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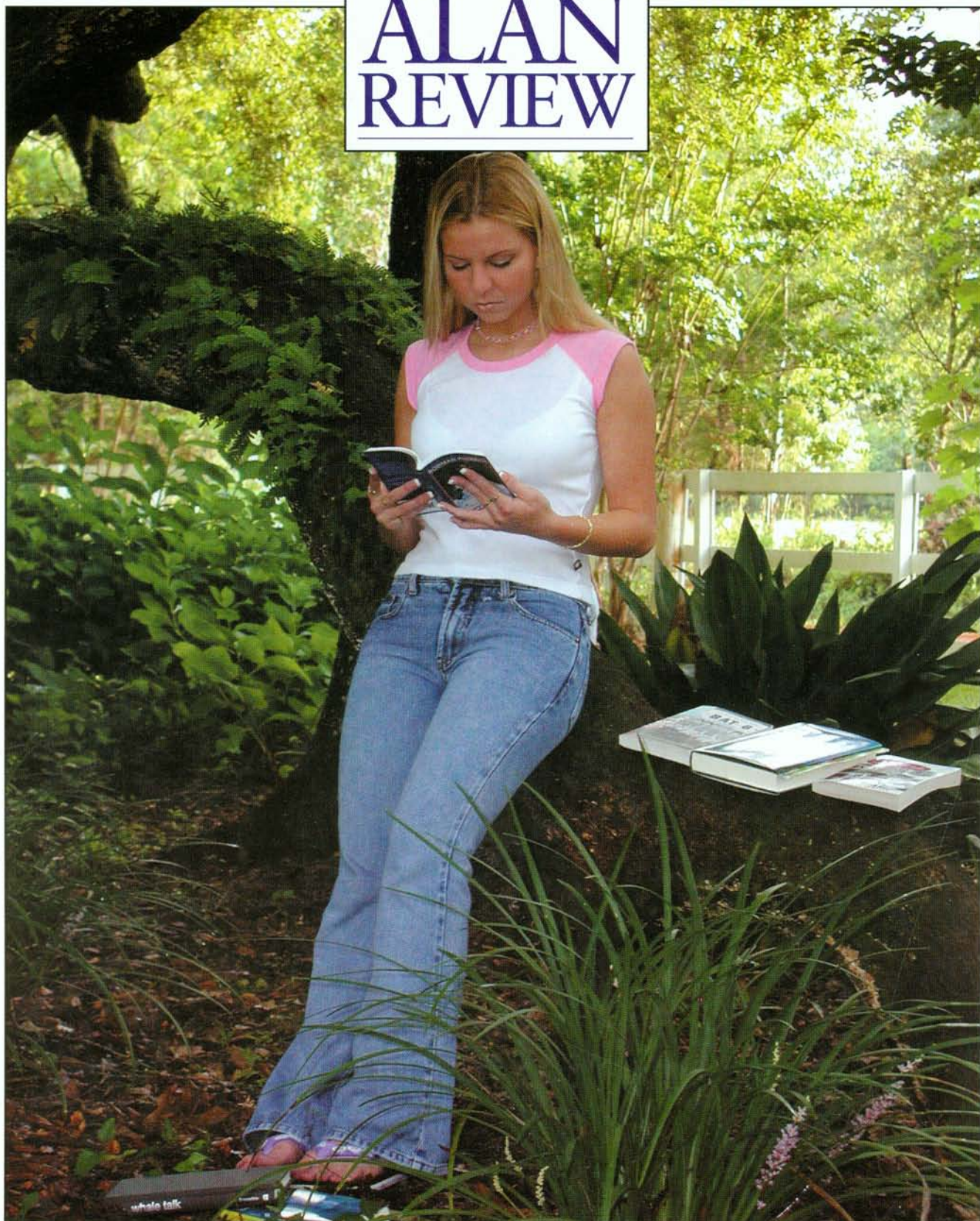
JUN 26 2002

Volume 29

Spring/Summer 2002

Number Three

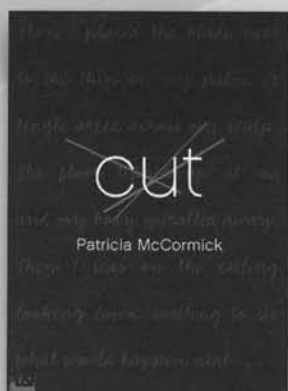
T • H • E
ALAN
REVIEW



Assembly on Literature for Adolescents of the National Council of Teachers of English

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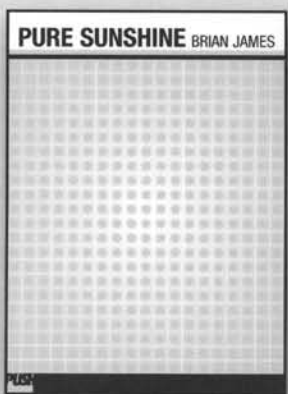
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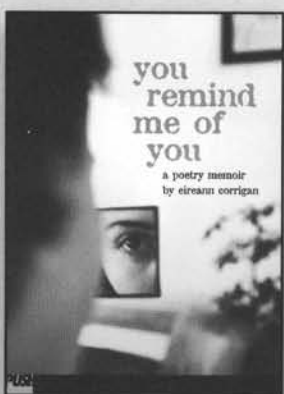
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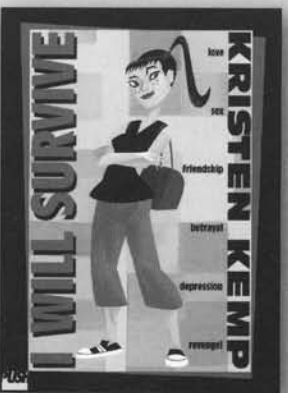
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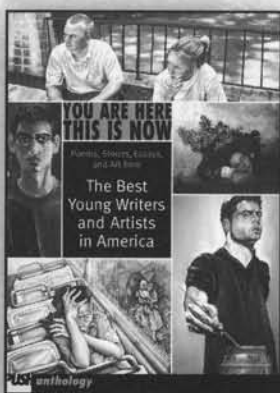
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Dear YA Enthusiast,

Welcome to PUSH – a new teen paperback imprint.

These are new authors with new voices. All of them are first-time novelists; many are under 25. They speak directly to teen readers. They are compelling. They are honest. They are real.

PUSH has been four years in the making. Our goal is to create a new body of teen literature, to put books on the radar alongside movies, TV, and music. To do this, the books need to connect. It's not what the books are about that's important—it's what they're *about*.

Cut is not about self-mutilation; it's about girls who choose pain and harm as a way of coping. *Pure Sunshine* is not about drugs; it's about what happens when we try so hard to stave off boredom that the distractions themselves become the destination. *Kerosene* is not about lighting fires; it's about the inarticulate rage that many teens feel right now, and the releases they find. *You Remind Me of You* is not just one girl's journey through a minefield of self-inflicted tragedies; it's about the strange roads we take toward recovery. These books are funny, observant, heartbreaking, and heartstopping—just like life.

PUSH is a bold initiative for us. I truly hope you will be a big part of it. We all have the same goal. We all want more teens to read. PUSH is one way to get there.

Thank you for joining us,

David Levithan

David Levithan,
Editor, PUSH

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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."

MANUSCRIPT FORMAT. Manuscripts should be double spaced throughout, including quotations and bibliographies. A title page with author's name, affiliation, address, and a short professional biographical sketch should be included. The author's name should not appear on the manuscript pages; however, pages should be numbered. Short quotations, as permitted under "fair use" in the copyright law, must be carefully documented within the manuscript and in the bibliography. Longer quotations and complete poems or short stories must be accompanied by written permission of the author and/or publisher.

Author interviews should be accompanied by written permission of the interviewed author to publish the interview in *The ALAN Review*. Interviewers should indicate to authors that publication is subject to review of an editorial board. The title of *The ALAN Review* should not be used to gain an interview.

Original short tables and figures should be double-spaced and placed on a separate sheet at the end of the manuscript. Notations should appear in the text for proper placement of tables and figures.

The ALAN Review prefers the use of the Publications Manual of the Modern Language Association. A 3 1/2-inch MS-DOS disk in either a recent version of Word or Word Perfect format must accompany all manuscripts. Disks must be clearly labeled with author's name, manuscript title, disk format, and file title.

SUBMITTING THE MANUSCRIPT. Send three clear copies and a disk of the manuscript to: Pamela S. Carroll, Editor, *The ALAN Review*, 209 MCH, Florida State University, Tallahassee, FL 32306-4490.

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.

PUBLICATION OF ARTICLES. *The ALAN Review* assumes that accepted manuscripts have not been published previously in any other journals and/or books, nor will they be published subsequently without permission of *The ALAN Review*. Should the author submit the manuscript to more than one publication, he/she should notify *The ALAN Review*. If a submitted or accepted manuscript is accepted by another publication prior to publication in *The ALAN Review*, the author should immediately withdraw the manuscript from publication in *The ALAN Review*.

Manuscripts that are accepted may be edited for clarity, accuracy, readability, and publication style.

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.

A manuscript published in *The ALAN Review* is considered to have been copyrighted by the author of the article.

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

Happy sunny summer! I hope that you are finding time to enjoy your favorite books and authors during the months when many of us are away from the demands of classrooms and libraries. And I hope that you will forgive me for asking you to do some homework for ALAN this summer. Here is the assignment:

We all know that ALAN is a terrific organization, one that promotes adolescent/young adult books and the authors that write those works. But the word about ALAN has not spread as widely or as well as it could. That's one place that you can help: please let your colleagues and your students know about us. You might want to use our Web sites—one for the organization, at <http://www.alanya.org> (with thanks to David Gill, Web writer!) and one for the journal, at <http://scholar.lib.vt.edu/ejournal/ALAN/alan-review.html> (with thanks to Pat Kelly Proudfoot, Web maintainer!) to introduce them to our organization and to the issues and concerns that are important to us as proponents of high-quality, compelling, artistic literature for young people. Or introduce them to us through our parent organization, NCTE, by clicking the "Assemblies" button on the <http://www.ncte.org> Web site. Point out to your colleagues and administrators the advertisement of one issue of *The ALAN Review* that has been included in the newest NCTE publications as a way to encourage them to join the organization and, in doing so, receive the journal three times per year (at \$15 annual fee, our membership is still the best bargain in the professional universe). Clip the reviews of books that are included in each of our issues so that students can browse through them in your classroom or library. We can take advantage of the national attention on reading skills by talking, often and much, about the kinds of books that resonate with adolescent readers.

Thought you would go back to your lemonade and read this interdisciplinary-focused issue of the journal now? Not quite yet. There are a couple of other requests I would like for you to consider.

One request is aimed toward those of you who are classroom teachers and school or community media specialists who work with adolescents: Please consider gathering your students' comments about the YA books that they are reading, and send them to us, to be published in our frequent feature, **Book Bubbles**. This section is a fun pair of pages in which student readers' voices pop up off the page, fresh and shimmering, like soap bubbles. This is an example of the kind of text we are hoping to see:

"Wow—I knew exactly what John meant when he said he felt like his tuba was really a frog sitting on his shoulder. When I was learning the trumpet, the instrument seemed to have a mind of its own."

8th grader Xavier Parsons, commenting on *You Don't Know Me*, by David Klass

If you would like to send us comments for **Book Bubbles**, you need only send us a list of your name, the grade(s) you teach, and the school name, along with your students' book comments. (If you are sure that we can read your students' work, you are welcome to send originals. If you are not sure that we can, please type the comments and send us a list). We will be happy to give you and the school some publicity when we publish their remarks. And what a lesson on writing for publication this can be for your students!

The students' comments should be only two-three sentences long. All of your students might be responding to a single book that they read in common. If so, we need only the student's name along with his or her comment. We ask that you give us the book title and author's name for

the group of responses. If your students are responding to different books, please have them include the book title and author's name, along with their own names, when they write their comments. With the help of our friends at Graphic Press, we will add the art work to make your students' comments bubble.

The second request is aimed toward those of you who are working in colleges and universities with pre-service and in-service teachers. We would like to hear from you if you are interested in having groups of your undergraduate/graduate students serve as guest reviewers, *alongside our faithful regular reviewers*, for the **Clip and File Book Reviews** section of one issue of *The ALAN Review*. This is what section editor Jeff Kaplan and I have in mind:

You will send Jeff your name, mailing address, and email address, along with the number of prospective and practicing teachers with whom you work. Jeff will send you a batch of books, ideally one per student, along with a deadline for the return of the reviews. Your students, under your supervision, will write reviews, using the current reviews as models. Reviewers get to keep the books! You will read and edit those reviews, adding comments regarding books in a series, and so on, if appropriate (items that teachers who are less familiar with the genre than are you might not know), then send Jeff a copy of the reviews, in hard copy and on a disk. He will further edit for length and stylistic features, then send the reviews to the *ALAN Review* office before publication. The benefits with this system will be many. The primary ones are that prospective and practicing teachers have an opportunity to read and review new books, thus increasing their own knowledge in the field, that they will have the experience of publishing for a demanding professional audience of their peers, and that a broader body of reviewers will be contributing to the journal. We would happily add a note regarding your university affiliation, so that you and your students and school get a bit of PR from the enterprise.

