had his game, the same game I had, and I had thought the game would make us all right. It hadn't. What I wished was that things would stop for a while and maybe we could all catch a breath and check out the score or something. That wasn't happening. What was happening was that the clock was still running, like Goldy had said it would, and we had to keep on keeping on the best way we could." (p. 265)

Tenacity: Slam's stubbornness works against him in the beginning of the story. The more he allows the coach to get to him, the more he cheats himself. Slam finally learns to use his own persistence as a survival tool. Slam realizes that he's:

"somebody too strong to be moved" (p. 266).

Sense of Belonging: Slam doesn't think much of the Latimer players when the season begins. Until he finds his place on the team, he'd rather play as a one-man show. What he discovers is that teamwork makes victory possible:

"Goldy came up to me after the game and hugged me, the coach hugged me, teachers were hugging the whole team. It was like a fantasy trip." (p. 249)

Contributing to the team makes Slam feel like a whole person.

Summary of *Party Girl*

For Kata and Ana, survival is a nebulous term. When you live on 53rd Street in a neighborhood war zone, it's dangerous to feel safe. Kata doesn't have to face the future, though, when she's dancing. Dancing is her escape from the violence of the gang wars. When the music is pulsing and her best friend is beside her, Kata thinks she can handle anything that comes her way. But now Ana is gone, shot down by a rival gang, and Kata is lost. She used to protect Ana, and now she can't even protect herself. On a path toward self-destruction, Kata finally finds the courage to save herself. She must get out "of the life" to find where she really belongs.

Significant Others: Kata feels that her mother's love for the bottle is more powerful than her love for anyone else. With Ana's death, however, her mother begins showing the

concern the Kata longed for when she was younger:

"I felt like I was watching her ghost. I wished she had loved me enough to wait up for me, back when I still had a chance."
(p. 68)

Still, her mother's renewed effort brings Nando back into Kata's life. Nando is a former boyfriend of her mother's. His love for Kata is unconditional. With Nando's support, Kata is given the opportunity to find faith again:

"Maybe something good's coming in your future. Something you can't see yet because you're living too close to the earth...The heavens give us a measure of what God might be: large enough to hold a billion trillion stars." He drew me close to him, trying to guide my vision, until we were cheek to cheek, gazing at the night sky, his glasses pinching my temple. "Don't look at the earth for the center of life" he said. "If you look up at the night and see what's above you, a lot of things that bother you here aren't worth the fuss."
(pp.108-109)

Problem Solving: Kata is insightful about the happenings in her neighborhood. Kids trading lunches in the first grade end up mortal enemies by the eighth. Girls planning weddings in the fourth grade are planning their funerals by the fifth. Guys who act the toughest are actually the weakest. She also understands the motivations of girls who deliberately get pregnant:

In our neighborhood girls were happy when they got pregnant. Some even tried to get pregnant, putting holes in condoms or lying about taking the pill, so they could face out, quit the gang life, and collect their welfare. (p. 13)

However, although she understands it, Kata feels apart from it:

Men and booze were the only way she forgot her sad, broken life. She had me when she was fifteen, and maybe that was the reason I stayed away from boys and didn't dream about babies the way the other girls did. I knew how bad it felt to have a mother who should have been an older sister. She told me my dad was shot in a drive-by. But I think she only said that so she could get her welfare and not bother him. (p. 52)

Autonomy: In the beginning Kata does not feel a sense of individuality. When Ana dies, Kata does not even know if she has an identity anymore:

I didn't have a name without Ana to call it. It had taken the two of us to make one for so long that I wasn't sure I existed without Ana. (p.21)

But through the course of the novel, Kata begins to understand that she didn't know Ana as well as she thought. They were different, and Kata realizes that Ana took the cowardly way out. Eventually, Kata finds the courage to stand up to the gang leader and leave the gang:

I glanced at the drops of blood and stopped, suddenly remembering Ana being carried to the ambulance. I looked up at Pocho, at the anger in his eyes. I had a choice. "I'm not going to fight anymore, Pocho," I said. "You want to hurt me because I know your story. You think killing me keeps your past hidden forever? You can't hide it from yourself."
(p. 98)

Tenacity: Kata's strength of character is the single most important quality that leads to her survival. In the beginning her strength comes from her dancing:

"We worked hard to build a big reputation. We practiced until our muscles felt like rubber and our feet throbbed, and then we practiced some more. Anything was possible if the music was right." (p. 10)

Sense of Belonging: Kata may have been a part of the gang, but she doesn't want to be owned like other gang members. Maybe this is why she is attracted to Kikicho. He is the oldest male in the gang, the only one who doesn't run fast, hit hard, and treat people badly. He is also the only one to recognize her **real** strength:

"You got bigger plans than even you can see right now. And someday, no matter how much you love me, you'll have to leave me here," he said, his voice as soft and quiet as angel wings. "I used to want to ask you to take me with you, but I know I don't belong there, wherever it is. I belong here." I wondered what he saw in me that made him think I could ever get out of here. (p. 82)

In the long run, Kata discovers what Kikicho means. She finds where she belongs:

I danced for a long time, the moon like a halo around me, and finally I could feel Ana beside me again. For only a moment I was with her in heaven, our feet reaching back urging waves across the ocean. Then Ana pulled away from me, her hands lingering on my face, then pushing me gently back to earth. The moon set and the darkness surrounded me, but still I danced, finding my place in this new music, waiting for the first rays of dawn to bathe me in a new light.
(p. 110)

Summary of *Hero*

Fifteen-year-old Sean Parker has had it rough. His parents divorced when he was young, and he assumes his father does not care about him. His mother is an alcoholic who abuses Sean both physically and mentally. Sean's method of coping is to shut himself off from the world. After being picked up for a curfew violation, Sean is sent to a ranch for community service. At first he doesn't like the ranch owner, Mr. Hassler, because the man is strict, strong, and too structured. After a while, though, Sean begins to enjoy the responsibilities because they make him feel worthwhile. Sean eventually realizes that behind that gruff demeanor is a man who sincerely cares about him. As Sean begins to respect and admire Mr. Hassler, he realizes that his determination will lead him down the right road.

Significant Others: Dave Hassler offers Sean more acceptance in one week than Sean has ever experienced in his entire life. In the beginning Sean is unnerved by the rigidity of the ranch; it is so foreign to him. Eventually, though, that structure is what makes Sean feel safe and needed. Mr. Hassler proves to Sean that there are people looking out for him:

"Milk and cookies? Oh, man, where were you when I was in first grade?" "Doesn't matter where I was. What matters is where I am." (p. 67)

Problem Solving: Sean is used to providing for himself. He eats on his own, makes his own rules, and stays out of the way of gangs trying to recruit him. He has figured a way to keep money hidden from this mother by planning alternative hiding places. Although he's miserable with his life, he understands why he has lived in this setting for so long:

The possibility of life without my mother has always been in the corner of my mind, as kind of a fantasy, where I could be happy. But I had talked with a friend who had come back after a stint as a runaway, and I knew that my home, as bad as it was, was still a home, a place I could go, a place where I could usually find food. If my mother died, where would I go? It was the same question that had kept me lying to the social workers whenever they were called. (p. 72)

Autonomy: Sean has a real sense of his own identity. Proof of this is Sean's detachment from his old friend, Rick. Rick is so into his image of being tough and using drugs. Sean feels that Rick is no longer a real person:

I honestly didn't understand why Rick was so amazing to some people. As far as I could tell, he was just a stupid big-gang member wanna-be. He couldn't get in with the big gangs, so he had his own little gang that seemed to think they ran the school. I guess the big-time gang knew he was just a little pushover, like I did. What got me was the fact that no one else in our school seemed to have picked up on that. (p. 14)

Tenacity: For most of Sean's life, his sheer determination has been an effective coping mechanism for dealing with life's adversities. Now that he is older, however, that same stubbornness has kept Sean from reaching out for something better. Mr. Hassler teaches Sean how to look for opportunities by letting his determination become a positive asset again. Mr. Hassler recognizes a strength in Sean that reminds him of his own young adulthood:

People had been putting me down all my life because they could tell I could be something if I wanted to be. They didn't want me to succeed. That's why they made my life hell. If I could succeed where they didn't, then they were weaker than I was. So they tried to stop me.

"Sean, a lot of people can tell you can succeed. Some of them will try to stop you now from even trying. Don't let them. Come back in twenty years and be able to buy you father's company. Don't sink into what they think you are."

I dropped my eyes to look at the floor. I didn't want Mr. Hassler to know how good that idea felt. I could do it. I could prove Mr. H. right and my mother and father wrong all at the same time...

This time I didn't even try to hold back a grin. Things were going to be okay. I could find the right track here. Mr. H. would help me stay there. (pp. 86-87)

Sense of Belonging: On the first night that Sean is on the ranch, one of the horses goes into premature labor. Sean is forced to help deliver a foal because the vet is not available. Although he is resistant at first, Sean becomes fascinated with the foal's entry into the world. The birth symbolizes a new beginning for Sean. Sean not only bonds with the colt but identifies with it as well; when the mare rejects her it reminds Sean of the way his own mother has always rejected him:

He was shaking and covered with disgusting bloody slime. I didn't want to be in the same stall with him, let alone touch him. But he was begging me with his eyes. He was pleading for help. And I knew how much it hurt to ask for help and be denied. (p. 27)

Sean soon becomes very attached to the colt, Knicker. His relationship with the baby makes him feel needed and helps him find an inner strength:

He looked more than just satisfied. He looked happy, content. We were both learning how to enjoy that feeling at the ranch. (p. 81)

A week later when the suggestion is made to try to put Knicker back with his mother, Sean admits his fear:

"Once a mother hurts her child, she keeps doing it. Because it's easy and it makes her feel strong." I didn't mean to keep talking, but I couldn't shut up. "She doesn't care about him. She didn't before and she won't now. Don't make *me* go back. Please don't. You can't make him go back." (p. 58)

Besides caring for the foal, Sean also grows in his relationship with Mr. Hassler. It eventually becomes important to Sean to show how hard he can work.