Please send **Book Bubbles** contributions to:

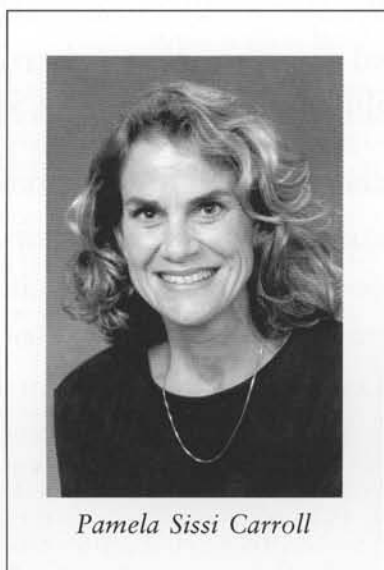
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University of Central Florida
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Orlando, FL 32816-1250
Email: jkaplan@mail.ucf.edu

Good homework assignments should be meaningful. These are. Good homework assignments should reinforce our knowledge of an area of inquiry. These assignments do.

And now, please enjoy this issue of the journal, one that has an interdisciplinary focus; it is an ideal issue to share with your colleagues regardless of the school subjects they teach...



Pamela Sissi Carroll

**We hope to see you in Atlanta for NCTE's Fall, 2002 Convention,
and for the ALAN Breakfast and Workshop!**

Place: Atlanta, Georgia

Dates: November 21-26 (NCTE Convention, including
the ALAN Breakfast and ALAN Workshop)

ALAN Breakfast: Saturday, November 23, 2002

Speaker: Virginia Euwer Wolff, Simon & Schuster

ALAN Workshop: Monday and Tuesday, November 25-26, 2002

Chris Crutcher, HarperCollins, ALAN Keynote Speaker (Monday morning)

These authors, and Others, also will be featured at the ALAN Workshop:

Graham Salisbury, Random House

Orson Scott Card, TOR Books

Robert Jordan, TOR Books

David Lubar, TOR Books

S. L. Rottman, Penguin Putnam

Sonya Sones, Simon & Schuster

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Mark Delaney, Peachtree Publishers

M. T. Anderson, Candlewick

Kevin Crossley-Holland, Scholastic

Arnold Adoff, Scholastic

Michael Cadnum, Scholastic

Jeanette Ingold, Harcourt

Please go to www.ncte.org for information and to register!

An Interview with Author/Screen Writer David Klass

Sissi Carroll

Author David Klass caught my imagination and attention years ago with his *Wrestling with Honor* (Dutton 1988) and *California Blue* (Scholastic 1994), each of which raises serious, thought-provoking questions about sports, ethics, human values, and complex father-son relationships—traits that, I later learned, are characteristics of Klass's YA fiction. And now, it seems possible that John, the protagonist and narrator of David Klass's *You Don't Know Me* (Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2001), might dethrone Holden Caulfield as the voice of adolescents.

I had the privilege of engaging in a telephone interview with David Klass in January, 2002. When we initially spoke in order to arrange the interview, one of his first questions for me was, "So, do you know about my dual role as writer for young adults and for Hollywood?" I admitted my ignorance about the Hollywood connection, then began doing some serious homework. A few weeks later, during the interview, I quickly realized that the dual role as YA author and Hollywood screenwriter is only one of the many rich surprises I would learn about David Klass, the author-author.

The First Surprise

David Klass is one of the humblest and most gracious men with whom I have ever had the pleasure to speak. He is eager to downplay his own accomplishments and to praise those who have had a positive impact on his life, especially his father, mother, sisters, wife, and infant son. Despite his success as the author of some of the most compelling books in young adult literature, including *Wrestling with Honor*, *California Blue*, *You Don't Know Me*, and his newest, *Home of the Braves* (to be released by Farrar, Straus and Giroux in the spring, 2002), and his success as a Hollywood screenwriter of blockbuster films including *Desperate Measures* (1998), starring Michael Keaton and Andy Garcia, and *Kiss the Girls* (1997), starring Morgan Freeman and Ashley Judd, and collaboration with his sister Perri Klass

on an ABC Movie of the Week, *Runaway Virus* (2000) and collaboration with his sister Judy Klass on a Showtime Original Movie for television, *In the Time of the Butterflies* (2001), David Klass refuses to boast. (I think I would constantly wear a t-shirt that announced: "Brilliant and Successful Writer" if I had his resume.) While he recognizes that he has become a successful writer in two disparate worlds—Hollywood and young adult literature—he shrugged off my amazement by saying that he has merely been exceedingly "fortunate". And he added, "There are a lot of people I knew in Los Angeles who are a lot more talented than I was or am who, for one reason or another, have been unable to crack through and are still trying, 10 years after I left."



Klass credits his mother, Sheila Solomon Klass, a now-retired professor of English and author of seventeen novels, including popular YA titles *A Shooting Star: A Novel about Annie Oakley* (BDD, 1998) and *The Uncivil War* (Bantam, 1999) as his professional role model. It was she who demonstrated what a writer does, for her son, by awakening him to the sound of her typewriter each morning before the family started its day. He modeled her self-discipline when he arose at 5 a.m. each morning in Atami, Japan, to write what would become his first novel, *The Atami Dragons* (Macmillan 1984).

Klass credits his mother, Sheila Solomon Klass, a now-retired professor of English and author of seventeen novels, including popular YA titles A Shooting Star: A Novel about Annie Oakley (BDD, 1998) and The Uncivil War (Bantam, 1999) as his professional role model.

While it is clear that his mother plays a significant role in his life as a writer and as a human, Klass is also eager to credit his late father for urging him to write, even at times when the writing seemed stalled or impossible. He refers to his father, who served as Chair of Anthropology at Barnard College and taught there for over thirty years, as his "best reader." He remembers that his father read to the

Klass children every night; *Treasure Island* was a family favorite. Klass cites the following as specific evidence of his father's influence on his work: When writing *You Don't Know Me*, Klass felt that he was trying to do the impossible—giving narrator John a comic voice, yet placing him

in a horrific situation. Sure that the book was hopelessly flawed, Klass put it aside. It was his father who assured him that a character like John *needed* to be written. The elder Klass reminded his son that humor is John's way of escaping pain, and that through humor, John is "able to get a different look at the world." With that encouragement and perspective, Klass was able to return to the manuscript and complete the novel. Although his father died in the spring, 2001, "his presence lives large" in his son's work and life.

Klass is also noticeably proud of his sisters, with good reason. Perri Klass is a medical doctor who writes non-fiction for the *New York Times* and who has won five O. Henry awards for short stories. She is also the Director of Reach Out and Read, a literacy program in the Boston area. Judy Klass is a playwright with whom he has collaborated, most recently on the Showtime movie, *In the Time of the Butterflies*. With all of that brain power concentrated in a single family, I had to ask Klass what a holiday celebration is like when his clan gets together. He admitted, "It can be pretty intellectual," then added, with a laugh, "It is no wonder that I never thought I could keep up. I guess that I got into sports as a way to distinguish myself." Klass confesses that it was competition with his sister that led to his first publication: Perri had submitted short stories to *Seventeen* magazine, and they were published. When that magazine ran a short story contest, David, then a high school student, entered it—and won.

Throughout our conversation, David Klass deftly deflected praise away from himself—and heaped it onto members of his family and others. I was surprised to learn that he is unabashedly proud of, and close to, his family, and that he is humble and generous as an artist.

The Second Surprise

David Klass, the prolific and powerful writer who studied with John Hersey at Yale, did not intentionally set out to write either novels or screenplays. This is the story of how he happened to write his first novel, an event that had an immediate impact on his entree into the film industry as a screenwriter:

After he graduated from Yale with a degree in history, he spent a year working as a clerk in a law firm in Washington, D.C.. There, he felt like a glorified file room attendant; the windowless room in which he worked made him long for "an adventure". After a year, he enlisted in a program sponsored by the Japanese Ministry of Education. In the program, 800 Americans were chosen to go to Japan, where they would be expected to teach English. Although he had no background in teaching, he signed up, and was sent, as fortune had it, to the "beautiful wonderful resort town" of Atami, less than an hour from Tokyo by bullet train.

Klass as Teacher

As the first American to go to Atami to teach, he was

treated as an honored guest. The mayor held a press conference upon his arrival, and, since the mayor knew that Americans are used to large houses, Klass was given the use of a three-bedroom apartment, a size that is an almost unheard-of luxury in Japan. His apartment overlooked the bay; it was in that idyllic setting that he lived for the two years of his Atami assignment. He taught adolescent students in the equivalent of American junior high school and high school classes three days per week (all of his students had studied English for years), then traveled into the mountain and island towns to teach two days per week. For someone who had left a position as a law clerk in a windowless office, seeking adventure, he was certainly living a dream. Klass soon understood that he was treated with honor not only because he was an American who was there to work, but because he was a teacher. According to Klass, all of Atami's public school teachers were afforded the kind of respect that American teachers would call "amazing." As an example, he noted that the townspeople would "rarely even allow" him to pay for a meal. He commented, too, that "the mayor, police chief, and the principal of the high school were the most respected people in town." Klass summarizes his impression of Atami and its people by stating, simply, "It knocked me out."

Klass as Writer of YAL

On the first night of his arrival in Atami, Klass sat down and began writing a story about an American boy who played baseball, and who wanted to climb Mt. Fuji. The story became *The Atami Dragons*. When I asked if he knew that he was writing a "young adult book" from the beginning,

Klass admitted that he was not focused on writing for the genre exclusively, though the fact that he felt comfortable with "the length and size" of adolescent novels appealed to him. He added, laughing, that he also had, at the time, "the advantage of being a 23-year-old with the maturity level of a 17 year-old." Before Christmas of that first year in Japan, he finished the novel, and sent it to Scribners. Why Scribners? Klass explains, "I knew that it was the company that had published Fitzgerald and Hemingway, so I figured they knew something about getting books published." He was right; the book was published

when Klass was still in Atami. I can only imagine that his popularity as a local celebrity, due to his role as a school teacher, skyrocketed when the title "author" was added to his name.

Klass as Hollywood Screenwriter

On the eve of his 25th birthday, Klass was surprised with a call from out of the blue—or close to it. After celebrating his birthday with his Atami friends, Klass returned home in the wee hours of the morning, where he received an unexpected telephone call from a person in Hollywood. The

Klass is also noticeably proud of his sisters, with good reason. Perri Klass is a medical doctor who writes non-fiction for the New York Times and who has won five O. Henry awards for short stories. She is also the Director of Reach Out and Read, a literacy program in the Boston area. Judy Klass is a playwright with whom he has collaborated, most recently on the Showtime movie, In the Time of the Butterflies.

caller informed him that someone had bought the option to make *The Atami Dragons* into a movie. The potential producer was, coincidentally, traveling in Japan, and Klass was asked to pick him up to show him around Atami. There was the possibility that some of the film would be shot in the town for which Klass had developed a deep affection. When I asked him if his reputation shot even higher with the news got around that a Hollywood producer was in town because of him, Klass explained, graciously, that he was reluctant to have the world of Hollywood burst into Atami, since Atami had “become sacred” to him. The presence of a Hollywood producer, one who constantly looked for features of the resort town that would serve as advantages for a feature film, made Klass uncomfortable. He offered, as an example of his discomfort, an incident in which the movie producer, upon meeting the highly respected high school principal, showed his lack of regard for the principal’s reputation and standing by asking, immediately, “Can you act?”

Despite his lack of knowledge about Hollywood, Klass was up for a new challenge and adventure. He decided to take a leap; his teaching assignment in Atami completed, Klass moved to Los Angeles, expecting that *The Atami Dragons* project would allow him to break into the film industry as a successful screenwriter. The project failed, as Klass says most do—most often “for reasons that have nothing to do with the writer, like the producer getting a new job, or divorcing the director, or someone writing a similar story that gets picked up.” Klass describes the next seven or eight years, ones he spent in Los Angeles, as difficult, lonely ones. He re-discovered a lesson that he had learned while in Washington D.C.: it is tremendously difficult to break into the big time without family connections or a great stroke of luck. As Klass admits, his family is an intellectual powerhouse, but it had no connections in Hollywood. Even his stellar education and his quick success as an author carried little weight there. Nevertheless, Klass tried everything he could to break into the industry: he completed a degree in directing at the University of Southern California’s acclaimed cinema school. He continued to write screenplays, but he discovered another truth hidden in Hollywood: “many screenwriters keep working for years, and even make a decent living, but never have scripts that get produced.” He was persistent, yet by his admission, he was “terrible at schmoozing,” and his entry into the film world was a long, painful struggle.

Finally, with his idea for a screenplay called *Desperate Measures*, Klass made his mark in Hollywood. The screenplay was made into a major motion picture starring Michael Keaton and Andy Garcia. The director/producer, Barbet Schroeder, decided that Klass should be replaced by a writer with more experience once the cast had been hired and filming had begun, and a team of nine writers was hired to revise his original script. Nevertheless, Klass ultimately received credit as the sole author of the movie, the writer with

the “major vision” for the movie.

His wonderful achievement as a screenwriter was tinged with a few other mildly dark moments, as well. When I asked him if he was happy with the movie once it was complete, he indicated that he had mixed feelings. As Klass explained, the fact that nine other writers worked on his idea meant that the final product was not exactly the one he had intended. For instance, Klass said, “they took it out of small town America where I’d started it and moved it to a big city.” More significant, he explained, was the portrayal of the boy in the film. To write about a child with cancer, Klass had “spent a lot of time at a Los Angeles children’s hospital, observing children in the cancer ward”.