When Mr. Hassler tells Sean a story about being labeled in his youth, Sean is one of the few people to really understand:

"I wasn't looking for money. I wanted to be..." He broke off, searching for the word.

"Respected? Understood? Accepted?"

"Yes," he said, nodding with a smile. "All of those." (p. 85)

Sean's new understanding of Mr. Hassler proves to be a true test of character. Near the end of the story, Sean makes the decision to put his own life on the line to save Mr. Hassler from a deadly situation. The man has been there for Sean, and Sean will be there for him.

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Holes: Folklore Redux

Elizabeth G. Mascia

Folk literature is an unfailingly rich source of reading pleasure and literary study in the middle school classroom. In addition to reading individual legends, folk tales, myth, and fairy tales, teachers and students have discovered the value and satisfaction of comparing text variants from several cultures. Middle schoolers invariably relish “fractured” fairy tales and parodies of the classic tales. Moreover, young adult readers have proved to be an appreciative audience for contemporary short stories and novels that recast traditional folk stories. Donna Jo Napoli has retold the traditional tale of the Frog Prince in the novel *The Prince of the Pond: Otherwise Known as De Fawg Pin* and its sequel, *Jimmy, the Pickpocket of the Palace*. Similarly, she has recast the story of Rapunzel as a novel in *Zel*. Robin McKinley’s novels *Beauty* and *Rose Daughter* are both retellings of the Beauty and the Beast tale. Gail Carson Levine’s novel *Ella Enchanted* is based on the Cinderella story. Her *The Fairy’s Mistake* humorously retells “Diamonds and Toads.” Jane Yolen’s *Briar Rose*, based on the Sleeping Beauty story, and Patricia Wrede’s *Snow White and Rose Red*, based on the tale of the same name, are both novels in Terri Windling’s Fairy Tale Series in which authors are asked to cast classic fairy tales as novels. Priscilla Galloway has revisited the tales collected by the Brothers Grimm in her short story collection *Truly Grim Tales*.

A careful reading of the recent, award-winning *Holes*, by Louis Sachar, reveals that it can be added to the list of contemporary texts grounded in folklore and, as such, stands as yet another manifestation of folklore’s enduring allure for modern writers and readers. In fact, it can be argued that it is a debt to folk literature that allows readers to willingly accept and delight in a plot so improbable that it would otherwise strain their capacity to suspend disbelief as they read *Holes*.

A sketch of the plot hardly leads a reader to expect folklore from this Newbery and National Book Award recipient. Rather, one might anticipate a dose of harsh realism. A young boy, unjustly accused of a crime, must serve a term at a detention camp for juvenile offenders. The camp, incongruously named Green Lake, is situated in the Texas desert, and, each day, in merciless heat, each inmate must dig a hole, five feet deep and five feet wide. Neither the sadistic warden nor the guards ever explain why the holes must be dug. Everyone does acknowledge that hopes of escape across the unforgiving desert are futile. This grim place and its cruel, Sisyphean routine do not, however, get the better of the endearing hero of the novel, Stanley Yelnats, or his equally sympathetic sidekick, Hector “Zero” Zeroni. With much struggle, they defeat their jailers.

These events certainly may sound like the fodder of realistic fiction, but by the end of *Holes*, a reader must make a

disconcerting admission: The novel involves events that are too improbable and coincidences that are too farfetched for it to succeed as realistic fiction. To wit: Stanley, bemoaning the bad luck that his “no-good-dirty-rotten-pig-stealing-great-great-grandfather” (p. 7) has visited upon him, is incarcerated for stealing a pair of sneakers belonging to a superstar athlete when, in fact, Zero, whom he happens upon and befriends at godforsaken Green Lake, admits to being the real thief. Camp Green Lake becomes the final resting place of the New World fortune that Stanley’s great-great grandfather won, then lost, to Madame Zeroni’s curse. The curse has allegedly bedeviled the Yelnats clan right down to poor, hole-digging Stanley. Since Elya’s and Madame Zeroni’s descendants have now met on the Texas moonscape that is Camp Green Lake, it is Stanley Yelnats IV who fulfills Elya’s promise. But the promise is to a latter-day Zeroni, and thus breaks the generations-old curse. And there are many more such chance encounters and coincidences that just do not happen in “real life” but that do comprise this story.

So it is that the reflective reader begins to suspect that, rather than being the realistic fiction it seemed to be at first glance, *Holes* is quite otherwise. It is, in fact, a huge yarn that weaves together well-known elements from traditional folk literature, then stretches them across a contemporary landscape. Readily recognizable are myriad motifs from Old World fairy tales and elements of New World legends and tall tales. But, lest readers lose sight of the immediacy of the story’s events, there are sufficient amounts of grim reality—racism, poverty, the juvenile justice system as well as the forbidding setting—to ground the story in the here-and-now. Nevertheless, once the folkloric has been summoned up within the novel’s early chapters, the reader comfortingly senses that no matter how dicey things may at times become for Stanley, his story will not succumb to the true-to-life harshness of a Robert Cormier or Cynthia Voigt narrative. Rather, there will be adequate magic to pluck the hero from the villain’s maw and conjure a happily-ever-after ending in which, as in traditional folk literature, moral order is restored. Moreover, while all this is happening, Sachar displays his trademark humor (*Sideways Stories from Wayside School*), regularly parodying the folklore he invokes to tell his story. He thereby alerts his reader that Stanley’s travails should not be taken too seriously; tragedy cannot befall the hero while the reader is chuckling. Folklore, and the parody of it, therefore, cushions Stanley’s story and convincingly distances it from stark realism. In the end, one realizes that in *Holes*, Louis Sachar has experimented with the conventional novel form; he has blended fairy tale, legend, tall tale, and realistic narrative into a story that, while defying easy genre classification, grabs hold of its readers and steers them along to an satisfying conclusion.

The evidence for *Holes* as folklore abounds whether one has a scholarly familiarity with Stith Thompson's *Motif-Index of Folk Literature* or merely comes to the story with a typical middle school student's Grimm-Andersen-Disney acquaintance with folk literature. If one did turn to Stith Thompson's *Index*, one would find the characters and events of *Holes* generously represented among compiled motifs; for example, unpromising hero or heroine (L100-L199); suitor tests (H310-H359); tasks imposed (H900); witch assigns tasks (H935); task performed with help of old woman (H971.1); task of carrying ever-increasing burden up mountain (H1114.2); task contrary to laws of nature (H1020); bride offered as prize (H336); curses (M400-499); old woman helper (N825.3); old woman's curse (M411.5); curse: failure in all undertakings (M441); magic powers from swallowing magic drink (D1735.3); magic results from bathing (D1788); magic healing water (D1500.1.18); magic healing river (D1500.1.18.6); magic healing drink (D1500.1.11); magic object gives invulnerability (D1344); magic invulnerability (D1840).

Several pieces of Sachar's story are fairy tale-like in nature, but, most notably, is the account of Stanley's great-great grandfather's quest for the hand of a young woman he thinks he loves. Like so many fairy-tale suitors, Elya Yelnats is an underdog — young and poor, but passionate and pure of heart. Like his many fairy-tale counterparts, he enters a competition to prove his worth to his beloved and her father. Alas, this adventure, (which involves a pig, a promise, the aforementioned Madame Zeroni, a task imposed, a magic lullaby, and an enchanted stream where the water runs uphill) ends hastily with a task unfinished, a promise unfulfilled, and a curse heaped on Elya's head and the heads of his descendants. Students will quickly recognize in this bit of Yelnats family history the unworthy suitor, the competition, the task, the fairy godmother-helper, the magic, and the curse that are familiar elements in fairy tales with which they have been acquainted since childhood such as "The Frog Prince," "Cinderella," "The Golden Goose," "Sleeping Beauty," and "The Brave Little Tailor."

Elements that readers will readily associate with fairy tales continue to appear throughout the story, often at critical junctures. Stanley, like Elya before him, proves to be the fairy-tale hero who is unfailingly pure of heart despite his humble appearance and underdog history. Recognizable as magic, albeit homely magic, is the onion juice that works as a potion to protect Stanley and Zero from the fatally poisonous sting of the dreaded yellow-spotted lizard, this tale's incarnation of a deadly dragon. In fact, a certain magic has seemed attached to Stanley from the earliest pages of *Holes*. The careful reader notes a peculiar happenstance of his lineage: "Stanley was an only child, as was every other Stanley Yelnats before him" (p. 9). As in "Rumpelstiltskin," the recognition of a name climaxes the story, this time it being the palindrome Stanley Yelnats. At this point, as in so many fairy-tales, the true heir is revealed, and Stanley, once the Ugly Duckling but now transformed by his physically rigorous ten-

ure at Camp Green Lake, and with his true mettle finally apparent, redeems his family from its Old World curse and restores its fortune.