When he describes the young cancer patients, he adamantly states, “They do not see themselves, and the doctors and nurses—the people who work with them—don’t see them as weak and pathetic. They’re not. You’ve never met people who enjoy life so much and who are so optimistic. When they go into remission they really lead completely normal lives.” He was determined that the young cancer patient who was a focal character in the movie would reflect the energy and optimism of the children whom he had met and watched. He adds, “So

the last thing I wanted to do was present them or show them in any way as weak.” Further, he notes that it is “impossible to be a good screenwriter without falling in love with your character and dreaming that your movie is going to go.” When the nine writers who were chosen to revise his *Desperate Measures* script decided to portray the little boy as pale, weak, pathetic, Klass was troubled because his original intention had been altered. He was also troubled by critics’ reactions. Klass said, “When the movie came out, the kid was pale and pitiful. A number of the reviews said, ‘Klass should be ashamed of himself for doing this.’ So that is one time when you just have to say, ‘This is a really hard business.’” He admitted that being “scathingly criticized” for others’ work is part of what makes Hollywood “a very tough business.”

It was writing young adult literature that gave him a balance, and a sense of himself as a writer. That sense of being a writer sustained him during the years in Los Angeles when he was fairly broke and fully alone. And it led him to write his fine early books, *Break Away Run* (1987), also set in Japan and intended to convey what he had learned while living there; *A Different Season* (1987), which features a girl who joins a baseball team, and which was written in part as a response to a feminist friend with whom he liked to discuss gender roles; *Wrestling with Honor* (1988), a story that probes a son’s attempts to connect to a father he’d lost to the Viet Nam war; *California Blue* (1994), an environmental and personal novel that centers on what happens between a boy and his father when the boy’s discovery of a rare breed of butterfly threatens to shut down the factory in which his dad, who is dying of leukemia, works; and *Dan-*

As a Hollywood screenwriter, he has learned to accept the fact that directors and producers lay claim to his work, and are free to change it to suit their needs, regardless of—or with no concern whatsoever for—his wishes. In contrast, he says that his editor will telephone him even if he is across the country if she has a question as minute as one concerning the placement of a comma.

ger Zone (1995), which was his own attempt, after the Los Angeles race riots, “to understand what life is like for people who struggle” to survive in racially explosive and dangerous sub-cultures of American cities. Klass says that he found, among writers and proponents of young adult literature whom he began to meet as his books became popular, “a WORLD” — a welcoming, friendly, positive place.

The Third Surprise

David Klass is calm about balancing his life, work, and location. He writes young adult novels and scripts for Hollywood primarily from New York City, where he shares a home with his wife, baby son, and the daughter whom the couple is currently expecting. He convinced me, throughout our conversation, that he is comfortable in all of his roles, and that he uses each productively as a weight to keep the others level.

I asked Klass to discuss the ways that screenwriting and writing novels for adolescents are similar or different, and whether or not the “dual” roles ever became “dueling” roles. His responses, peppered with specific examples, helped me understand how his work as a writer of young adult books adds a balance that allows him to continue to be productive in both arenas. And he helped me understand differences regarding the approaches and processes he takes as a writer, due to the different demands of the genres.

First, he explained that his writing in the film industry actually takes three different jobs. The most desirable job is that of the writer of an original screen play, which was his with *Desperate Measures*. A second job involves being hired by a studio to write an adaptation of a novel. This is the job that Klass assumed when he re-worked James Patterson’s novel into the feature film, *Kiss the Girls*. The third kind of Hollywood writing involves rewriting scripts that a studio has bought from another author. It was this job that Klass was engaged in when he began the YA novel, *You Don’t Know Me*. The story of how the characters and situations for that novel came to be is an intriguing detour:

Klass sounded almost apologetic when explaining the unusual way he began *You Don’t Know Me*. He had been working for almost 18 months on a screenplay for Universal Studios. The script was a submarine suspense saga, and the director, John McTeirnen (director of *Hunt for the Red October*), a stickler for details. Klass had an advisor at the Pentagon so that his work would be accurate and authentic, and he was doing his writing in New York City. One day during his tenure with the submarine film, while he was walking to lunch and at the intersection of Park and 57th Street, Klass claims that he, “started to hear the voice of John clearly.” He went home and wrote the first chapter almost automatically; the published version is virtually identical to that initial draft.

John’s voice gradually “told [Klass] what his story would be.” Even then, Klass admits, he was not sure what would happen with John. The author acknowledges that John took control of some of the scenes in the book. For example, Klass had planned to have John’s first date with the coveted Glory Hallelujah turn out well; however, John refused to let the story unfold that way. The date was an utter disaster, ending with a humiliated and mortified John running away from Gloria’s basement, in fear that Gloria’s father was going to pummel him. Earlier in the date scene, Klass had John and Gloria attend a high school basketball game. When

the author realized that he was giving too much careful attention to the ballgame itself, and not moving the narrative forward, he felt stalled, and had to put down the book. John stepped in to give him direction. When John took Gloria to the game, his irreverence toward Gloria’s crowd sparked the eruption of a bleacher brawl. It was the fight, and John and Gloria’s flight from it, that took the author’s attention away from the details of the ballgame itself, and got him back on track with the novel.

This story illuminates other important differences that Klass finds when working as writer of young adult books and as a screenwriter. He states that for him, “novels are all about character,” and insists that writers “have the battle won” when they create a character that they like, and that readers will like. In contrast, screenplays are “all about conflict and structure,” and about “solving a puzzle” with the added challenge of compelling dialogue.

Although he confesses that being a writer in Hollywood is “a very tough business,” he is quick to check what may sound like a broad stroke of criticism with this note: “I must say that I worked harder than I’ve ever worked in my life to break into that world. I feel really lucky,” and adds, “When a Hollywood movie comes out, it’s seen by everyone. You hear people talking about it on the street. It’s seen by millions and millions of people.” He realizes, on the other hand, that the impact of even the finest young adult books will have a much shorter reach. Nevertheless, he says that writing YA books that kids read is “a great joy.” As a Hollywood screenwriter, he has learned to accept the fact that directors and producers lay claim to his work, and are free to change it to suit their needs, regardless of—or with no concern whatsoever for—his wishes. In contrast, he says that his editor will telephone him even if he is across the country if she has a question as minute as one concerning the placement of a comma. He explains, “The ability to completely control and portray a character without anyone tampering with it is a unique joy when compared to the world of film writing.”

More Surprises to Come

Klass was happy to announce that he had just completed his newest young adult novel, *Home of the Braves*, which is scheduled for publication in the spring, 2002. In it, he returns to the serious tone that he is best known for, and avoids the temptation to try to imitate John’s comic voice. Klass describes *Home of the Braves* as a novel that raises the question, “Why does an average American high school spin into violence?” He notes that the violence is not of the Columbine High School type, but more subtle—“bullying, gangs, town vs town rivalries” that crescendo into fighting, and so on. It is a book that we can look forward to, from an author who reminds us to take seriously the voices of teenagers, to attend to their concerns, to recognize their rights as citizens in our democratic society.

At the end of our conversation, Klass mentioned that he was a little nervous as he was preparing to go visit Scarsdale Middle School, where he would talk with 7th graders about his experiences as a writer. I assured him that he was in for a treat, but was surprised that this hugely successful author would have any reservations about speaking to a group of readers—then realized that David Klass had surprised me yet again.

YA novels by David Klass (Each of these books will be ideal to introduce to middle or high school readers):

The Atami Dragons (1984)
Breakaway Run (1986)
A Different Season (1988)
Wrestling with Honor (1989)
California Blue (1994)
Danger Zone (1995)
Screen Test (1997)
You Don't Know Me (2001)
Home of the Braves (2002)

Klass **You don't know me**
at all. You don't know the first thing
about me. You don't know where I'm
writing this from. You don't know
what I look like. You don't know
over me. What do you think I look
like? Skinny? Freckles? Wire-rimmed
glasses over brown eyes? No, I don't
think so. Better look again. Deeper. It's
like a kaleidoscope, isn't it? One
minute I'm short, the next minute
tall, one minute I'm geeky, one
minute studly, my shape constantly
changes, and the only thing that stays
constant is my brown eyes. Watching
fsg you. That's right, I'm watching you
right now . . . a novel by David Klass

INTERDISCIPLINARY CONNECTIONS COLUMN

Jim Brewbaker, Editor

Learning History Through Literary Memoir

by Jinx Stapleton Watson

From the Editor: Too Few Stories

Portland, OR—March 7, 2:00 p.m.—Coffee Shop at Powell's Bookstore

*Thinking that the NCTE spring conference can surely get along without me until tomorrow, I settle into a seat by the window at Powell's, the Portland landmark billed as the world's largest brick-and-mortar bookstore. A steaming mug of coffee is to my right, and poet William Stafford's *Down in My Heart* (Oregon State University Press, 1998) is to my left. I like the feel of the rough china mug in my hand. Thanks just the same, I think to myself, but no sleeved Starbuck's cup for me. Not at Powell's.*

Down in My Heart, I see, is Stafford's account of his years as a conscientious objector during World War II, an account he transformed after the war into his master's thesis. Stafford and other COs or "Conchies," as they were called, spent the war laboring on various public work projects—fighting forest fires, repairing dams—that sort of thing. Stafford was not exactly a prisoner but not exactly free either. He was paid nothing, and his food came from pacifist religious groups such as the Friends and Mennonites.

I've never thought much about conscientious objectors. My own father, the same age as Stafford, spent World War II working for the government in Washington, DC. Fort Myer was across the street from my Arlington, Virginia home. When our windows were open, I feel asleep to taps and awakened to reveille. We lived among the families of majors and naval officers; the men were overseas.

Skimming the slim volume, by now a second mug of coffee in hand, I light on the following:

. . . we often fought fire in the company of state prisoners and servicemen either not yet sent overseas or back home pending discharge. One bleak and frosty night three of us sat hunched over a tiny campfire on a ridge above the fire line. I asked the wearer of the purple heart how he had received it; he said it was for the wounds he received while accounting for the lives of some vast number of Japanese—fifty-three, I think.

Our companion was a prisoner, a Filipino doing the fifteenth year of a life term. He scratched his head, kicked disconsolately at the fire, and said,

"I killed a Jap too, but I guess it was out of season."

The decorated one looked at him with a sad expression. "No fooling, is that what you're up for?"

"That's what I'm up for," said the little fellow. "But if you think that's funny—here's a guy," and he indicated me, "who's up here because he refused to kill Japs."

An incident, a snapshot, a true story told in 167 words. Through it, Stafford takes me to a scene where three men are "hunched over a tiny campfire." Reading, I feel the cold, I smell the fire, and I sense the irony of their words.

In this spring's guest article, Jinx Stapleton Watson points out that there are too few stories in textbooks. She argues that literary memoir can and should be a powerful supplement to the normal fare in history classrooms. Finally, she illumines a number of books we ought to be using if we want to put flesh and blood on the bony history of our times, books that in most instances weren't written for adolescent readers but that—through the power of story to put us in real places where real men and women live their lives in extraordinary times—ought to be part of what young readers come to understand as history.

Read on. But pour yourself a second mug of coffee first, preferably in that old-timer with the little chip along its base.

—jb

Learning History through Literary Memoir

Jinx Stapleton Watson

In schools, students learn about people who have inspired notable changes in the history of the modern world. However, textbooks condense their lives into captioned photos that emphasize legendary, rather than three-dimensional status. Such texts do not fully explore the sustained human efforts required to bring about change nor do they portray the complex lives of the individuals behind the events. Thus, readers may imagine others to be extraordinary and superhuman. Concurrently, our popular culture idealizes and idolizes both living and dead celebrities. Contemporary athletes, movie stars, singers, fashion models, and others, become subjects of hero worship through media coverage. What message do we offer teens when we neglect the lives of ordinary people who have lived through particular periods of history in extraordinary ways? How might we share the stories of people throughout history who have contributed to human progress in small, courageous ways?

In order to understand a history, one must first appreciate the conditions that influence individuals' range of choices of behavior in their time and culture. Indeed, the creation of one's own identity; the parameters of conformity and obedience within a society; the assumption of roles in time of

crisis, such as becoming a perpetrator, victim, or bystander of injustice; and the resistance to norms, ultimately make a difference to one's own life as well as to history (Strom). Because these questions are the very ones with which adolescents wrestle as they leave childhood and enter into adulthood, teen readers may link their own life with the memoirist's life, no matter what period of history. By reading the personal and social conditions that influence individual actions, students may begin to understand the more panoramic events of history often too difficult to grasp.

Adolescents naturally engage in the process of forging an identity (Elkind; LeFrancois). Reading and discussing literary memoir may inspire debate about the choices that human beings make in constructing their lives as well as offer a narrative constructed of the essential elements of good literature. In memoir one reads of the author as protagonist or hero, engaged with an antagonist or critical incident and resolution, much like literary fiction. Reading memoir, coupled with primary sources, such as legal texts, newspapers, and others' scholarship, offers students a rich set of documents portraying a particular period of history. Rather than conceiving of the historical record as a linear set of dates and official reports, most historians today agree that narrative lies at the very heart of the process we call history. Most agree, as well, that story does not presume to bring to light "the" truth, but at most, a version of it.

And its value resides in allowing the historian and student to compare a variety of available versions in order either to choose among them or to construct a composite image from all of them.

For example, teen readers of *The Diary of Anne Frank* hear Anne's story, among others, to connect to the "official" history they may learn from their teacher and texts. But, the power of her diary allows students to connect with Anne's relationships and with her passions and frustrations as a human being, first, before they comprehend the enormity of the history of the Holocaust. Coupled with primary documents and others' testimonies, students recognize the universal human issues first. Then, they may begin to appreciate what appears as an incomprehensible history, far removed from contemporary times.

As one example of understanding the power of perspectives, Hampl writes that Anne Frank listened to the radio while in hiding and heard Gerrit Bolkestein, Education Minister of the Dutch Government, in exile, deliver a radio message from London and report,

"History cannot be written on the basis of official decisions and documents alone. If our descendants are to understand fully what we as a nation have had to endure and overcome during these years, then what we really need are ordinary documents – a diary, letters" (188).

Perhaps this speech inspired Anne Frank to begin the diary of her ordinary life under extraordinary circumstances, thus portraying a picture of one Jewish family in hiding under the conditions of the Third Reich.

Contemporary historians have begun to use the literary device of multiple narratives to render the complexity and contradiction of historical experience to signal that history

is not just what happened but particular views of what happened. Story becomes the tag that pulls the reader's attention into the abstract concepts of complex human behavior. Carefully selected memoir may invite collaboration between history and English teachers in new ways, offering a window for teaching teens history and literature through story.

Too Few Stories in Textbooks

In recent years, historians have sought a narrative style in which to write history. Narrative history for adults includes writers such as David McCullough, Barbara Tuchman, Daniel Boorstin, Stephen Ambrose, William Manchester, and Simon Schama, among others. But textbooks written for secondary students have ignored contemporary historians' changes in discourse and rhetorical forms (Paxton). The narrative voice is missing and omniscient; anonymous authors strive for little elaboration and much authority. Textbook authors typically do not offer their audience any particular perspective, viewpoint or slant about their content (Paxton). Paxton's research suggests that students scan textbooks but read more deeply and engage in mental conversations when they read high levels of authorial voice. That is, "the reader uses back-

ground knowledge together with an author's textual cues to develop a personal understanding of a piece of writing" (Paxton 328). Students' construction of meaning of events beyond their own personal experience relies on engaging with the text. But

text, in itself, holds no meaning without some sense-making, some personal construction of meaning (Rosenblatt). Thus, in reading a variety of memoir and primary sources, students may question the authors of texts, and think more critically about perspective or stance. Students may begin to wrestle with a personal construction of history as well as to appreciate writing styles of nonfiction narrative.

The Genre of Memoir

Stanley Fish writes that biography differs from autobiography and memoir. He quotes Mark Twain – "biography is but the buttons on the coat" – to contrast the deepest feelings and idiosyncratic perspectives expressed by the author of a self-narrative. And autobiography may differ from memoir as well, for it assumes a full life lived and reviewed. Both autobiography and biography presume a significant or distinguished life. But memoir, as distinct from other forms, may focus on a vital event in the life of an "ordinary" person, a critical incident in which the writer speaks as witness or protagonist. Such memoirists offer, with no apology, a particular slant or perspective. Second, although writers may assume role of protagonist, as narrator of actions and feelings, they may take pride or dismay in others' involvement in the pivotal event, creating strong secondary characters in the narrative.

Memoirists' stories offer readers insight into what makes us human. We identify with the individuals' emotions, their challenges, their luck and choices, their dynamic possibilities. We begin to understand the universal issues that their particular story presents. Such stories help in teaching both history and literature because readers and listeners may identify with the protagonist and conflict, worry about the reso-

In order to understand a history, one must first appreciate the conditions that influence individuals' range of choices of behavior in their time and culture.

lution, or care about the setting. In this way, such narrative has the capacity to entice back to former times while it connects to the reader's present condition.

Memoir of the Civil Rights Movement

I briefly present three memoirs in order to examine the history of the U. S. Civil Rights Movement. For each of the memoir, I have selected text to illustrate essential themes for adolescents: creating a sense of identity, conforming to, resisting, or choosing to participate in an historical moment (Strom). The texts include portraits of three women and their personal contributions to the history of the Civil Rights Movement. They vary in age, geographic settings and time periods.

The historical phenomenon of the Civil Rights Movement did not happen over one decade, but rather, was pieced together, stretched over many decades. Ordinary people, black and white, in ordinary neighborhoods, in the North and in the South, made a difference in the quality of life for all Americans, culminating in the Voting Act of 1965. Nicknamed the "children's movement," the history is full of stories of young people's personal courage and commitment to confront entrenched culture and longstanding law. For many reasons, memoir of the Civil Rights Movement offers a particularly powerful genre and primary source for adolescents, new to abstract and conceptual thinking, self-absorbed in their interests, but intrigued to make their marks in unique ways.

A Question of Identity

Virginia Durr, a white woman, became a Southern activist during the Depression, astonishing herself out of her Junior League and privileged role by launching into leadership to help end racial discrimination. Throughout the 1940's, 50's and 60's in Birmingham and Montgomery, Alabama, as well as Washington, DC, she was instrumental in working with Mary McLeod Bethune, Rosa Parks and others to mobilize resistance to segregation. What does it mean to be born with privilege, to be assured of the status quo, yet to urgently resist the system that sustains an unjust society? Virginia Durr confronts social ostracism, as she becomes an activist for civil rights long before it becomes fashionable. Pursuing questions of identity (Strom), we might ask, "How is our identity formed? Do the groups to which we belong limit us or can we expand our horizons? How can we keep our individuality and still be a part of a group?" (2). The forward to Virginia Durr's *Outside the Magic Circle*, written by Studs Terkel, poses similar challenges for readers:

She could be the actress playing out the stereotype of the Southern belle . . . In short, going with the wind.

If she had a spark of independence or worse, creativity, she could go crazy. . .

Or she could be the rebel. She could step outside the magic circle, abandon privilege and challenge this way of life. Ostracism, bruises of all sorts and defamation would be her lot. Her reward would be a truly examined life. (ix)

Readers begin to note the influences on Virginia Durr's life and watch her change from a privileged "Southern snob"

(xii) to powerful "troublemaker" (xii). By using her influence of wealth, education and personal networks, Durr touched many lives. Rosa Parks, best known for her leadership in the 1956 Montgomery bus boycott and active member of the NAACP, received a two-week scholarship to attend the Highlander Folk School to learn about civil disobedience the year before, thanks to Durr's nomination. There, Parks continued her own personal learning as resister, culminating in testing the constitutionality of the segregation law of the Montgomery bus system.

In Virginia Durr's memoir, readers witness the shaping of her identity. They may understand better the historical time for women, especially women of privilege, and learn to appreciate the courage of taking a stand to make a difference. Certainly not as well known as Rosa Parks, learning of Virginia Durr's role in Parks' experience helps students understand the small, background steps that help create real change

A Questions of Roles

Warriors Don't Cry by Melba Patillo Beals shares the idealism and pain of nine students integrating Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas from 1957 to 1959. The author fashions her memoir from her own journal and diary entries of the time, newspaper clippings

and letters from a scrapbook her mother maintained. It relies, as well, on the memory of the pain and joy of breaking new ground. Readers of this memoir appreciate the essential questions of when and why human beings assume the varied roles of perpetrators, bystanders, victims, rescuers and resisters of violence. As Beals writes of the nine students attempting to integrate the school, mothers and fathers, citizens, soldiers and policemen assume varying postures, either perpetrating violence against the students or nurturing them for success. White mothers throw bottles and taunt the African-American students as they enter the building. Young soldiers in the National Guard heckle the nine students under their breath as they stand on the steps ordered to protect them. But one white classmate, Link, surprisingly reaches out to befriend Melba amidst the turmoil.

The question of how and when we assume roles both surprising and contrary for our known character offers inspection. Readers of such acts ponder and examine the circumstances that drive human beings to surprising deeds. Even Melba questions herself in roles. Initially, full of courage, Melba signs the paper without her parents' knowledge or permission, indicating that she wants to attend Central High School. When her name is selected as one of the seventeen students to integrate the school, her beloved Grandma India's "mouth was poked out, but she talked to me, saying over and over again that I was too smart for my britches" (Beals 23). Shunned at first by her family and church members for attempting participate in integration efforts, Melba re-gains her courage and pride in going against the norm. Nevertheless, after many weeks of meetings to learn passive resistance techniques, Melba wonders why she has chosen to disrupt her formerly successful and happy high school career and announces she wants to return to her former school. And this time, her Grandma announces, "One little setback - and you want out," she says. "Naw, you're not a quitter." (Beals 42). Her personal courage waxing and wan-

Memoirists' stories offer readers insight into what makes us human.

ing, Melba writes in her diary during a tumultuous day of being forced back by the mob that will not let the students enter the school doors:

I was disappointed not to see what is inside Central High School. I don't understand why the governor sent grown up soldiers to keep us out. I don't know if I should go back. But grandma is right, if I don't go back, they will think they have won. They will think they can use soldiers to frighten us and we'll always have to obey them. They'll always be in charge if I don't go back to Central and make the integration happen. (Beals 42)

Today's adolescents may appreciate both the ordinary and extraordinary circumstances of Melba's life. In comparing similar dynamics of peer relationships, of aspirations and of school culture, contemporary students may connect to a history too typically marked by a paragraph or two in standard textbooks.

A question of choosing to participate

In the classic memoir, *Coming of Age in Mississippi*, Anne Moody reveals the loneliness of a young adult who dares to question the status quo in the early 1960's. Anne notices the differences in the quality of life between her own home and the homes of white folks that she cleans. She comprehends the disparities in employment opportunities for Blacks and Whites and suffers work at a chicken factory one summer in high school to make money for college. Fearing reprisal for her opinions and insights into life's inequities, Anne's own family dares not acknowledge her hard work for justice. Ostracized by her family and later, by some of her college friends at Tugaloo College in Jackson, Mississippi, she rejects the conformity of a co-ed life to assume leadership in the Movement:

I would go to the next meeting [of the NAACP]. All that night I didn't sleep. Everything started coming back to me. I thought of Samuel O'Quinn. I thought of how he had been shot in the back with a shotgun because they suspected him of being a member [of the NAACP]. I thought of Reverend Dupree and his family who had been run out of Woodville when I was a senior in high school, and all he had done was to get up and mention NAACP in a sermon. The more I remembered the killings, beatings, and intimidations, the more I worried what might possibly happen to me or my family if I joined the NAACP. But I knew I was going to join, anyway. I had wanted to for a long time. (Moody 248)

Trying not to allow her grades to suffer as she demonstrates in Jackson, Mississippi under Medgar Evers' leadership, Anne's activist life continued to grow. In her senior year, "a white student moved into the room across the hall . . . and soon I was going into Jackson with Joan and hanging out at the SNCC [Student Nonviolent Coordinating Council] office" (Moody 251) to canvass every other weekend in voter registration drives and every evening in mass rallies.

Readers may appreciate the risks taken in such political work. Anne reflects on "the schoolteachers and the middle-class professional Negroes who dared not participate. They knew that once they did, they would lose that \$250 a month job" (Moody 254). Choosing to participate in the Movement must have seemed a natural extension to her life's observations, for Ann writes, "That summer [1963] I could

feel myself beginning to change. For the first time I began to think something would be done about whites killing, beating, and misusing Negroes. I knew I was going to be a part of whatever happened" (Moody 254).

Indeed, one perceives youth's idealism and focus for meaningful work in

Anne's story. Alone and often ostracized by those closest to her, she risks membership in a higher ideal than her own life to make sense of a lifetime of injustices.

Conclusion

The stories of Virginia Durr, white and privileged, from Alabama; of Melba Patillo Beals, a middle class, African American high school girl from Little Rock, Arkansas; and of Anne Moody, a rural Mississippi, poor African American young adult, illustrate particular and individual responses to their worlds. Each of these lives, richly chronicled in memoir, reveals a three dimensional human being making choices, celebrating and suffering as she makes her way in the world. Their names are not mentioned in school texts; they would remain obscure if they and others had not written their stories, as both activists and witnesses of an historical period. Their issues are ones of defining themselves, as they respond to their singular values. They represent one ordinary human being engaging in extraordinary acts to ensure justice during a particular time.

Reading or listening to memoir of experience during a particular period deepens students' understanding of the history. More than a chronology of events, memoir offers varying perspectives and attitudes of the historical complexities rather than the distilled simplicity represented in texts. The memoir introduced in this paper represent a small sampling of artful writings to introduce young people to singular voices. And because this recent history is named "The Children's Movement," students may find themselves compelled to plumb for more. In doing so, readers may truly understand that literary memoir offers insight into universal human behavior as well as a particular historical period.

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Grief, Thought, & Appreciation: Re-examining Our Values Amid Terrorism Through *The Giver*

Angela Beumer Johnson, Jeffery W. Kleismit, Antje J. Williams

“Teachable moments” are not always pleasant experiences. Sometimes we are jolted into knowledge or thoughts we might rather avoid. This is the story of a “teachable moment” in a young adult literature class as students processed complex emotions and thoughts surrounding the September 11 terrorist attacks after reading striking parallels in Lois Lowry’s *The Giver*.

Before we proceed, we need to express our deepest sympathies to all those affected by the terrorist attacks. Only because *The Giver* has had such an impact on us during these sad times do we share our ideas with you. In no way do we mean to downplay the suffering of others by academizing this event. We share our own thoughts in the hope that they might help others in some small way.