While Elya Yelnats' brush with love puts an Old World fairy tale, albeit one gone awry, at the heart of *Holes*, the completion of his tale awaits in the New World, specifically the American West, not a place of fairy tales but of legends and tall tales. Accordingly, Sachar moves his story forward by thrusting Elya's offspring into the path of the legendary Kissin' Kate Barlow, wronged schoolmarm turned vengeful outlaw. The incident that changes Kate's life is viciously racist: Because Kate has fallen in love with Sam, a Black man, the sheriff burns down her schoolhouse and Trout, a feckless, spurned suitor, murders her beloved. Kate kills the sheriff and turns to a life of crime, robbing the first Stanley Yelnats, Elya's son, as he travels West after striking it rich in New York's stock market. She buries Stanley's fortune at what will become Camp Green Lake. Twenty years later, Kate dies as an impoverished Trout vainly attempts to make her reveal the whereabouts of Stanley's trove. Trout's granddaughter,

Green Lake's sadistic warden, is determined to find those riches, and her search for them drives the plot in which the fourth Stanley Yelnats becomes enmeshed.

Kissin' Kate Barlow will easily remind readers of larger-than-life Old West bandits such as Jesse James and Belle Starr. For two decades she was "one of the most feared outlaws in all the West" (p. 115). Her signature

gesture was to apply a fresh coat of red lipstick and then kiss the men she had killed. When her end came, she mocked the murderous Trout and died laughing. Kate's story is tinged with the hyperbole of the tall-tale: her spiced peaches, "food for the angels," (p. 102) were so delicious that no one else in the town even tried to make them; from the day Kate's beloved Sam was murdered, not a drop of rain fell on Green Lake, turning the thriving community into a desert ghost town.

Old World and New World tales having intersected when Kissin' Kate relieved Stanley I of his newfound wealth, they are set on a trajectory to their resolutions when thirteen-year-old Stanley Yelnats arrives at Camp Green Lake and starts digging Holes. The descendants of the principals from Elya and Kate's stories meet and play key roles in the unfolding plot until Stanley Yelnats IV has not only fulfilled his great-great-grandfather's promise to Madame Zeroni, but also recovered his great-grandfather's stolen fortune. On the day that happens, the first drop of rain in one hundred ten years falls on Green Lake; good triumphs over evil and, in this one instance, at least, good luck befalls life's lowly. In present-day Texas, the Old World fairy-tale at last finds its happily-ever-after ending.

The last lines of *Holes* seem emblematic of the entire outlandish, yet satisfying, tale. The story ends with Zero's mother singing the lullaby Madame Zeroni taught Elya Yelnats long ago in Latvia, crooned first to a pig and then to her. Sung in the Yelnats and Zeroni families across five generations, the song suffered variations, but constant remained the words

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"If only, if only." Repeated throughout *Holes*, the words seem to punctuate the story for good reason, for in it, Louis Sachar has made the highly improbable happen to fulfill good people's longings. He has employed literary forms in which magic and the outrageous are expected so that unlikely events might happen and enjoy reader acceptance. While in real life "if only, if only" most usually remains but a futile wish, in fairy tales, legends, and tall tales, "if only, if only" can become reality. When this happens in *Holes*, young readers can take heart and consider that, like Stanley and Zero, they too might prevail over imposing adversaries and life's vicissitudes.

Louis Sachar was able to tell his unlikely story because he ingeniously wove the folkloric into the lives of two down-on-their-luck kids. He let folklore secure his story against a realism that often limits and even destroys heroes. The result: a rich tale of loyalty and goodness triumphing over injustice; a finely crafted novel that has found an appreciative adolescent audience and critical acclaim; and yet another testament to folk literature's continuing magic for contemporary writers and readers.

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The First Printz Award Designations: Winners All

Jean Pollard Dimmitt

On January 17, 2000, the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) of the American Library Association announced the winning book and three honor books for the newly created Michael L. Printz Award. The award honors the late Michael L. Printz, who was an advocate for young adult literature. In addition to his duties as librarian at Topeka West High School in Topeka, Kansas, he served YALSA as a member of both the Best Books for Young Adults Committee and the Margaret A. Edwards Award Committee, and he taught young adult literature to preservice and practicing teachers at Washburn University. Printz was knowledgeable and enthusiastic about the value of young adult literature. It has been said of him that “finding the right book for the right student at the right time was not just a slogan to Mike — he lived it” (ALA, *Who Was Michael Printz*). It is fitting that this major new award commemorates his life and work.

The Printz Award, sponsored by *Booklist* magazine, honors the best young adult book published the previous year. The winner and up to four honor books will be selected by a YALSA committee on the basis of literary merit. Recognizing that literary merit is hard to define, YALSA has enumerated the following flexible criteria that are to be demonstrated by the books: “story, voice, style, setting, accuracy, characters, theme, design (including format, organization, etc.), and illustration” (ALA, *Michael L. Printz*). Winning books do not have to exhibit all of the characteristics, and they may be in any genre.

At the midwinter meeting of the ALA, Frances B. Bradburn, chairperson of the selection committee, announced the first winner of the Printz Award: *Monster* by Walter Dean Myers. The committee also designated three honor books: *Skellig* by David Almond, *Speak* by Laurie Halse Anderson, and *Hard Love* by Ellen Wittlinger. What do these books have in common that make them unusual and outstanding examples of young adult literature? They are structurally sophisticated, and they have memorable characters who deal with significant issues. These significant issues or themes sometimes overlap. *Monster*, *Speak*, and *Hard Love* deal with the search for identity; *Skellig*, *Speak*, and *Hard Love* explore friendship; and all four novels examine facets of truth.

Monster

As is frequently the case with young adult literature, the protagonist of each novel is also the first person narrator. In *Monster*, sixteen-year-old Steve Harmon, who is on trial for murder, analyzes his part in a robbery that results in a storekeeper's death. He seeks to determine who he is—a monster, as the prosecutor labels him and as the title reflects—

or a human being. He has taken a film class in high school and contends with the pressures of the trial and incarceration by pretending to film the courtroom events. He has also been given a notebook which serves him as a journal. In this he writes:

I can hardly think about the movie, I hate this place so much. But if I didn't think of the movie I would go crazy. All they talk about in here is hurting people. If you look at somebody, they say, “What you looking at me for? I'll mess you up!” ...

I hate this place. I hate this place. I can't write it enough times to make it look the way I feel. I *hate, hate, hate* this place!! (Monster, 45-46)

In his cell he is constantly afraid, and in the courtroom he is constantly afraid. This fear distorts reality, and the supposed filmmaking and the journal help Steve to cope. The film serves a second purpose as well. Although Steve conveys events in his own voice, he describes the scenes in the courtroom from different distances — closeup, middle, or long range — and from different participants' points of view through snippets of dialogue.

When presenting the award, Bradburn observed, “The detached style of the screen play, juxtaposed with the anguished journal entries, reveals the struggle within Steve's conscience” (ALA, *Walter Dean Myers*). In addition, the multiplicity of views given through the snippets of dialogue forces the reader to examine Steve's role in the crime and the extent of his guilt.

In the case of *Monster*, format contributes to structure and theme. The cover of the book replicates a police record, which includes fingerprints, and the book jacket bears a mug shot. Once the reader opens the book, he or she sees that the courtroom scenes are in typical type on white paper whereas the journal entries appear to be printed by hand on gray paper. These differences reinforce the sense of distance and intimacy as well as take the reader from the world of the courtroom where clear distinctions are made into the world of the mind where truth and fear blend to create a gray reality.

Skellig

Skellig is less innovative structurally than *Monster*, but it is no less demanding for the young adult reader because Almond relies heavily on two complex stylistic devices: allusion and symbolism. This book is especially challenging for the literal-minded, objective reader. It calls for one of Coleridge's willing suspensions of disbelief. Michael, the protagonist and first person narrator, who has moved with his family to a new home, discovers a creature in the dilapidated

garage. The creature identifies himself as Skellig and appears to be an infirm man with angel wings. He has a close affinity with owls, to the extent that owls feed him and that he regurgitates pellets of indigestible matter as owls do. The mythical allusions and the literary allusions contribute to the skeptical reader's ability to accept the story as well as to the theme.

On Michael's first day back at school following his discovery of Skellig, Michael's English teacher tells the story of Icarus, the young dreamer who attached wings to his back with wax and then flew too close to the sun causing the wax to melt and him to plunge to his death (13-14). Icarus' wings are artificially affixed, but the presence of a myth about a winged man begins to soften the reader's resistance.

The second mythological allusion is to the legend of Proserpine, who was allowed to return once a year from the underworld where Pluto had taken her. Her return corresponds with the arrival of spring and the renewal of life. The allusions are more directly connected to the struggle for life experienced by Michael's premature baby sister, but they also serve to remind the reader of the possibility of miraculous happenings.

In addition to these references to myths, there are no less than ten references to William Blake or to his work. Three of these allusions refer to either the repressive nature of traditional education or its practices (50, 59, and 90). In the third, Mina baits Michael about his having been labeled a mature reader and asks him which level he thinks Blake's deceptively simple little poem "Tyger" would be for (90). Introducing "Tyger" also introduces the question of creation, because the poem asks who could and then who dared make the tiger. This poem, one of the *Songs of Experience*, expresses an ambiguous position toward the creation of the tiger. Skellig himself is an ambiguous figure. He is dirty and has bad breath, yet he has angel wings and embodies love. The reader familiar with the poem moves easily from the question of who made the tiger to who made Skellig.

Two quick references to Blake occur in an argument between Mina and Michael (109 and 110), but in others Almond uses Blake to introduce mysticism and the existence of angels, thus continuing to soften the reader's resistance to the spiritual nature of this tale. The final Blake reference comes when Michael questions a physician about the healing nature of love. He inquires, "Can love help a person get better?" and the doctor responds with a quotation implied to be from Blake: "Love is the child that breathes our breath/ Love is the child that scatters death" (161). When Michael asks if the words are William Blake's, the doctor says, "We have an educated man before us," (161) implying that the words are Blake's. Whether the lines are Blake's or an imitation of his style, they encapsulate the theme of the novel: the power of love.