As one student, Sarah, commented (all students, with the exception of co-authors Jeffery and Antje, are referred to by pseudonyms), “In the wake of our recent tragedy I found *The Giver* to have more meaning than just a young adult novel about a make believe land.” One of the strengths of young adult literature is that it helps adolescents deal with complex social issues. Even as adults, reading *The Giver* and writing a free response to the novel helped the class grieve, ponder their values and system of government, consider the costs and benefits of an open and democratic society, and appreciate advantages formerly taken for granted. If one well-crafted young adult novel helped these college students to think critically about current events and their own lives, perhaps other such works would be similarly beneficial to younger readers, those in middle or high school. Themes from the class’s responses may be of interest to parents, students, and teachers addressing recent, and possibly future, news events with young adults in both academic and non-academic settings. Rather than imply that some of the students’ thoughts are right or wrong, we intend to provide a glimpse into the patterns of thought—and the depth of thought—a novel such as *The Giver* encourages.

The first few sentences seemed uncanny, considering the terrorist attacks had occurred exactly one week before our in-class discussion of The Giver: “Squinting toward the sky, he [Jonas, the main character] had seen the sleek jet, almost a blur at its high speed, go past, and a second later heard the blast that followed.”

The first meeting of our young adult literature class was just two days after the attacks. Since no one was ready to get back to “business as usual,” our class of upper-level English majors (most of whom plan to teach middle or high school English) simply introduced ourselves, skimmed the syllabus, and set off for our first reading, *The Giver*. As a professor of young adult literature, Angela always begins the course with *The Giver*. With its powerful writing, themes, and issues, it provides an introduction to the best in young adult literature for students who might have had few (or no) prior experiences with excellent young adult literature. In addition to reading, students were asked to write a response addressing their thoughts and feelings sparked by the book.

The Giver has always spurred thought in Angela’s young adult literature students; however, as Jeffery and Antje recall, they became immediately aware that the book would affect a great response at this particular time. The first few sentences seemed uncanny, considering the terrorist attacks had occurred exactly one week before our in-class discussion of *The Giver*: “Squinting toward the sky, he [Jonas, the main character] had seen the sleek jet, almost a blur at its high speed, go past, and a second later heard the blast that followed” (1). Those early lines from the novel recalled for many of us the tragedy of the hijacked jets being flown over our metropolitan cityscapes. We had all been shocked out of our comfort zones by the reality of terrorism on American soil. Ashely summarized our responses well: “After reading *The Giver*, I began to reflect on my own life.”

The Giver, at a Glance

Jonas, a young boy and the story’s protagonist, does not live in a perfect community, as Lowry initially implies. While the Elders control every aspect of life, and many of the world’s evils—hunger, pain, poverty, and violence—have been eliminated, life within this particular “community” comes at a cost. Jonas’ community is ruled by a system of government

appropriately titled "Sameness," with rules enforcing conformity and order in every detail of life, eliminating change in weather and as many human differences as possible. Carly stated, "[T]he book was horrifying [. . .]. I do realize that they didn't have things like war, [. . .], pain or famine. However, with taking the bad out they didn't leave much good either." There is no individual freedom in the community, and the citizens must live without experiencing color, love, or accounts of history—"the memories of the whole world" (Lowry 77).

Jonas is assigned as the community's next Receiver of Memory, and must take on all of the memories of the world from the elderly Giver (the former Receiver).

As Jonas' assignment allows, he begins to question the community, and he realizes the sacrifice of being the new Receiver. For example, one way the community maintains

order is by *releasing* those who threaten the strength or stability of the group. Jonas finds out that to be *released* is to be *killed*. Gabriel, an infant like a brother to Jonas, is not progressing as well as the community believes he should. In order to save Gabe from release, Jonas defies the rules and flees the community with the child, choosing personal freedom over the community, and leaving them to cope with all the memories he has received. The novel concludes ambiguously, leaving the reader to decide whether the pair survives or perishes outside the community.

Parallel Journeys: Jonas' and Our Own

As we present our class's written responses to *The Giver*, readers may see that the students drew multiple parallels between the fictional world of *The Giver* and the reality of life after September 11, 2001. To organize our musings from the class' responses, we will present our ideas according to Jonas' journey in the novel. First, by receiving memories of times past, Jonas loses innocence and gains experience of atrocities and the forbidden treasures in the world. The students' responses imply that, like the community in *The Giver*, many in the United States were blind to the atrocities occurring on a daily basis outside the country's borders. Experiences of September 11 seemed to wake some students from complacency. Second, because of Jonas' new experiences, he learns to value individuality and freedom of choice. The attacks caused some students, like Jonas, to reflect on components of society. Finally, since Jonas now values individuality and a life full of experiences, he asserts his right to make choices for himself. These choices lead him to seek a free society, as opposed to the Sameness of his community. We, too, are in a crucial time of choice and decision. As Teresa stated, "There are no quick or easy answers to the world's issues, nor can we hide from them." As we present the class's responses, we will demonstrate how one class of readers followed Jonas' journey while contemplating their own.

By writing about her thoughts on The Giver, Jamie notices that not only children but also adults are thrust out of innocence into the experience of senseless, massive tragedy.

Students' grief also shows in their responses as they reflect on the alluring possibilities of a controlled society.

Losing Innocence, Gaining Experience

Jonas and all members of the community are sheltered from most experiences in life. While The Giver does not wish to inflict pain upon Jonas, he knows that in order for Jonas to gain wisdom, he must experience the harsh side of a life unrestricted by Sameness. As Jonas begins to train for his career as Receiver of Memory, The Giver must provide all types of experiences through memories in order for Jonas to learn and grow. Before his training, Jonas is fairly innocent in his protected and seemingly secure world. Although exhilarated by memories transmitted by The Giver of snow and family, memories of war and elephant poaching bring

him experiences of horror and despair. Carol confessed, "My heart ached for Jonas as he discovered the pain of receiving memories, and it hurt even more when he discovered [. . .] that the life he had come to believe in, a life that was predictable and painless, was just an illusion." Jonas, with the experience of the memories, is awakened to a different, more complex world.

Carmen continued with the idea of a rich, yet complex, world. She wrote, "Jonas [. . .] understands the advantages and freedoms of diversity and choice making. This change is seen when Jonas begins to see colors, thus symbolizing his loss of innocence. He no longer lives in a black and white world where everything is the same and choices are made for him. His world becomes colorful and confusing and allows him to experience history, pain, and love."

Ultimately, Jonas comes to "reject the Sameness of his community," as Carmen said. Jeffery commented on the community's erasure of complexities in life, linking it to the reaction of some to September 11. He stated the following:

After the recent terrorist attacks on the Pentagon and the World Trade Center, I have heard many parents questioning—both publicly and privately—how to discuss the harsh and frightening realities of terrorism, war, and death with

their children. There are many who would rather keep their children preoccupied than to have a tough conversation about life, death, and taking things for granted [. . .] These individuals

remind me of the citizens in Lowry's *The Giver*, and I completely disagree with them. Instead of confronting the great problems of our society, they hide behind a façade of denial and a false sense of security. We must all realize, like Jonas . . . , that these false faces are never going to solve anything. We must confront the "overwhelming task of bearing the memories [our]selves" (Lowry 161). In order to understand and appreciate the goodness of life at its best, we must closely reflect upon and examine the shadow of life at its worst.

According to Jeffery, avoidance and denial of the world's horrors will not exorcise them. With *The Giver* as a catalyst to think about his stance on confrontation or avoidance, Jeffery solidifies his position.

Sarah, also discussing Jonas' new experiences, compared his loss of innocence to the terrorist attacks:

"[Jonas] wanted his childhood again, his scraped knees and ball games" (121). I felt the same way he did when I began to realize the reality of war in my own life. When I was a child I didn't understand the horrors of war and I wasn't scared during the Gulf War crisis. Now that I am older I know more about the way the world works and what going to war is all about. I almost envy those people who are as blind as Jonas' community. People who have no idea what being scared is really about.

Sarah's articulation of her fear and desire for life to return to "normal," before September 11, is poignant. Like Jonas, some students' responses demonstrate a longing for lost innocence—for us, that of a country impenetrable by terrorists.

Jamie also commented on the analogy of childlike innocence:

Even though Jonas is twelve, he has the experience and understanding of a small child. It isn't until after he receives the memories that he is awakened to the full capacity of life. He feels and sees tragedy for the first time, as a child in today's society does watching the World Trade Center being demolished [. . .]. A child today watches their parents, teachers, and entire community mourn for the loss that has taken place [. . .], not fully comprehending what has happened, but still psychologically affected by the aftermath.

By writing about her thoughts on *The Giver*, Jamie notices that not only children but also adults are thrust out of innocence into the experience of senseless, massive tragedy.

Again, Jamie explicitly commented on the parallels of our current struggles and the world of *The Giver* when she stated,

"[T]he terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center in New York City are somewhat comparable to what Jonas [. . .] observes in his community after he is given his special Assignment. Jonas learns, like some young people today are learning, of the inexplicable depth of human capacity. People cannot comprehend the horrific tragedy that took place in our society, just as Jonas cannot bear to witness the wrongful acts of his own people." Jamie also recognizes that adults and children are dealing with new emotions and questions perhaps never pondered. Innocence has been lost, experience gained.

Weighing the Costs and Benefits of Open & Closed Societies

While many students in our young adult literature class commented upon their own feelings of insecurity which eerily connected with *The Giver*, the reading also led some to consider the nature of our system of government. Living in the United States has left many of us privileged enough to take for granted the individuality and differences of people living in an open, democratic society. (While we are empathetically aware that not all people in this country experience the same privileges, the terrorist attacks and reading *The Giver* woke many in our class to the appreciation of the essential values of a democratic society, in spite of the fact that those liberties are not always fully and equally distributed.) The United States—as an open, democratic society—contrasts sharply

with the closed, metaphorically walled society of Jonas' community. (Of course no society, even fictional, is completely closed or open. Jonas' community was "open" through release, though not much of an option. Similarly, even in free, democratic societies, limits exist.) For most students, the costs of Jonas' community, such as a lack of color, music, and true emotion, outweighed the enticement of a "safe" and "secure" closed society. In some small way, perhaps these students found comfort from the terrorist attacks in reading *The Giver*, reconsidering the costs and benefits of the society in which we live.

For some students, thinking about Jonas' world as compared to ours provided them a space to consider the pros and cons of open societies. Erica remarked, "I particularly like novels like this one that challenge our social construct and question our beliefs as a whole yet individually." In other words, people need to consider the governing elements not only of society, but also of the ways we conduct our personal lives. Renee mused, "Maybe the orderliness and comfort of this imaginary world isn't what makes it crazy. It is crazy because it is not our reality." For some, their reading, writing, and thinking reinforced values of an open society, but Erica and Renee used this opportunity to pose questions and entertain the possibility of alternative systems of governance.

Erica and Renee remind us that there are costs to both open and closed societies. Toward the end of the novel, Jonas' and Gabe's lives are far from the material comforts they enjoyed in a controlled society. Antje focused on the hardships of the journey to a freer society:

It feels so unfair that [Jonas] should suffer so and not be re-

warded for it. It seems unfair that Lowry would seduce me into liking Jonas so much only to disappoint me so. It was a betrayal. I am sure the author intended for the reader to be disturbed, to have questions, and to feel sad, to wonder "what was the point?" It was maybe just a little too sad for this week.

In the midst of grieving over an assault to our country by ones who seek more control of the world, the majority of the students, like Antje, expressed frustration at the ambiguous ending. As Antje aptly put it, perhaps the strong affective response to the book *at this particular moment* stirred a need for finality, if not also a need for an uplifting ending.

Students' grief also shows in their responses as they reflect on the alluring possibilities of a controlled society. For instance, Erica noted, "The concept of having a community without any real hardship and pain is temptingly appealing, especially with the great tragedy we as a country have recently endured." Yet later in her response, Erica explained that this society is not one she would really want.

On the other hand, Evelyn remarked that "[Jonas'] world was so well organized and smooth running, all at the expense of human emotions and reactions. It is a cold, sterile world that is shown." Similarly, Teresa stated, "Reading *The Giver* was a little frightening because it seemed at first to be the kind of world that some people would like to achieve

Our individuality, manifested in our choices—our freedom to make choices—is embodied by Jonas' and The Giver's resolution to attempt to change their world.

[. . .]. Jonas' world was safe from terrorists and war." Teresa continued, "It's ironic that in the end, Jonas was escaping his perfect world in exchange for a world where he would experience pain, starvation, and possible death. But he was willing to risk that in order to have love, emotional connection with people, the colors of the world, or to hear music—all the little things that make life in a crazy, sometimes painful world, worth living." For Teresa, Jonas' world is tempting, but it is a mirage. No such world exists in which all of society's ills are remedied—no matter how tightly controlled and limited that society. Carmen agreed, "By vividly expressing inadequacies of the community of Sameness, Lowry makes me sympathize for oppressed and controlled societies in the world and appreciate the opportunity and the freedom I have and often take for granted." While not all students agreed on their opinions of more or less open societies, their debating of the issue is significant.