In addition to the numerous allusions in *Skellig*, Almond employs symbols in the novel. Mina watches a family of blackbirds and teaches Michael to listen and to observe na-

ture via the birds. The fledgling birds' journey to maturity parallels the baby's struggle for life and her eventual recovery. Moreover, the parents nurture the baby birds into adulthood just as Mina and Michael physically nurture Skellig and as Skellig spiritually nurtures the children.

Skellig himself may be a symbol. When Michael asks Skellig what he is, Skellig replies, "'Something like you, something like a beast, something like a bird, something like an angel'" (167). The reader recognizes that he or she is like Skellig — part beast, part angel. This opens the possibility that Skellig is in fact a manifestation of a part of Michael. Almond's choice of names may also be a hint in that direction. Skellig Michael is a small, rocky island off the southwestern coast of Ireland, where a monastery by the same name exists (Skellig Michael). If Skellig Michael is one island and one monastery, perhaps the novel's Skellig and Michael are two facets of one being: the spiritual and the physical.

Speak

In Laurie Halse Anderson's *Speak*, as in the other novels, the protagonist serves as first person narrator. Melinda Sordino tells the story of her freshman year at Merryweather High School, where she experiences social and emotional isolation. Little by little snatches are given which enable the reader to piece together the events that occurred before school

started that result in this state of affairs. Melinda had gone to a beer party with friends. She drank three beers, and Andy Evans, a senior, danced with her and then raped her. It is not until page 135 that the reader sees the actual event. When Evans asks if she wants to, she is confused and silent. She is after all thirteen and drunk. When he has her on the ground, however, she says no. He covers her mouth with his hand, and "In my head,

my voice is as clear as a bell: 'NO I DON'T WANT TO!'" In shock, she calls 911 for help, and the police come, but she becomes frightened and walks home during the confusion, leaving everyone at the party to think she called the police because the party was getting out of hand. As a result, she is regarded as an informer, and treated as an outcast.

The time span of the book is an entire school year. Melinda's grades fall; she skips class and school. Her only companion is Heather, a new girl, who dumps Melinda when she no longer needs her. Melinda becomes increasingly silent at school and at home. It is at this point that two potent symbols emerge.

The first is the closet at school that becomes Melinda's refuge. When she cuts class, she needs a place to go, and she discovers an unused broom closet. Her retreat to this secret place reinforces her loneliness and isolation. She decorates it by hanging a picture of Maya Angelou. Angelou, of course, was raped as a child herself. Melinda also brings some of her art work to this room. Art is the only class in which Melinda experiences any success.

It is fitting that Melinda finally breaks her silence in this room. As spring wears on and she does some yard work, she seems to rejuvenate. She decides that she no longer needs the

What do these books have in common that make them unusual and outstanding examples of young adult literature? They are structurally sophisticated, and they have memorable characters who deal with significant issues.

room and is cleaning it out when Evans locks her in and proceeds to attack her a second time. This time she fights back; she finds her voice at last and screams and screams. The lacrosse team, practicing nearby, hears and comes to the door to find her holding a broken piece of mirror at Evans' neck. The room serves as a cocoon. It offers protection until she recovers her voice and heals enough to leave its shelter.

The second major symbol is the tree that she persistently tries to carve throughout the novel. Her art teacher has his students draw a slip of paper from a bag at the beginning of the year. The students are to work all year on drawing the object named on the slip. Melinda's slip said *tree*. Her teacher has not ordered adequate art supplies, so Melinda must carve her tree in tiles. Effort after effort fails until Melinda comes to terms with what happened to her. She thinks:

IT happened. There is no avoiding it, no forgetting. No running away, or flying, or burying, or hiding. Andy Evans raped me in August when I was drunk and too young to know what was happening. It wasn't my fault. He hurt me. It wasn't my fault. And I'm not going to let it kill me. I can grow. (198)

Once she accepts what happened and realizes she is not to blame, she can move on. She carves a tree with realistic, imperfect details but with new growth and birds in the top. The tree, of course, symbolizes herself. She cries as she finishes the picture, tears which dissolve the final block to her talking.

Hard Love

The protagonist and first person narrator of Wittlinger's *Hard Love* is John Galardi, Jr., a high school junior who lives with his divorced mother and who writes under the name Giovanni. John publishes a zine (a homemade magazine containing one's own writing) and reads others. Through one of these zines, he encounters Marisol Guzman, who is a year older. They meet on weekends in Boston, where John goes to visit his father. John, like Melinda, is emotionally isolated in part due to his father's leaving his mother and in part due to his mother's reaction to abandonment. After teaching school each day, for years she had come home to sit in the dark. Even more emotionally scarring for John, she has avoided touching her son for the six years since his father left. This becomes even more pointed when she develops a relationship with another man.

This unnatural lack of touching occurs like a refrain and takes on symbolic overtones. It represents the fact that there is no real communication between mother and son. John also fails to connect with his father. The two have dinner every Friday night, but then the father pursues his social life. It is through writing and the friendships that develop as a result of his writing that John finally breaks through his isolation.

Hard Love, the novel's title, bears significant weight, for it is hard love that brings John to the point described in the last sentences of the book: "I'm ready, I think, to join them. Very anxious, more than a little scared, susceptible now to anything that might happen" (224). Diana Tree, another zine writer with whom John has corresponded, plays a part in John's readiness. They meet for the first time at the conference, and Diana is obviously taken with John, but John is too involved in working through his feelings for Marisol to

respond romantically. He has, however, responded to her writing, and he appreciates her sensitivity to his feelings. At a campfire on the beach, Diana sings the song "Hard Love" seemingly to John. The song speaks of love in an unhappy home and impossible love as hard love, but the lyricist recognizes that hard love changes people and restores lives. He writes:

And I'll tell you how you change me as I live from day to day
How you help me to accept myself and I won't forget to say,
Love is never wasted, even when it's hard love.
For the love that heals our lives is mostly hard love. (227)

John loves Marisol, who as a lesbian cannot return a like love. She can love him only as a friend, and does. It is this hard love that has made John ready to join life.

Like Myers, Wittlinger uses the format of the book to her advantage. The design of the novel replicates characteristics of a zine. Each chapter begins with slanted print as if the book had come through a home computer's printer with the paper crooked. In addition, when zine articles do appear, they are surrounded with illustrations as if they were in a zine.

Just as Myers establishes psychological intimacy with Steve Harmon's journal entries, Wittlinger creates immediacy through the illusion that the reader is often reading John's zine, that is, his writing. John's writing reveals who he is. Marisol realizes this. When reading one of his pieces, she says, "' There's the moment of truth. ... That's the line that lets me know this cocky guy is real, that he's not just a slick jerk who doesn't care about anything'" (76).

John's notebook entry and his letters and poems are printed as if they were printed by hand on lined notebook paper. Marisol's letter to her birth mother and her poem to John are neatly typed, and Diana's letter to John is handwritten on what appears to be stationery. The format clearly sets these pieces apart, calling attention to their importance in the story and revealing something of the character of each writer. Thus, like Myers, Wittlinger uses format visually to develop character and to underscore theme.

The Search for Self

These four novels deal with three themes that are important to young adults. First, most young adults struggle to come to terms with who they are, and *Monster*, *Speak*, and *Hard Love* all contain characters who are searching for their identity. When the prosecutor refers to Steve Harmon as a *monster*, he begins to examine his life, trying to repudiate for himself the attorney's claim.

When he is found "not guilty," the question remains. He opens his arms to hug O'Brien, his attorney, at the moment of victory, but she turns away (276). Is it because he is black and she is white? Is it because she is young and thinks this would be unprofessional? Does she think he is guilty? In his cast of characters, Steve has described her as "the Defense Attorney with Doubts" (10). The conclusion that he imagines for the screenplay ends with a grainy black and white picture of him — "It looks like one of the pictures they use for psychological testing, or some strange beast, a monster" (277).

The novel itself ends with a short section written five months after the trial. It finds Steve still trying to discover who he is by constantly filming himself. He says, "In the movies I talk and tell the camera who I am, what I think I am

about" (279). His mother is simply happy that he is not in jail, but the distance between him and his father grows (280-281). Steve is trying to find "one true image" of himself because he is haunted by wondering what O'Brien saw that made her turn away. The novel literally ends with that question.

Melinda Sordino in *Speak*, like Steve Harmon, must come to terms with what she did and did not do. Unlike Steve, however, she is the victim. She seems to feel the guilt and shame that rape victims often report experiencing. The terrible social isolation she is subjected to exacerbates her inability to deal with the attack. Little by little, she realizes that "it wasn't my fault" (198). She finally knows herself, and this knowledge enables her to talk about the event and sets her free to be known and understood by others.

Although self-knowledge is not a major theme in *Hard Love*, it is present as a supporting one. *Hard Love* deals primarily with John's emotional isolation and his need to connect with people, but the novel makes clear that knowledge of one's own identity is necessary before being able to establish a meaningful relationship with others. Marisol realizes this. Early on John is not even sure what his gender orientation is because he has not thought about it. John jokes, "Maybe we ought to take a poll. I could decide my sexuality based on the conclusions of a survey" (56). Marisol reprimands him about not caring and tells him in no uncertain terms that he should care: "If you don't know who you are, how is anybody else supposed to get to know you?" (56) The issue of John's sexuality is quickly resolved because of his attraction to Marisol, but his success in breaking through the wall he has built to protect himself is much slower.