One massive cost of this tightly controlled society is the concept of release. For instance, twins are not permitted in the community, and Jonas' father has hidden the truth of his job of releasing lower-weight twins. The Giver encourages Jonas to view a videotape of a twin's release, and this experience effects tremendous change in him. The atrocity of the crime as well as his father's lies result in overwhelming feelings of betrayal, anger, and despair. As Jeffery commented, "Jonas' experience of seeing the release of the smaller twin and the realization of his father's lies cannot be far from the experiences many children must have had while watching news reports during the past week [of September 11]." Again, Jeffery alludes to an experience of shattered innocence. The experience of watching his father release the twin is more than Jonas can take.

A Wake-up Call: Valuing Individuality and Difference

Jonas' experiences—particularly those of watching the twin's release and hearing the threat of the infant Gabe's release—lead him to value individual human life even more, and to value differences over the Sameness that confines and rules his community. For Carmen, Sameness was initially appealing, yet ultimately rejected. She responded this way:

While hearing about discrimination, racism, and slavery, I have many times thought of how nice it would be if everyone disregarded differences and appearances and accepted people for who they are. This idea is portrayed in an old anti-racism commercial where everyone wears paper bags over their heads to hide their faces. These people get along because they are blinded from each other's differences. The community in *The Giver* represents this blindness through rules that make everyone the same.

Not only is everyone nearly "the same," but as Scott, Carly, and Brooke noted, they are also "robots" and "drones" who followed rules unconditionally and uncritically. After all, they knew nothing else. The terrorist attacks remind us that as Americans, we have been viewed not as individuals with varying thoughts and lives, but simply as Americans—the enemy of the terrorists. Reading *The Giver* reinforced

to some students that living in a world that denies individuality and difference is certainly dangerous and catastrophic.

Jonas and The Giver were different from their community members; they were individuals with their own thoughts because they were granted the freedom of experience and memory. Our individuality, manifested in our choices—our freedom to make choices—is embodied by Jonas' and The Giver's resolution to attempt to change their world. Carmen commented, "Jonas soon embraces the idea of diversity and escapes the Sameness of his community. Through Jonas' experiences the book shows the importance of freedom. This makes me appreciate living in America where we are granted freedoms by the Constitution and where different cultures are welcomed."

The Power of Choice

Freedom of choice was a powerful theme for some members of the class. For example, Ashley stated, "I value the individuality our country embraces and celebrates because I like being free to make choices and experience new things. Even though experiencing hunger, war, and sickness is a terrible thing, it helps to give us wisdom and courage." Embedded in Ashley's comment are core values of a democratic society: individuality, freedom of thought and speech to

enable critique, freedom to make one's own choices, and through those choices, to gain a multitude of experiences.

Because The Giver and Jonas are the only two in the entire community who are permitted to learn anything, ask anything, and experience anything, they

are the only ones who can appreciate the freedom to make choices. Carmen articulated this point: "Eventually, when given the knowledge of diversity and choices, Jonas becomes frustrated with having no choice: 'If everything's the same, then there aren't any choices! I want to wake up in the morning and *decide* things! A blue tunic, or a red one?' (97)." Other students also commented on the simple pleasures in life that are results of choice-making. For example, Sarah remarked, "Jonas and his adventure take the things in our daily life and make them into the most wonderful choices humans could ever make. In reality, that is just what freedom of choice is all about, and acting on our own choices is something we all take for granted."

Jonas' experiences lead him to value difference and individuality, which encourages—even provokes—him to assert his right to make choices for himself. As Susan put it, ". . . the Sameness [kept] the people in the community trapped in a life they [had] no choice but to like." They were content because they were relatively pain-free, secure, and most importantly, they knew no other way of life and had no other choices.

Jamie connected the book to the terrorist attacks by writing, "Jonas discovers what the world really consists of, and is able to make choices based on that knowledge. Just like a child today who is attempting to grasp the inconceivable events that occurred, he or she is making choices as well: the choice to change or the choice to be changed." Most likely, we are both *changed by* events and actions of others, and actively *change* our lives by making our own choices.

The Giver is a prism through which we can view our society, and be thankful that despite the risks and costs of freedom, we have brilliant colors.

Jonas and The Giver had once laughed at the potential mistakes which could be made if people made choices for themselves, but as Jamie said, “[p]eople make choices every day and some of them are wrong, but it’s the learning from their mistakes that is beneficial.”

Brad takes a different tack on the nature of our choices:

The first aspect of the book that I feel needs to be discussed is the connection with the nation’s current events. When The Giver tells Jonas about the town’s fear of the jet that passed over the community, and how they asked the old man whether it should be shot down, I could not help but think about last week. The Giver’s response is especially relevant now. “I knew that there had been times in the past—terrible times—when people had destroyed others in haste, in fear, and had brought about their own destruction” (112). In times when the word “retaliation” is muttered by every politician and newsperson, I can’t help but wish for someone [as] respected [. . .] as The Receiver advocating a need to avoid dangerous and hasty decision-making.

Brad’s concern for hasty, possibly irreversible, decisions is legitimate, especially only one week after September 11. War is not a decision to be taken lightly. Reading *The Giver* and writing a response provided a venue for Brad to reflect upon the seriousness of our government’s decision-making.

The ultimate choice—Jonas’ defiance of the lack of choice in his community—is to set out for Elsewhere. Along with The Giver, he chooses a different life for Gabe, for himself, and for everyone else by default, by devising a plan to leave the community. However, Jonas also chooses to set their plan in action earlier than anticipated when he learns that Gabe will be released the next day. His choice to set out on his own, without the stockpile of memories of courage The Giver planned to provide for him, was an assertion of his essential right to make choices for himself, to take action over his own life. Ashley commented, “I was glad when Jonas chose to make the decision to leave their community and take Gabriel with him because he made the decision not to let anyone play God for him.” In *choosing* to make a decision, as Ashley stated, Jonas puts himself at risk in order to save Gabriel’s life, to seek a better life for them both.

Along the same lines, Teresa reminded us of the immense power of choosing to help others: “Although our government has its faults, as American citizens, we are blessed to be able to enjoy freedom and have the opportunity to reach out to others and make their lives a little easier. Even in the face of disaster, it is love and our common humanness that

gets us through the tough times.” Teresa underscored the agency of those “in the face of disaster.” Even then, people have choices in how to react, and acting to help others is one thing that helps people to survive “the tough times.”

To Borrow from Bauer, Hope Was (and is) Here

Reading *The Giver* and reflecting on its issues helped the class make sense of the loss of innocence and the costs and benefits of free societies. It helped students find scraps of hope in the midst of national—indeed, international—despair. As Susan commented, “It seems that the message of this novel is a hopeful one, one that encourages readers to take chances, to feel free to love and even question the environment around them.”

We are not bibliotherapists; however, we have experienced the power of an excellent work of art to help us grieve, think, and appreciate. As Antje questioned, “[I]n learning to love and to choose to accept the pain along with the joy had [Jonas] succeeded regardless of whether he lived or died?” She also remarked, “I found myself emotionally invested in Jonas’ story and hopeful that he would be able to discover his own humanity.” By choosing to risk his life to save Gabe, he seems to have done that. Jeffery also ended his response with a note of appreciation for the impact of this work of art. He stated, “[. . .] *The Giver* has shed new light on the real-world events around me. I am left feeling thankful to be alive and thankful for this work of fiction[. . .].”

The Giver has become a very timely novel. As our society questions Sameness versus diversity, every gathering seems to have some opinionated voice shouting, “We should just send them all back.” Jonas helps us to see that this is the path toward Sameness, away from the freedom and the choice we value. In this way, *The Giver* is a prism through which we can view our society, and be thankful that despite the risks and costs of freedom, we have brilliant colors.

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Angela Beumer Johnson is a faculty member at Wright State University, Dayton, Ohio, where she has the pleasure of working with prospective teachers of English including co-authors Jeffery W. Kleismit and Antje J. Williams.

Anne and Me: A Frank Talk with Writers Cherie Bennett and Jeff Gottesfeld

Melissa Comer

Recently, writers Cherie Bennett and Jeff Gottesfeld joined me for a weekend workshop where they talked about their books, their screen plays, and their television show (*Smallville* on the WB.) They discussed their writing and their passion for telling a good story. After the workshop, most of the participants and I wanted more. We wanted more of their stories, more of their gift for gab, and more of them. With this thought in mind and my own personal interest in Holocaust literature, I presented this wife and husband pair with several questions concerning their latest publication: *Anne Frank and Me*. Their responses are forthright and enlightening.

CB & JG: First of all, we'd like to say that there are few things that make us want to crack open a beer (Jeff) or rip the lid off a pint of Haagen-Daaz (Cherie) and turn on *Monday Night Football* (Jeff) or *Blind Date* (Cherie) more than interviews where an author pontificates ad nauseam about his or her Work-with a capital W. So, if what we say here crosses the line between reasonably illuminating and insufferably self-important, feel free to email us at authorchik@aol.com and tell us off. That's what we'd do if we were you. Alrighty then. Moving on.

MC: Why *Anne Frank and Me* (AFAM)? In other words, why focus on this topic?

CB & JG: Lots of reasons. (A) Many teens either don't know about what happened to teens who lived under the Nazi occupation, or, if they do know, they don't see how those experiences could possibly matter to their own lives. But they do matter. Profoundly so. After they read AFAM, we hope they'll understand why. (B) The Internet is rife with Holocaust denial sites designed to suck in kids as easily as our Nicole and her kid sister were sucked in. Some of these sites look as innocuous as the *Encyclopedia Britannica* and as academically rigorous as any legitimate scientific journal. Hundreds and thousands of middle school and high school students wander into these web sites without knowing what they are. No one can refute a lie unless they know the truth. To read AFAM is to be armed with the truth. (C) The story of the Nazi occupation of Paris, France, and the checkered French response to it, is one of the most morally troubling stories of the past century. Yet this story had previously been untold in a novel for young adults (YAs). (D) No one knows who will rise to heroism until they are tested. Many kids believe themselves to be ordinary (whatever that means); certainly not hero material. That's true of our protagonist, too. Nicole Burns is a middle-of-the-packer who

says, "Most of the time I'm just . . . there." But when this ordinary girl finds herself extraordinarily tested, she learns to find the hero inside of herself. And so, vicariously, does our reader.

MC: Describe your research journey, length of time from beginning to end in writing the book.

CB & JG: Gargantuan. We subscribe to the if-you-can-be-accurate, you-must-be-accurate theory of historical fiction. Maybe you can fudge a bit if you're writing about, say, a remote hamlet in fifteenth century France. Who the heck is going to fact check you? But it's quite another matter if you're writing about a time and place only sixty years ago and where your novel aims at the nexus of what the late C. Wright Mills called "the sociological imagination" — that intersection of private troubles and public issues.

Since our novel is in part a broadside against Holocaust revisionism, and since we know that young people sometimes have a hard time telling the difference between fact and fiction, we felt it crucial that we get the facts right.

Starting in 1994, when Cherie's stage version of *Anne Frank and Me* (Dramatic Publishing Company, 1997) was first conceived, we read everything we could get our hands on about life in Paris under the Occupation. Professor Jacques Adler, author of *The Jews of Paris and the Final Solution: Communal Response and Internal Conflicts, 1940-1944* and a professor of history at the University of Melbourne, became a personal friend and tireless fact checker. We vetted every detail of both play and novel with him. Jacques wore the yellow star as a teen in Paris and then fought with a Communist resistance cell. He should know.

Fortunately, Jeff speaks French, so we were able to call on French secondary sources, too. Among them, Herve le Boterf's definitive two-volume *La Vie Parisienne sous L'Occupation*, Henri Michel's *Paris Allemand*, and Claude Levy and Paul Tillard's *La Grande Rafle du Vel d'Hiv*, a brilliant account of the Velodrome d'Hiver round-up in Paris that is such a turning point in our book—though not in the way you'd think. And many more.

Then, we did our own interviews of about a dozen French survivors who now live in America. The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum was instrumental in putting those people in contact with us.

How meticulous were we with this research? By the time we sat down to write the novel, we knew such things as which Metro stations the Nazis closed during the Occupation and which stayed open (so Nicole wouldn't take the

Metro from a station that had been closed in actuality); whether Passover matzo were available for the Seder of 1944 (yes, and it was round); what street names were changed during the Occupation; who was on Alois Brunner's final transport as the Allied artillery boomed at the gates of Paris; and how many showerheads were inside the main gas chamber at Birkenau (14). Anyone reading AFAM is reading a novel, but they are also learning history.

MC: Were you intimidated by the original version of *Anne Frank*? How much did her story influence yours?

CB & JG: Anne Frank has been Cherie's personal heroine since she first discovered her diary at age eight. We've both read it many times since. So we weren't so much intimidated by her diary as hyper-aware that we were charging headlong into a critical free-fire zone by deciding to include Anne in the story, however briefly, as a living character.

Anne is, after all, one of the two or three best-known teenagers of all time. She's been the subject of a controversial Pulitzer-prize-winning play, a controversial rewrite of said play, a controversial Oscar-winning motion picture, myriad controversial biographies, etc. From the moment we conceived *Anne Frank and Me*, we could imagine voices shouting, "Enough already. Stop exploiting her story!"

But we did not exploit her story. That is why the protagonist of the novel is Nicole Bernhardt, and not Anne Frank. Nicole, a 21st century Christian girl living in the suburbs, is assigned Anne's diary in school. Like so many of her peers, she never finishes reading it. It is, after all, "ancient history," from another country, in another century. Besides, she's not even Jewish. Nicole goes to the "Anne Frank in the World" exhibition more worried about the guy she likes than about learning Anne's story. Then, Nicole's world gets rocked in a way that she could never have anticipated.