In spite of Marisol's declaration about her sexuality, she has questions about who she is as well, and, like many teenagers, she believes that she must leave her parents to discover herself. At one point she tells John:

I have to leave to find out who I really am inside this person my parents have tried to manufacture. But I don't run from my feelings. Believe it or not, I love my parents. Sometimes it scares me to think about leaving them and going off by myself. What if I can't make it on my own? (64)

In spite of her affection for her parents and her self-doubt, her first goal is learning who she is. Nor does she lose this desire as the novel continues. The women she met at the zine conference invite her to return to New York with them, and she explains her decision to go in these words: "I have to do this, Gio. I have to see who I am without my parents hovering over me. Or you" (210). Thus, while not a major theme, discovery of self is a part of John's journey to connection and Marisol's journey to independence.

Friendship

Friendship is a second major theme shared by three of the four novels. *Skellig* deals with the power of love both within a family and among friends. Michael shares his discovery of Skellig with Mina, and she eventually helps Michael move Skellig to a safer place. They share visits to Skellig as well as his care, and experience a mystical dance with him in which

both children have angel wings like Skellig's. When Skellig disappears, he leaves three white feathers, one each for Michael, Mina, and the baby. Through their friendship with Skellig, both Michael and Mina learn much about the spiritual power of love.

Michael's friendship with Mina includes more than their shared relationship with Skellig, however. He learns things from her necessary to his full participation in the miracle of Skellig. It is through Mina that Michael becomes acquainted with William Blake's poetry and ideas. Through these he casts off some of his repression and becomes more open to the possibility of angels. Moreover, he gains comfort and companionship during his baby sister's illness. It is in Mina's home that he encounters the myth of Proserpine and comes to understand its significance in regard to his sister's struggle for life.

The subject of friendship occurs in *Speak* also. Social isolation is the opposite of what Melinda knew in middle school. There she had friends; she had a best friend. When Rachel, her former best friend, starts to date Andy Evans, Melinda's fear for Rachel's safety moves her to action. She sends Rachel an anonymous note, warning her about Andy. Rachel goes to the prom with Evans in spite of the note, but when he

begins to behave inappropriately, she leaves him in mid-dance. Perhaps Melinda's warning prepared Rachel in some way that enabled her to act quickly, thus extricating herself from possible rape. Although Melinda and Rachel's

friendship has been irreparably damaged, the remnant that survives helps both girls. The results of the absence of friendship and of a single act of friendship in the novel testify to the importance and power of friendship in the lives of young adults.

Hard Love also speaks of the power of friendship. Through a mutual commitment to writing, John meets two young women who become his friends. The first, of course, is Marisol, the gifted Puerto Rican adoptee. Although John's feelings for Marisol turn romantic, at first their relationship is friendship. It is through Marisol and the writing that she encourages that John overcomes the sterile emotional existence he has held onto as protection from the pain in his life. An irony associated with this friendship is that he becomes more dishonest as his relationship grows with a woman who demands absolute honesty from her friends.

John's second friend is Diana Crabtree. As with Marisol, his first encounter with Diana is through her zine. He responds by letter, and she invites him and Marisol to the zine conference. Unlike his relationship with Marisol, honesty characterizes this friendship from the beginning. John lies to Marisol that Giovanni is his real name, and it is not until they are double-dating at John's prom that she discovers that Gio is plain John. It is perhaps a small point, but when John signs his letter to Diana, he thinks about which name to use and decides to use John. It is this friendship, built from the beginning on truth, that promises at the end of the book to develop into something more.

It is important to note that in two of the three novels that deal with friendship, the friendship is between a boy and a girl, not between people of the same gender. Such friendships have become more prevalent as more freedom is ac-

All four of the Printz books have one thing in common. Each comments on truth in some way.

corded to women. Once girls had to worry too much about impressing boys, whereas today they can be themselves. This enables real friendships to develop between the genders, a condition well documented in these books.

Truth

All four of the Printz books have one thing in common. Each comments on truth in some way. In *Monster*, the question is, "What is the truth about Steve Harmon?" Was he the lookout in the robbery gone awry? Does fear distort truth to the point that it becomes slippery? These are not easy questions to answer. In the meeting between Steve and King, his co-defendant, where King explains the role of the lookout, he asks, "You down for it?" Steve never answers; he simply looks away (150). Moreover, it would appear that Steve was in the store shortly before the robbery attempt. In his journal he writes: "What did I do? What did I do? Anybody can walk into a drugstore and look around" (115). Another, later journal entry reads: "What did I do? I walked into a drugstore to look for some mints, and then I walked out. What was wrong with that? I didn't kill Mr. Nesbitt" (140). Yet on the witness stand, Steve testifies that he never discussed acting as a lookout and that he was not in the drugstore on the day of the robbery (223). Bobo Evans, the second robber, has testified that because Steve gave no signal as he left the store, he and King proceeded with the robbery, thinking no bystanders were in the store (182). Events are ambiguous, and testimony is conflicting. The reader and the jury must sort out the truth, and their conclusions may or may not be the same.

Myers presents several prisoners who convince themselves that they are not guilty of the crimes with which they are charged. Does Steve's fear of punishment make him deny his actions and in fact make him believe he is not guilty? At one point Steve tells his attorney, "I'm not guilty," and she replies, "You should have said, 'I didn't do it.'" Only when prompted in this way, does Steve say, "I didn't do it" (138).

The truth may be absolute, but fear can distort it and make it difficult to recognize. Myers' novel drives that point home. In addition, because Steve is the narrator, the reader sympathizes with him. The reader is touched by this sixteen-year-old who is alone in prison, but never alone, this boy who is so afraid for his present safety and for his future. Does the reader's connection with the narrator make the truth even more difficult to grasp? Myers' novel may well raise more questions than it answers, but it will surely stimulate the reader to think about the nature of truth.

If *Monster* questions what is true and how fear affects truth, *Skellig* questions what is true (real) and whether the truth must be real. When Michael first discovers Skellig, he thinks Skellig is dead, but he quickly says, "I couldn't have been more wrong. I'd soon begin to see the truth about him, that there'd never been another creature like him in the world" (1). Thus, truth is associated with Skellig from the first, and as previously discussed, Almond uses allusions to help the reader accept the existence of Skellig. However, Almond also introduces the possibility that Skellig is a dream. When Michael decides to take Mina to see Skellig for the first time, he says, "I don't even know if it's true or if it's a dream," and Mina replies, "... Truth and dreams are always getting muddled" (52). Then when Michael actually takes Mina to see Skellig, he worries that she will not see him, that "maybe

dreams and truth were just a useless muddle in my mind" (74). However, like Michael, Mina sees Skellig. Is this a dream? No, Michael and Mina discuss their visits to Skellig while they are completely awake in the daytime throughout the book. Michael's mother also sees Skellig. This occurs, however, under dubious circumstances, because when she tells her husband about it, she acknowledges that she has been in and out of sleep, but she describes seeing this filthy winged man pick the baby up and dance with her. She says that the baby also appeared to have wings. At first she had been afraid, but then she was reassured by the occurrence (158-160).

Although the reality of Skellig is an intriguing question, the issue may be resolved by simply recognizing the novel as a fantasy. A more pressing issue is whether or not the truth must be real. Can the abstract, the imaginary, the spiritual be true? Almond strongly suggests that it can. The children are discussing the possible evolution of the archaeopteryx into today's birds and beyond when Mina whispers the name *Skellig*. Michael's reaction is "I stared back. I didn't blink. It was like she was calling Skellig out from somewhere deep inside me" (99). What is deep inside Michael, that Skellig represents, is the power of love. The lines attributed to Blake and spoken by the doctor contain Almond's answer: "Love is the child that breathes our breath/Love is the child that scatters death" (161). Human beings are at least part love, and in the instance of Michael's baby sister, love conquers death.

Truth is an essential issue in *Speak* as it is in the other novels. Although the incident itself is not revealed in detail until mid-book, the reader soon understands that Melinda has been raped. Melinda, like many rape victims, struggles with the question of whether she is somehow to blame. However, Melinda does finally realize that the attack was not her fault (198). When she understands the truth, she is able to speak again. When she can recognize the truth and speak it, Melinda is free to move on and, like her tree, to attain new growth.

Truth plays its part in *Hard Love*, too. From the first of their friendship, Marisol lets John know how important the truth is to her. She chastises him for feigning that nothing is important to him, and she declares, "I don't lie, and I don't waste time on people who do" (27). It is apparent that Marisol demands the truth from her friends because she has had the courage to reveal her gender orientation. She says, "You tell the truth even if it's painful, especially if it's painful" (27). Although John promises Marisol that he will not lie, he realizes that he starts lying more after he meets her (85). He lies about his name. He lets Brian and Emily think that Marisol is his girlfriend (99), and he lies to himself about Marisol's gender orientation. Their relationship is threatened when he tries to kiss her at the prom she has agreed to attend as his friend. She eventually writes John a poem telling him that he is not listening and that that makes her "invisible" (145). John finally does accept the limitation that Marisol's gender orientation places on their relationship and thanks her for touching him. She responds that she loves him as much as she can (223). Accepting the truth is a lesson in "hard love."

Thus, each protagonist in these novels must deal with the truth in some way. Steve Harmon must decide the truth about who he is, while Michael must decide what is true about the spiritual world. Melinda Sordino must accept the truth that

the rape was not her fault, and John Galardi must listen to the truth Marisol speaks before he can set his stalled life in motion. Through analyzing the nature of truth and its impact on fictional lives, young adult readers should be better able to explore its intricacies in their own lives.