We were as meticulous in our research about Anne as with anything else, because Anne is, for a dozen pages or so, in the action. Nicole meets her on a transport to Auschwitz-Birkenau in early September 1944, and they arrive at this camp together. We agonized, prayed over, wrote and re-wrote this small section of the novel. Our effort was to capture a complex mix of hope and fear, insouciance and upheaval, feelings of doubt, and transcendent faith. We wrote neither the overly optimistic Anne of the Goodrich/Hackett stage production nor the mirror image Anne that some would prefer (as she was, by all accounts, just before her death at Bergen-Belsen in late February/early March 1945): a dispirited and broken victim.

Did we get Anne right? The only people who could really say are those who knew her. Which is why we were thrilled to receive an email from her last direct surviving relative, Buddy Elias, a couple of weeks after the novel came out. Here's what he wrote, in part:

I hope this mail reaches you. I don't know if you know about my existence. I am Anne Frank's last living direct relative, her cousin, she called Bernd in her Diary. My mother was Otto's sister. I am also President of the ANNE FRANK- Fonds, Basel (AFF). I received your book from Penguin (London) as they wanted my opinion. I had never heard of [it] before, nor your play. Well, I like your book very, very much. It is excellent, wonderfully suited for young people to learn about the Holocaust and to get to know Anne Frank. It is interesting, exciting and true to the facts, which is not always the case. I can see that your research

was done in perfect manner and your dedication to Anne warms my heart. You are to be congratulated and thanked. It is an important book.

In some ways, what's *not* in Anne's diary had more impact on us than what's in it. Elaine Culbertson, a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Mandel teaching fellow and a respected Holocaust educator, wrote a powerful essay about why she doesn't teach Anne's diary any more (Totten, 2001.) Culbertson's position might be extreme—in fact, we think it goes too far—but the thrust of her argument is well taken: Anne's diary takes place entirely within the four walls of the Secret Annex. There's no context as to what's happening in the outer world. The diary comes to a screeching halt when Anne and her family are arrested in the Annex.

Culbertson's point is that it's too easy for students to overlook the rest of the story because, well, there is no more rest of the story in the diary itself. The truth in Anne's diary is Anne's truth inside those walls. But the story outside those walls is of vital importance. And you can't really understand what happened inside unless you understand what happened outside.

What we tried to do in *Anne Frank and Me* is tell something of the story outside—not in Anne's Amsterdam, but in Paris. Paris after mid-June, 1940, was a place beset by an attenstiste population doing its best to muddle through the Occupation. There was, from the outset, a strong current of collaboration with the occupiers, especially during the early years of the war when it seemed that German victory was imminent. This collaborationist current met with a growing countercurrent of resistance, but only as the tide of the war turned.

Onto an even more major minefield: Anne's budding sexuality and romance with Peter van Pels (called Peter van Daan in the diary.) The diary is filled with the romantic yearnings of a newly pubescent, quite dramatic girl, locked up for twenty-four hours a day with one and only one young boy. She is in the throes of first "love." At times, it consumes her. Anne's writing at age 14 about Peter had a big impact on our construction of Nicole, at age 16 and 17, and her relationship with her own boyfriend, Jacques.

MC: Why the back-in-time angle?

CB & JG: It's such a powerful device for YA books because time travel makes the past feel real. It's a wonderful way for teens to realize that their lives, now with pop culture, music, film, etc., aren't that different from teens' lives then. We drop 21st century Nicole into the most sophisticated city on the planet: Paris, France, circa 1942. There's a lot of Holocaust literature for young people—some of it time-travel themed. But we think AFAM is the first book that looks at the experiences of both Jewish and Gentile teenagers in the hip, urban, utterly relate-able setting that was Nazi-Occupied Paris. Because Nicole is a gentile Every Girl in the present, she becomes a place card for the reader who might not normally be able to relate to the events in the book. When it happens to Nicole, it is happening to the reader.

MC: What makes the novel accessible to today's teens?

CB & JG: The same thing that makes any book accessible to anyone: plot, character, dialogue, and writing style. In other words, a good book is a good book.

More specifically, though, we wanted AFAM to be read

by a widest possible audience—not just tomorrow’s doctors, but also tomorrow’s nurses, orderlies, and janitors. So we wrote it in what we hope is a very readable style, with a protagonist who obsesses at times about what all of us obsess about: her love life.

This was risky, we know. A lot of teen novels with strong romantic arcs are designed to be mere beach reads. We knew that some would dismiss AFAM on this basis, as if passionate teen romance by definition makes a work flimsy.

Notice the same does not apply to a book about adults.

We think we do a disservice to the emotional lives of teen readers by assuming that a YA novel with a driving romantic arc is ipso facto lightweight. There is a powerful romance, ultimately, a romantic tragedy, in AFAM. It’s amazing how many of the emails we get from teens focus on that romance. Again, we took our cue from Anne’s diary and her feelings for Peter van Pels.

Teen readers get Nicole from page one for the same reason that adults might dismiss her. That is, she’s just so . . . imperfect. Self-involved. Superficial, really. If readers are not Nicole, they ride the bus with her, eat lunch with her, go to school or church with her. So when her story unfolds, it’s like it’s happening to the reader. And when Nicole becomes a hero, readers understand that heroism has nothing to do with your GPA or your IQ score. It has to do with your courage, with what’s in your heart.

There were plenty of inflated IQs among the human beings who organized the transports and designed the gas chambers.

MC: What do you hope readers gain from reading *Anne Frank and Me*?

CB & JG: Ah ha! Our moment to pontificate on all the important themes in our book, right? Blah, blah, blah. Theme, theme, theme. Wow, are we ever brilliant.

The most important thing we want readers to gain from AFAM is a great reading experience. That is, a book that grips them, twists and turns in ways that don’t anticipate, and depicts a heroine’s journey that in some way becomes their own.

Teens today grow up on stories. In fact, with the media explosion of the 1980s and 1990s, there’s been a story explosion too. Kids are far more savvy than we were at the same age. You’d be shocked at how many YAs tell us they’re far ahead of the plot with too many YA books—on page 50 they can predict what’s going to be happening on page 200, and then tell exactly how the book is going to turn out.

Which is so not a fun reading experience.

Okay, onto theme.

We do a great deal of speaking in middle schools and high schools about our fiction, plays, and television writing.

We love it, and so do the kids and educators to whom we talk. When the subject turns to AFAM, (we have a multimedia presentation/writing workshop including videotape of professional productions of the stage play) some student raises his or her hand and says: “It’s important to remember what happened in the Holocaust because the people who lived through it are dying, and soon there won’t be any of them left. We need to be witnesses.”

That kid is right. But that answer only gets you so far. Witnesses weren’t the problem. There was a continent full of witnesses to the atrocities of the Germans and their sympathizers, including in France. It’s not as if these men and women kept their feelings a secret. They rounded up Jews not just in Polish shtetls, but in sophisticated cities like Paris, Brussels, and Amsterdam.

And what did the vast majority of these witnesses do in response to their neighbors’ blood being shed? Nothing. They did nothing.

Miep Gies—the Franks’s protector during those days in the Secret Annex—wrote in her 1987 autobiography about how there were only two types of people in Holland in those days. Collaborators and resisters. If you stood by and did nothing, you were part of the problem. In France. Everywhere. If kids stand by idly today in the face of evil, they too are part of the problem. And history is destined to repeat itself on

Review of *Anne Frank and Me* (Cherie Bennett and Jeff Gottsfeld, New York: Putnam, 2001)

Nicole Burns is your typical teenager. She is, in fact, middle-of-the-road normal. Nothing exciting ever happens to Nicole. She does get noticed in crowds and the boy she has a major crush on does not know she exists. For all intents and purposes, Nicole is “just there.” And so goes the life of main character Nicole Burns in *Anne Frank and Me*. Nicole is very much a 21st century girl. Internet savvy, she creates her own web page called Girl X. It is here that she records her thoughts, her secrets, her desires.

Nicole doesn’t give much thought to anything but the present. All of this changes, however, when she is assigned to read *The Diary of Anne Frank*. On a visit to the state museum’s *Anne Frank in the World* exhibit, Nicole’s life is forever changed. She enters the museum in modern day and through a freak accident is transported back in time to Occupied Paris, as a Jewish girl.

a lesser or greater scale.

By the book’s end, Nicole does not stand idly in the face of evil. She is more than a witness. She acts. And she passes on to her sister the truths she’s learned. We hope our readers, whatever their age, take her journey, and her passion, to heart.

MC: How do you answer the critics of the novel? What do you say to the Holocaust Deniers?

CB & JG: At the risk of skating dangerously close to the email-inducing line, Chekhov’s Trigorin, in *The Seagull* (a play with an important role in our next novel, *A Heart Divided*) said this when asked about reading reviews of his writing: “When they praise me, I’m pleased. When they hate me, I feel badly for a day or two.”

AFAM got some fantastic reviews, and AFAM got some crappy ones. We felt pleased at the good ones (especially when reviewers actually got what we were trying to do in the book) and badly at the crappy ones. Jeff says he felt crappy for a “a day or two.” Cherie says she needed a bit longer to recuperate. And our families stay angry at our critics forever. Gotta love ‘em.

What did burn our butts was critical suggestion that AFAM was more gimmick than history. We’ve gotten so many letters from Holocaust scholars, including many United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Mandel high school teaching

fellows, praising the book's ability to meld fiction and scrupulous historical accuracy. We've been asked by the Los Angeles Museum of the Holocaust and others to participate in teacher training because of the historical accuracy of our book.

Uh . . . more gimmick than history? You might or might not like the novel—hey, that's why they call it art. But you cannot fault its "history."

As for the deniers, especially those who'd seek to suck our kids in via the Internet, we have only this to say: WE'RE ON TO YOU, YOU LYING POND SCUM! Not just us, but teachers, educators, and groups like the Simon Wiesenthal Center and ADL. Kids are learning the truth, which sets them free and sends you packing.

In the long run, deniers don't have a chance.

MC: Both of you are Jewish. Did this influence your decision to write this book? Did you find it difficult writing from Nicole's (who is not Jewish) point of view?

CB & JG: We're both fairly observant Jews. In 1994, we saw Holocaust denier Ernst Zundel spouting his hate on *60 Minutes*. He looked so normal. He sounded so reasonable. And we thought: "Okay, this is not some neo-Nazi skinhead with a tattoo on his forehead." If you're a kid, and you don't know the truth, you could believe this guy. Why wouldn't you? He's just telling "the other side of the story."

Only sometimes there is no other side to the story.

Our faith definitely was an impetus in our decision to construct a play—and later, a novel—that would thematically do battle with Zundel and his ilk. It has been, and continues to be, a subject of the deepest passion for us both. We've devoted a substantial chunk of our professional lives to this project. And we're glad.

That said, we do not subscribe to the theory that the Holocaust is a story only to be told or commented on by Jewish writers anymore than only the Irish can write about the potato famine. That is just ludicrous. The proof of the work is the work, not the faith, national origin, color, or external whatnot of the storyteller.

We've written protagonists who are Jewish, practicing Christian, Catholic, non-observant Christian, and no faith at all. Hopefully, we've written them all truly.

MC: When writing this storyline, how did you decide what was most appropriate for the audience?

CB & JG: Uh . . . gee, we really don't know. We just tried to tell a great story that hadn't been told before and stay out of the way of the plot and the characters. We wrote the kind of story we like to read. Our one guiding light was not to make this a story about life and death in the concentration and death camps. It isn't. The sequence at Auschwitz-Birkenau is about a dozen pages, no more.

MC: What was your hardest struggle in writing this or any book?

CB & JG: Plotting. We are utterly intolerant of bad or lazy plotting in books, movies, or play for adults, and we don't think that teens should have to tolerate it either . . . no matter how lofty the theme or how educational the underlying work might be. We hate plot holes and predictable plots.

We went through an astonishing number of file cards as we outlined this novel sequence by sequence, and then re-outlined the last fifth of it prior to a top-to-bottom rewrite. Our intrepid editor Susan Kochan's notes were very helpful, as well as some comments from teen readers to whom we gave early drafts of the manuscript.

The other struggle was in containing the novel's length. Originally, our grandiose scheme was to not only tell Nicole's story, but also the stories of her friends Mimi, David, and Jacques, in a Marge Piercy *Gone to Soldiers* kinda thing crossed with Herman Wouk's *Winds of War*. If we'd written that 1000+ page tome, not only would our editor have launched an ICBM in our direction, but we'd probably still be wearing it. Our first draft was gigantic by YA standards, anyway. Then we took out the chainsaw, ax, knives, and scalpel, and went to work killing off our darlings.

MC: Shifting gears a little. How often do you write things that you never develop into works to be published?

CB & JG: It doesn't really happen with books anymore; publishers trust our outlines. We know we're very fortunate to have publishers who believe in us. Sometimes Cherie starts a play that doesn't go where she thought it would go, and she puts it away for a week, a month, a year. But it's still incubating . . .

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Please see Holli Levitsky's article in the Winter, 2002 issue of The ALAN Review pages 11-15; Levitsky, a Holocaust scholar, praises Anne Frank and Me for the authors' careful treatment of their subject.