The selection committee has chosen a variety of well-written and stimulating books to receive the first Printz Award and the honor designations. Each novel is an enticing story told in a strong voice about well-developed characters elucidating thematic ideas important to young adults. Appropriately *Monster*, the prizewinner, is the most innovative of the four books, with its one voice at two distances. The inaugural selections give the award stature. If such outstanding books continue to be chosen, the award will soon become well-known and respected as a guide to the best in young adult literature.

Note: Thanks go to Ms. Carol Ball, librarian at Northern Hills Junior High School and at the Topeka and Shawnee County Public Library. When I could not locate these lines in Blake, she employed her electronic expertise to conduct a search, using Granger's Poetry Index, Bartlett's Quotations, and an online Blake concordance, none of which identified these lines as Blake's.

—jpd

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Interrelated Themes in the Young Adolescent Novels of Virginia Driving Hawk Sneve

Jim Charles

Introduction

The publication of N. Scott Momaday's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel *House Made of Dawn* in 1968 marks the beginning of a period of artistic, particularly literary, expression among American Indians termed the "Native American Renaissance" (Lincoln, 1983). During this period, which continues to the present, several American Indian writers have earned critical success and popularity. American Indian poets, novelists, story writers, and playwrights, drawing upon a century of tradition among their peoples of writing in English as well as an age-old tradition of verbal arts, depict for readers in a realistic manner diverse aspects of their historical and cultural experience. Nowhere has this expression found clearer, more forceful expression than in novels. From N. Scott Momaday's *The Way to Rainy Mountain* to James Welch's *Winter in the Blood*, from Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony* to Louise Erdrich's *Love Medicine*, American Indian writers have contributed much to the continued development of the novel, adding to both form and meaning aspects of the genre. Momaday and Silko connect oral traditions to modern life in intricate ways—Momaday through the use of stream of consciousness and Silko by weaving web-like interconnections between characters, between past and present. Welch's sparse language mirrors with vivid realism the world of his protagonists while Erdrich's novels unfold incrementally, through polyvocal narrative, each character revealing a unique aspect of the story. To such structural innovations, these and other American Indian writers have expanded the range of themes expressed in American literary works. Among the themes expressed uniquely by American Indian writers through their characters and their artistic technique are identity, heritage, landscape, alienation, racism, ceremony, balance, and healing.

A less well-developed category of literary expression among American Indian writers is "young adult literature," literature characterized by its inclusion of "conflicts...consistent with the young adult's experience, themes...of interest to young people, [young adult] protagonists...and...language [that] parallels the language of young people" (Bushman and Haas, 2001, 2). An important author writing in this genre is Virginia Driving Hawk Sneve, a member of the Rosebud Sioux tribe. Sneve, in describing the goal of her writing, has stated:

Among the themes expressed uniquely by American Indian writers through their characters and their artistic technique are identity, heritage, landscape, alienation, racism, ceremony, balance, and healing.

"...I try to present an accurate portrayal of American Indian life as I have known it. I also attempt to interpret history from the viewpoint of the American Indian. In doing so, I hope to correct the many misconceptions and untruths which have been too long perpetrated by non-Indian authors who have written about us" (quoted in Bataille, 1993, 242). Sneve's young adult novels include *Jimmy Yellow Hawk* (1972), *When Thunders Spoke* (1974 [1993]), and *High Elk's Treasure* (1972/1993). I summarize these short novels below, and add a focus on their thematic content. Because of the potential for these works to affect positively the growth and development of young adult readers, I present a case for teachers of English Language Arts to include these works in middle school/junior high literature curricula.

Classroom Context

When I taught middle school English, one of my most memorable experiences was teaching Virginia Driving Hawk Sneve's short story "The Medicine Bag." Teaching the story was memorable for a number of reasons. My students connected with it and responded to it with very little external prodding from me. Teaching the story allowed me to address simultaneously content of a multicultural and universal nature. The story bridged the experiences of my students (none of whom were American Indian) and those of the Lakota. Written in 1975, "The Medicine Bag" serves as a useful introduction to Sneve's thematic concerns.

Early in "The Medicine Bag," Martin, the protagonist, admits to being ashamed of and embarrassed by his Sioux great grandfather who "...wasn't tall and stately like TV Indians, [whose] hair wasn't in braids but hung in stringy gray strands on his neck, and...[who] didn't live in a teepee, but all by himself in a part log, part tar-paper shack on the Rosebud Reservation in South Dakota" (374). When his great grandfather comes to visit Martin's family because "grandpa thought he was going to die, and he had to follow the tradition of his family to pass [a] medicine bag, along with its history, to the oldest male child," Martin must come to grips with his identity and his responsibilities to important aspects of his Sioux heritage (378). For it is Martin who inherits the medicine bag and its teachings from his great grandfather. In the course of learning the ways of the medicine bag, Martin learns to respect and love his great grandfa-

ther; Martin honors his great grandfather's memory and all his Sioux relations by following the teachings associated with the medicine bag: "That night Mom and Dad took Grandpa to the hospital. Two weeks later I stood alone on the lonely prairie of the reservation and put the sacred sage in my medicine bag" (381).

Thematically, "The Medicine Bag" focuses on the importance of culture in the formation of healthy identity. It speaks to the need for intergenerational harmony in healthy adolescent development. Fundamentally, it is a story about respect. As Martin learns respect for family and heritage, he learns ultimately to respect himself as an individual. Readers, too, engage in their own reflective search for self.

In the three young adult novels examined here, Sneve develops these same themes, adding depth and complexity to her treatment of characterization and complexity to plot. The primary audience for these works is young adolescents, approximately ten to thirteen years of age, in grades five through eight. On the basis of the Fry Readability Graph (Fry, 1977), and the potential for interest in the themes and actions in the books, I believe that following reading level for the books is as follows: *Jimmy Yellow Hawk*: 7th grade; *High Elk's Treasure*: 7th/8th grade; and *When Thunders Spoke*: 5th grade.

Jimmy Yellow Hawk

In *Jimmy Yellow Hawk* (1972), Sneve portrays a young protagonist fully enveloped in a struggle to achieve a sense of his own personal identity. The story follows Little Jim Yellow Hawk from youth through a rite of passage to achievement of young adulthood. At the outset of the novel, Little Jim is too closely identified, as suggested by his name, with his father (Big Jim). While an endearing name to family members and other adults, the name "Little Jim" is a source of embarrassment for the protagonist. He is ridiculed by his friends who feel his name is indicative of not only his physical stature, but also his emotional attachment to his parents.

Along the way to Little Jim's maturation, readers witness aspects of contemporary Sioux life. The Yellow Hawk family works hard at maintaining a ranch on the allotted tribal land they own. The family feels the tension created by trying to maintain traditional Sioux ways (symbolized by the powwow) while meeting the demands of running a ranch. The presence of Grandpa Little Hawk heightens this tension. Little Jim's grandpa tells stories of the old ways while he expresses discontent over new ways of doing things. Grandpa shares with Little Jim the tradition of Sioux naming. When Little Jim, because he "[does not] like being called 'Little Jim' anymore," asks his grandfather, "How can I change my name?" (58), Grandpa relates the story of Goes-Alone-In-The-Morning, a Sioux boy who was able to provide food for his famine-stricken people by trapping rabbits during the dead of winter. Little Jim's initial attempts at trapping end disastrously as he is overcome by the odor of a skunk. Grandpa explains that "...in the old way.... this boy would have been given a name as a result of what had happened with the not so dangerous animal. Such a name might be Skunk Face and he would go by that whether he liked it or not" (72).

By the end of the novel, Little Jim demonstrates indepen-

dence, persistence, fortitude, and pride. He learns the subtleties of trapping and successfully traps a mink, "one of the deadliest animals for [its] size that we know" (74). In so doing, Little Jim reconnects symbolically with traditions of the Sioux people. After his father, with "...pride in his voice..." publicly declares, "My son, *Jimmy*, trapped it," (75) Little Jim earns the right to a new name. Adapting the Sioux naming custom to contemporary times, "Little Jim" becomes "Jimmy" Yellow Hawk, a name reflecting his newly achieved young adult status.

High Elk's Treasure

High Elk's Treasure (1972/1993) is story rich in thematic content. Primarily, the short novel traces the emotional growth and identity development of Joe High Elk, the young protagonist. As a result of increasingly complex responsibilities he undertakes, Joe comes to understand more fully his role within his family. He comes to realize what being a big brother to his sister is all about. He learns the value of family and of heritage. Two parallel stories comprise the plot, each story describing a "treasure" alluded to in the novel's title. One story details Joe's efforts to recover a pony lost during a tornado. More largely, this story relates to the line of horses developed by High Elk, the boy's great grandfather. The other story centers on solving the mystery of the hide-wrapped bundle Joe discovers while in a cave as he and his sister sought shelter from the tornado. He speculates

that the bundle was left in the cave by his great grandfather, High Elk. Unlocking its mystery proves pivotal to Joe's identity development and that of his cousin.

After losing his pony during the storm, Joe feels ashamed. He enlists the help of his neighbor Mr. Blue Shield in recovering the pony. They come upon horse thieves who attempt to steal Joe's pony. Joe recognizes that one of them is an Indian boy. Unbeknownst to Joe, he is a long-lost cousin, Howard High Elk. After confronting the thieves, Joe befriends Howard and helps him reconnect with both his Sioux heritage and his family by insisting that they both be present for the "unwrapping" of the bundle. As Joe says, "Come with us, Howard. This is your heritage, too" (86). The bundle turns out to be a "winter count," a Sioux historical calendar, hand-painted by High Elk, both boys' great grandfather. At the end of the novel, the mare *Sungewiye* has a male colt which Joe names *Otokahe*, Sioux for "beginning." The High Elk line of horses can continue. Symbolically, the *Lakota* people, one individual and one family at a time, continue.

When Thunders Spoke

Norman Two Bull, in *When Thunders Spoke* (1974/1993), encounters race-based hostility from a white shopkeeper as well as the more subtle racism of a white minister. With the help of his father and grandfather, he is able to confront anti-Indian racism and to better understand himself as a result. Norman learns to value the ways of the Lakota as espoused by his grandfather, Matt. At the same time, Norman, like most young adolescents, struggles to mature and come to understand himself more fully. Through the influence of his grandfather, he moves toward knowledge of traditional

Lakota ways. He gains greater self-awareness and a more secure sense of himself as he is forced to confront differences between himself and Brannon, the non-Indian shopkeeper who sees the world in terms of profit and materialism. "You Indians are just a bunch of superstitious heathens. I'm surprised at you, Mrs. Two Bull. You belong to the church and should know better.... No wonder you people never get ahead in this world" (93). Norman reconciles the identity conflict within himself as he confronts his mother, a converted Christian, and decides to honor traditional Lakota spiritual and familial values: "'A prayer before I leave you,' [the minister] said, bowing his head. Sarah lowered her head and closed her eyes.... Norman looked at the *coup* stick" (71). Even though this inter-generational conflict plays out in an American Indian context, non-Indian adolescents can relate directly to the antagonism between Norman and his parents. Norman rejects his mother's attempt to mold his spirituality. At the same time, he realizes he can continue to love her.

Conclusion

Among the important developmental tasks accomplished by protagonists in the young adolescent novels of Virginia Driving Hawk Sneve are the achievement of personal identity, acceptance of familial and social responsibility, and adoption of adult roles. Sneve's adolescent characters, after initial skepticism, even embarrassment, grow to exhibit pride in their American Indian (specifically *Lakota*) identity. Jimmy Yellow Hawk, Joe High Elk, and Norman Two Bull express profound respect for sacred ceremonies, accompanying teachings, and the objects used to perform ceremonial rites. In addition, these characters reconcile differences between themselves, their friends, siblings, and their parents. They grow to respect their elders, especially their grandparents, further strengthening ties to family and community and to cultural heritage. Sneve portrays Sioux families in a realistic rather than romantic and nostalgic manner as they struggle with contemporary life. These families must cope with life on reservations, balancing tradition with the frequently conflicting demands of the modern world. The *Lakota* who people Sneve's novels are real; they are not warriors mounted on horseback or "squaws" carrying a "papoose"; rather, they are students, teachers, homemakers, ranch hands, parents, and grandparents. In portraying Sioux life with humanity

and realism, Sneve dismantles prevalent stereotypes of American Indians.

Reading and studying Sneve's novels broaden students' worldviews, exposing them to a truthful treatment of the American Indian experience. Undermining the mythic image of Indians presented on television and in movies, Sneve's protagonists are real—students, both Indian and non-Indian, can relate to their interactions with parents and friends, their motives, introspections, concerns, and fears. In short, through vicarious experience and personal reflection, readers grow in their understanding of self *and* "other."

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Surviving the Journey: Literature Meets Life

Martha Brooks

“Lethbridge, Alberta—When he was six, school mates doused him with lighter fluid and threatened to torch him. By 14, he wouldn’t leave his house for months because he was frequently kicked and punched by peers who considered him a squeaky voiced geek, a pimply-faced loser. One attack left a hole in his lower lip so large he could put his tongue through it. For a lark, a girl took pictures of the beating. When he finally got up the nerve to register an assault complaint with police, his file got lost. Nothing was done for months. At 14, say psychologists and psychiatrists, he had become so lost and explosive, he took a sawed-off semi-automatic rifle into W.R. Myers high school in Taber, Alberta, and opened fire at the first students he saw. He didn’t know Jason Lang, 17, who was fatally shot, nor did he know the student he seriously wounded. Details of his life, revealed at recent court hearings, were held under a publication ban that was lifted with the boy’s guilty pleas yesterday.”

18 November 2000 - Canadian Press.

This is the opening of a disturbing piece that appeared in Canadian newspapers as I was preparing to leave for Milwaukee. It is particularly poignant in its resonance with the fact that every adult associated with this boy had failed him.

We can never assume anything when we look at a young person. We may be looking at someone whose support systems have all the outward appearance of solidity, whose family we may think we know intimately. But young people who are in the process of falling off the rails don’t always give off signals that anything is wrong. They become masters of the social mask and they can keep their secrets, whatever they may be, or, in some cases, whomever they may be protecting — from everyone, even from close family members.

Kids do not go wrong or fall into despair for no good reason. There could be legitimate medical causes such as undiagnosed emotional or mental illness. There could be issues of physical or emotional or sexual abuse, either inside or outside the family. There could be certain extremely challenging

issues arising in adolescence which revolve around sexual identity. There could be the slow erosion, for whatever reason, of the family unit. Poverty has no corner on any of this. And we all know that bad things happen to good people no matter what their life circumstances. And so we have the young alcoholic from the upper middle class neighborhood who, unbeknownst to his parents has some very unpleasant memories, from between the ages of four and six, involving his trusted baby-sitter. Or the young woman who can’t quite seem to make a decision, who seems forever immature and flailing and stalled in her journey to adulthood, whose uncle or older brother or cousin or family friend regularly abused her, stole her childhood, and uttered threats that he would kill her if she told anyone—and indeed she hasn’t. She loves her parents. How could she tell them anything so awful. Or maybe its the 17-



Photograph by Jeff Debooy, used by permission of Dorling Kindersley Publishing (DK Ink).

[NCTE Conference, 2000]

year-old girl whose doctor father is distracted and rarely available, and whose sad and harried mother is the anxious and frustrated caregiver not only of three teenage daughters, but also of an elderly mother, recently diagnosed with Alzheimer’s disease.

This 17-year-old has known most of her life that she prefers girls to boys; she also knows that her parents will not, under any circumstances tolerate her choice. And that may or may not be true. In any event she opts not to tell them that she is a lesbian, and the growing estrangement and its repercussions are deeply wounding and mystifying to everyone around her. To everyone except, of course,

The young people who survive this place of unsafety, I have found, have an innate ability to recognize nurturers, making the conscious choice that is involved in seeking them out, basking in their often unwitting warmth, looking for their advise, a smile, a pat on the back, a shred of hope.

her latest girlfriend. We expect a great deal from our children. We fill their lives, where we can, with lessons and sports and incredible stimulation. We spend time with them. Give to them. Love them. Most children grow up just fine in this sometimes scary world, filled at it is with the odd dragon behind the cupboard door. We are safe and they are safe and the world as we perceive it, as it translates to our own corner of Milwaukee, or Fargo, or Winnipeg, Manitoba, is safe. Safe to us and to our beloved children.

But when adults who are supposed to be protecting young people are not paying attention, or are avoiding certain untenable truths within their own lives, things can go wrong very fast. Patterns of family dysfunction may be involved, as well as the eroding stress of simply trying to keep life going. Balance, or harmony, is synonymous with beauty to the Navajo way of thinking; they even have a word for it: horzho. But we all know that finding balance within a modern world with its reeling and often completely unrealistic demands is a trick that many of us find out of reach.

For a few years our house had a revolving door for disenfranchised young people. They are all grown up now. Some still call me Ma, or Mum, or Mommy, or simply Martha where the image of “mother” does not carry with it the standard warm fuzzy memories. These young people have taught me a great deal about patience and compassion and trust. Of the three that I remain closest to, one was born into a life of privilege, the other two into a life of poverty. Their shared experience is that the adults around them either let them down, or could not protect them, or a combination of the two. The other things they have in common are intelligence, awareness, creativity, warmth, pride, courage, considerable charm, amazing resilience, a marvelous sense of humor, and a daily struggle with personal demons. Life is not easy when you have suffered early sorrow and have learned that the world can be unimaginably unsafe.

The young people who survive this place of unsafety, I have found, have an innate ability to recognize nurturers, making the conscious choice that is involved in seeking them out, basking in their often unwitting warmth, looking for their advise, a smile, a pat on the back, a shred of hope. These nurturers can be a teacher, the woman next door, a minister, a music teacher, somebody else’s dad, the family of a girlfriend, a librarian, or as one young man who is close to me remarked, when I asked him, with affection, “How did you turn out so good?” “It was girls,” he responded with a quick smile. “Girls kept me out of trouble and saved me.”

When you see street kids, it’s easy to think, okay, they fell onto hard times because of extreme social issues. But when I walk around in my own upper middle class neighborhood

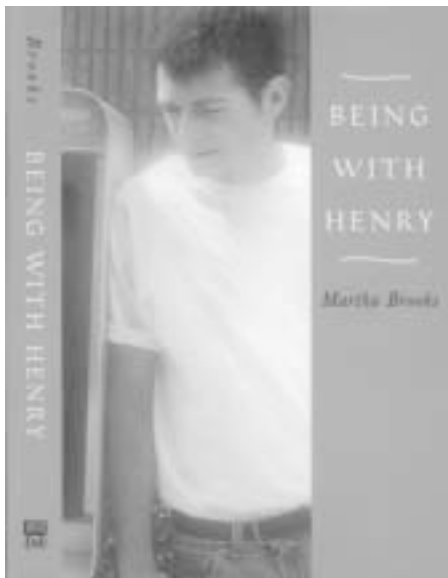
and I see a young person who stands out, whose personal aura sends forth the message: screw-up—I don’t blame the kid, I say to myself, “What the hell happened here?”

Despite the truth I am speaking we are all inculturated to certain areas of social blindness and denial. And the function of all good literature is to break though that. Just as I took those children into my home, I take readers into my books in an attempt to unmask and show inner realities. In my work I want to explore the fact that life throws us curves, things we don’t expect or deserve. I want to present the reality that good people do bad things and can survive and grow from the experience. I also want to present the fact that there is not only for young adults but for adults, as well, a sense of passage in everything we do. We are continually moving. Re-constructing. Re-examining. Re-focusing. And for each of us there are those private unheralded moments of utter courage. And many of us live those moments daily.

A few years ago, when I was writing my book, *Bone Dance*, my own daughter guided me through the intricacies of spiritual awakening. We had had a hard time, she and I. Now we were both healing. On the day of summer solstice she invited me out to a sweat lodge for a naming ceremony, her own. I will briefly explain, here that she is a published poet, a playwright, and more recently, partly because her association with her spiritual teacher, an Ojibway elder and healer, is in her pre-masters year of anthropology, cross-examining Ojibway and Icelandic cultures. The actual event was stunning. Stars shot up the prairie sky. All good prayers and songs were offered to the Creator and influencing sacred forces. In the mist and flames and scent of cedar, and in the presence of many good and humble people, my daughter received her new name and

found a different kind of family and a different sense of belonging. As for myself, I came away thinking in a more profound way about the Lakota phrase: All my relations.

We are bound together on this planet. We are all related whether or not we choose to believe it or to accept it. And it’s often the young who show us the way. In them we can see ourselves—alive, imperfect, and everlastingly hopeful.



Book Jacket, with photograph by Christine Rodin, used by permission of Dorling Kindersley Publishing (DK Ink).

Martha Brooks, an award-winning playwright, novelist, and author of short fiction, gave this stirring talk as a panelist at the November, 2000, ALAN Workshop, NCTE Conference. The topic for the panel presentation was “Compassionate Teenagers Making Choices.” She presented alongside authors Kimberly Willis Holt and Virginia Ewer Wolf.

Happily Ever After? Teens and Fairy Tales

Diane P. Tuccillo

“Once upon a time.” This opening line will conjure up myriad fairy tales in your mind I am sure, as readily as “...and they all lived happily ever after.” How many times, though, have you considered these same fairy tales as attractive reading material for teens, both boys and girls? If you haven’t, you may be surprised.

My teen book review group at the Mesa Public Library, called the Young Adult Advisory Council, or YAAC for short, keeps me on my toes about what is hot and what is not for teen reading. As Ella Peterson, one of YAAC’s members, says, “I think that modern retellings of classic fairy tales are wonderful. They retell the traditional tales in a way that relates the colorful plots and loveable characters of the past to today’s much different world. Whether the fairy tale has a moral or is just a great story, the retelling of a childhood favorite in a modern day context definitely helps us to imagine old familiar stories in a whole new way.”

In the last few years, teen interest in books based on fairy tales has bloomed. When Robin McKinley’s new book, *Spindle’s End* was recently published, teens were excited, and a library reserve list formed. *Spindle’s End* is a wildly imaginative and surprising retelling of the *Sleeping Beauty* story. Teens seem to like the variations and surprises in retellings, which sets the books apart from traditional fairy tales.

When one book becomes popular, another by that author usually follows suit, and that has been the case with McKinley’s titles. Teens here have shown renewed interest in her book, *Deerskin*, a frank and expansive version of the original controversial tale, *Donkeyskin*.

Perpetually a top choice is McKinley’s *Beauty*. As one teen put it, “*Beauty* is really good. I have read it about twenty times!” Another McKinley fan, Rosie Servis, loves *Rose Daughter*. She said, “Whenever I think of the fairy tale *Beauty and the Beast*, think of *Rose Daughter*. It is a beautiful story that shows appearances aren’t everything.”

Do you have teens who enjoy the *Cinderella* story? Two remakes are quite popular. *Ella Enchanted*, by Gail Carson Levine, provides a unique twist in that Ella has been given a gift at birth—to obey any command addressed to her. *Just Ella*, by Margaret Peterson Haddix, picks up where *Cinderella* left off, at the point where she marries the prince but then finds palace life is not what she bargained for.

Another author who has found favor with our teen readers is Donna Jo Napoli. A frequent teen reading choice is her book, *Magic Circle*, which retells *Hansel and Gretel*—from the startling perspective of the witch—in a very unique fashion. *Zel*, based on *Rapunzel*, is retold from the points of view

of various characters in that story, while it examines their psychological motivations. *Spinners* recounts *Rumpelstiltskin*. YAAC member Andrea Alonge said, “*Spinners* was one of the best books I have ever read. I think Donna Jo Napoli should be nominated for Author of the Year.”

Napoli’s latest titles are *Crazy Jack* and *Beast*. *Crazy Jack* is a retelling of *Jack and the Beanstalk* in which Jack seeks his father, falls in love, and learns what real treasure is. *Beast* showcases Napoli’s linguistic knowledge, as French, Latin, Arabic and Persian words pepper her version of *Beauty and the Beast*. This story is of a prince who is the victim of a curse and who has been transformed into a very non-elegant lion. In this form, he seeks a French woman with a love of roses who can free him from the curse.

Teens also love fractured fairy tales. In *Tales from the Brothers Grimm and the Sisters Weird*, by Vivian Vande Velde, the thirteen twisted versions of such well known tales as *Jack and the Beanstalk*, *Red Riding Hood*, and *Three Billy Goats Gruff* are hilarious. Pricilla Galloway’s *Truly Grim Tales* and Emma Donoghue’s *Kissing the Witch: Old Tales in New Skins* are titles frequently in demand. *Kissing the Witch* takes a unique perspective in that the stories are interconnected. Each fairy tale starts with a poem by a character from the previous story.

Fairy tale remakes from the darker side, such as those found in *Red As Blood* and *Tales from the Sisters Grimm* by Tanith Lee, are often selected by teens who enjoy that slant. Also in demand is *Briar Rose*, Jane Yolen’s version of *Sleeping Beauty*, in which the author entwines the terror of the Holocaust with the tale. As teen book reviewer Beth Dormady said, “*Briar Rose* was very interesting! It showed a whole new side to *Sleeping Beauty*.”

Francesca Lia Block is a favorite of teen readers, and she has recently taken the plunge into the sub-genre of retold fairy tales. Her book, *The Rose and the Beast: Fairy Tales Retold*, is a collection of stories with short and snappy titles such as “*Snow*,” “*Rose*,” “*Ice*” and “*Charm*.” Some take on a contemporary slant while others are more traditional. Block brings perceptiveness to the original elements of the fairy tales, often in a disturbing and mature manner. Older teens, especially Block fans, will enjoy this thought-provoking, quirky offering.

Some titles are based on retellings of unusual fairy tales. YAAC member Ella Peterson greatly enjoyed Juliet Marillier’s *Daughter of the Forest*. Ella said, “Based on a little known fairy tale called *Six Swans*, this book is one of the prime examples of fairy tale retellings today. The old fairy tale is taken

and remolded into an entirely new story that is wonderfully entertaining and engaging. The writing style flows beautifully and makes the book smooth and enjoyable to read. Marillier did an extraordinary job on her first novel and promises that this is just the first in a brand new upcoming trilogy."

A traditionally fun title that has had teens reveling in its humor for years is *Roald Dahl's Revolting Rhymes*. Another popular and very silly yet catchy collection is *Fractured Fairy Tales* by A.J. Jacobs, based on the stories featured on the *Rocky and Bullwinkle Show*. Plus, who could forget Jon Scieszka's extremely funny *The Stinky Cheese Man and Other Fairly Stupid Tales*? Teens still clamor for that one. YAAC member Jasmine Williamson said, "I like *The Stinky Cheese Man* because of the hilarious way the author tells the stories. When my teacher got it I made sure I was the first one to read it because I liked it so much." David LaHaie quipped, "I have to say that *The Stinky Cheese Man* is one of my literary favorites. It is a hysterical take on old fairy tales, which you can't put down." Elizabeth Steimle stated simply, "Lots of retellings are very funny (such as *The Stinky Cheese Man*) and they keep your attention."

So, what are you waiting for? Try some of these new versions with your teen readers and be surprised! As you can see, there is something for everyone in these old stories in new skins.

Retold Fairy Tales: Titles Mentioned and Additional Selections

By Ella Peterson and Diane Tuccillo

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Silly/Funny Collections

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Vande Velde, Vivian. *Tales from the Brothers Grimm and the Sisters Weird*. San Diego: Harcourt, 1995.

Diane Tuccillo has been Senior Librarian/YA Coordinator at the Mesa Public Library in Arizona for twenty years. Diane is on the ALAN Executive Board and has been a frequent presenter at ALAN Workshops. She has written articles for

The ALAN Review, VOYA, Kliatt and other publications. She is also a book reviewer for School Library Journal and VOYA. One of Diane's favorite jobs is working with the teen members of YAAC.

Ella Peterson is 15 years old and attends Skyline High School. Ella loves to read and she has been an active member of YAAC for two years. She has had many reviews published in YAAC's teen book review newsletter, Open Shelf. Ella was instrumental in preparing the bibliography for this article.

YAAC is a group of teen book reviewers who meet twice a month on Saturday mornings, at the Mesa Public Library,

to talk about books and write reviews. They serve as partner book reviewers with adult reviewers for VOYA (Voice of Youth Advocates) journal and were one of two national groups working on the Teen Top Ten Books pilot project for the Young Adult Library Services Association of the American Library Association last year. They are also involved in YALSA's YA Galley Project, for which teens read newly published or about-to-be published books and share their impressions. Considered official library volunteers, YAAC has been an active part of Mesa Public Library since 1977. The group also helps out with special library programs and projects as needed, and a YAA C Representative serves on the Library Board.