Is Robin Hood Alive in Your Classroom?

Sharon E. Royer

For over six hundred years, children have heard about the courageous Englishman who stole from the rich and gave to the poor, the hero of the common people, the infamous Robin Hood. However, today two major controversies accompany these enduring tales in relation to adolescent literature. The first controversy centers on whether the tales of Robin Hood should be presented as fact or fiction. The second controversy revolves around the appropriateness of the tales for use in literature programs.

Robin Hood: Fact, Fiction, or Legend?

The tales of Robin Hood fall under the classification of legends, within the broader context of traditional literature. Yet, rather than being presented as legends, they are often treated as nothing more than folk-tales. Richard Cavendish, editor of *Legends of the World* (1982) explains the difference: "That legends are accepted as authentic in their own milieu, however, broadly distinguishes them from folk-tales, which are not told as historically true" (11). Information about legends in general supports the idea that Robin Hood could not have been entirely fictional. Cavendish states that legends have "a foundation of some kind in fact. . .[they are] based on people who really lived or places that really existed or events that actually happened, to which tales have clustered and clung" (9). This idea is confirmed by the *World Book Encyclopedia*, which states that legends "are based on real people or events" (Workman 183). Therefore, the very minimum that can be assumed is that there is some basis of fact to the Robin Hood legends. Bernard Miles, author of *Robin Hood: His Life and Legend*, further emphasizes that point by reasoning that what has been true of similar legends is true of the Robin Hood legend. He explains that for hundreds of years people classified the stories of King Arthur and the Greek hero Odysseus as fairy tales. Yet, today the men are known to have existed, "only they were such remarkable men that the stories of their lives lived on after they were dead and fresh adventures were added to their real ones...And that is how it happened with Robin" (46). A summary of the evidence and current opinions on this issue follows.

Arguments for Robin Hood as Fact

A substantial amount of documented historical evidence supports the idea that Robin Hood actually existed. Robin Hood is traditionally dated as living from 1160 to 1247, during the reigns of King Henry II, King Richard I, and Richard's brother, King John (McSpadden and Wilson 13).

Mair, a Scottish writer, first gave these dates in the early sixteenth century in the *History of Great Britain* (McSpadden and Wilson 15). The earliest written reference to Robin Hood occurs in William Langland's *Piers Plowman* (1370), where a priest says that he knows "rymes of Robin Hood." However, the manner in which this was written indicates that such "rymes" were well known before they were written down. Also, the amount of time that had passed since Robin died would seem to be "an appropriate period for a real outlaw, who was in and out of royal favor, to develop a widespread legend" (Knight 24). This permits the traditional dates to be considered as realistic possibilities for Robin's lifetime.

A record from a court session in Yorkshire in 1226 notes, "the confiscation of the goods of one Robert Hod, described as a fugitive. He owed the money to St. Peter's, York, which has a general appropriateness to Robin's hostility to the

Many of the lessons communicated in the Robin Hood tales have a historical basis.

established church in that city" (Knight 24). This would indicate that Robin Hood frequented the area of Yorkshire, the location of the royal Barnsdale Forest which he is associated with in the earliest

tales, and not Sherwood Forest where contemporary works place him. Further proof of his activities in Barnsdale appears in a document that records William de Lambertton, Robert Wishart, and Henry Abbot of Scone being sent south as prisoners and their guard being increased "on account of Barnsdale" (quoted in Holt 52). This statement shows that Barnsdale was known as an area of special danger to travelers, probably a result of outlaw activity.

Further support of Robin Hood as a true historical person is provided by William Stukeley of Stamford, a doctor and parson, in a "Pedigree of Robin Hood Earl of Huntingdon". Stukeley traced the family of Robin Hood back to William the Conqueror's niece on one side and the Anglo-Saxon Earl Walthoef on the other. Therefore, Robin Hood was given credibility by being connected to verifiable historical figures. Stukeley's dates also place Robin Hood in the days of King John (Knight 19). Stukeley's findings were confirmed by a discovery by the playwright, Anthony Munday, that the Lord of Barnsdale was in fact the Earl of Huntingdon, the younger brother of King William the Lion of Scotland, living in England (Knight 31). This further increases Robin Hood's credibility by confirming the epitaph on what is believed to be his gravestone near Kirklees Priory, Yorkshire. The epitaph (with spelling modernized) reads:

Here underneath this little stone
Lies Robert, Earl of Huntingdon

Ne'er archer was as he so good
And people called him Robin Hood
Such outlaws as he and his men
Will England never see again. ("Robin Hood")

However, much opposition continues to be raised about the authenticity of Robin Hood.

Arguments for Robin Hood as Fiction

Some sources assert that the Robin Hood legends are entirely fictional. *Compton's Interactive Encyclopedia* states that Robin Hood was a mythical character, introduced in connection with the May Day celebrations. The entry claims that "an argument against the hero's existence is the fact that he is mentioned by no historian of the time during which he is supposed to have lived" and that "the events referred to in the stories could not all have occurred in his lifetime" ("Robin Hood"). This fails to take into account that legends were told orally long before they were written down and that they were added to and modified over the centuries. Another common argument against the authenticity of Robin Hood is that the abundance of "Robin Hoods" in English records over the centuries indicates that one "true" Robin Hood never existed. Historians Dobson and Taylor admit that "the discovery of the name Robert or Robin Hood in a medieval English document is not in itself of particular significance" (quoted in Knight 15). However, Edward C. Meyers explains that the abundance of Robin Hoods can be accounted for because of a certain practice of law officers in England during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. They used the name "Robin Hood" as a temporary identification of unknown captured outlaws, much as "John Doe" is used by modern police (quoted in "Ben's Realm" 4).

The view of many scholars concerned with the idea of Robin Hood as a real person is summarized in *Great Mysteries of the Past*, which states that "most scholars now agree that he [Robin Hood] represents a type—the outlaw hero—that was celebrated in ballads handed down from generation to generation" ("On the Trail" 287). Unfortunately, this does not take into account the findings of many historians and scholars concerning legends in general and the Robin Hood legend in particular. Many scholars' claims that Robin Hood could not have been a real person are based on contradictions that occur in later, edited versions of the tales.

Robin Hood and History

Another factor that must be considered is that the perception of history in the 21st century is significantly different from what it was over 700 years ago. The difference is a consequence of the nature of school textbooks "with the result that history tends to be even-handed and instantaneous" (McKinley 281). In other words, events may sometimes be inappropriately forced into slots on a timeline, because that is the most convenient way to study history in the 21st century. People who oppose the idea of a real Robin Hood point to the fact that the longbow, the weapon he is usually said to have used, is not documented as being in use

during his lifetime. Yet, historians now know that "the English were quietly using the longbow as a hunting weapon long before Edward III faced the French at Crecy, which is when the English longbow enters 20th century textbooks" (McKinley 281). Therefore, when considering the Robin Hood legends, caution must be used in the identification of dates when events might have occurred.

Robin Hood as Literature

The second significant controversy surrounding the Robin Hood legends concerns their appropriateness for use in a literature program. Opponents of use of the tales in the classroom often point to the presence of violence. Richard Cavendish mentions Robin Hood's practice of taking "the law into his own hands to right wrong. In the early stories he does so with a ruthless ferocity" (276). He describes Robin Hood as "quick-witted, daring, resourceful, generous, humorous and sometimes cruel" (Cavendish 276). One example of Robin's violence can be seen when he beheads Sir Guy of Gisbourne (a bounty hunter who desires to wed Robin's love interest) and carries his head on top of his bow, later defacing it with a knife (Knight 57).

Such violence has become a growing concern for parents and teachers, especially in twenty-first century American society, where the fear of violence is increasing and the question of the appropriateness of vigilantism is still unsettled. However, J.

Walker McSpadden cautions that "we must not make too much of these traits in the turbulence and lawlessness of early days, when king warred against noble and noble against bishop, and all three oppressed the common people, to whom the law gave no redress" (11). Many things that were common in historical times are largely unacceptable today. However, history can not be rewritten to support 21st century ideas of what ought to have been the case. Robin Hood's legends should not be eliminated from literature programs because of his unlawful actions, any more than the Boston Tea Party should be left out of the story of the American Revolution.

Robin Hood In the Classroom

Those who favor the use of Robin Hood legends in the classroom believe the value that can be derived from the use of the legends outweighs the objections to Robin's use of violence. Simply as an example of one of the few legends that has its origins in such early-recorded form, the tales of Robin Hood have literary merit. The legends also raise some interesting questions. Many of the lessons communicated in the Robin Hood tales have a historical basis. Robin Hood lived during the time when feudalism was coming to an end and the middle class was gaining power (Keen 20). There was oppression by the Church and State in addition to struggles between Saxon landlords and their Norman conquerors (McSpadden and Wilson 11). Yet, Robin refused "to accept coercive power as a basis for protecting those who are less than powerful" and constantly fought against the use of such power (Knight 5). These tales communicated an important lesson to the common people of his time

Robin Hood represented to the common people of England what King Arthur symbolized for the aristocracy: both were upholders of true justice (Miles 8).

about their reaction to such government. For example, Robin Hood's enemy was not the entire class of the wealthy and powerful, "but those of them who misuse their position to oppress honest men" (Cavendish 276). His legendary actions communicated the idea that the entire social order does not have to be overthrown in order to bring about change, but that those who abuse it need to be challenged. Against this backdrop, the signing of the Magna Carta occurred. On June 15, 1215 King John was forced to set his seal to the document. The Magna Carta outlined the liberties that were guaranteed to the English people and went on to become the foundation of the constitutions of every English-speaking nation ("Magna"). Therefore, Robin Hood lived during an exceptionally significant time in history.

Donna E. Norton, author of the textbook *Through the Eyes of a Child* (1995), states that "legends help children understand the conditions of times that created a need for brave. . . men and women" (308). Richard Cavendish agrees: legends are "part of the inherited conglomerate of accepted beliefs, values, and attitudes which give a people its identity. These stories consequently provide invaluable evidence about the societies that give birth to them, and insights into human nature in general" (9). Many insights can be gained from the study of the Robin Hood legend. Robin Hood was more than an outlaw who stole from the rich and gave to the poor. He was part of the historical movement away from feudalism and slavery and towards human rights. He was one of the many people who saw the need for democracy and witnessed the first step in achieving it with the signing of the Magna Carta. Robin Hood represented to the common people of England what King Arthur symbolized for the aristocracy: both were upholders of true justice (Miles 8).

The legend of Robin Hood is made even more practical for adolescents because it applies to contemporary life and values. The author of one Web page concludes that "Robin Hood is not just a man, he also stands for our ideals and how we must strive to make things right even if there's little hope of succeeding" ("Ben's Realm" 14). Richard Cavendish concurs, "The lesson which the supreme heroes of legend and history have to teach is that. . .the limits of human reach and achievement are not as narrow and restricted as they so often seem" (13). This is certainly applicable to adolescents who may often feel powerless to accomplish their desires because of their age and lack of authority. Yet if one looks deeper, right to the heart of the Robin Hood legends, the most important lesson to be learned and applied is this:

He [Robin Hood] was one of the first in a long line of men and women who believed that freedom is more precious than life itself. After centuries of struggle, that freedom has been handed down to you and me. It has been a long and up-hill battle, but for us and for our children it is won. Now we have the task of guarding it and of bringing it to others. And if Robin were alive today he would be among the first to help us. (Miles 123)

These connections, which transcend time and place, are what have made the Robin Hood legends so enduring and appealing to young people of all ages.

Versions of the Tale

Robin Hood's presence can also be found in almost every major genre of literature, dramas, operas, and most recently in movie theatres. There are also some excellent versions of

the Robin Hood legend available for young people. One exceptional example is *The Adventures of Robin Hood and His Merry Outlaws* (1984), retold from the old ballads by J. Walker McSpadden and Charles Wilson with illustrations by Howard Pyle and Thomas Heath Robinson. In this 1984 version each story is introduced by verses from the ballad it is based on, and the exact language is used frequently. Another notable example is *Robin Hood: His Life and Legend* (1984), by Bernard Miles, which includes an excellent map of important locations in Robin Hood's life. The accessibility of the Robin Hood legends increases the potential impact of the legend on adolescents.

Donna E. Norton states conclusively that the "stories of Robin Hood are popular with children" (308). This adds enjoyment to all of the other benefits that can be derived from a study of Robin Hood. Robin Hood deserves a place in children's literature programs—not as a folk-tale but as a story grounded in fact, not as a glorification of violence but as a means to understand that the people in a different time and place were unique yet similar to people living today. Robin Hood is alive and well in history, in the theater, and in literature. Is he alive in your classroom?

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Sharon Royer credits Mr. Tom Clark, a teacher of senior English at Jackson High School in Massillon, Ohio, for her interest in British literature. She is currently a teacher of 7th grade reading and language arts. When not teaching, she enjoys line dancing and competing as a member of an area dance team.

Mississippi Trial, 1955 by Chris Crowe
Phyllis Fogelman Books, June, 2002

Historical Fiction;
Racial Discrimination and Civil Rights
ISBN: 0-8037-2745-3

"My dad hates hate." With this compelling opening line, Chris Crowe draws readers into his first novel for adolescents. It is the story of 16-year-old Hiram Hillburn, who lives with his family in Arizona, but who longs to visit Greenwood, Mississippi, and the grandfather who helped raise him. And it is also the story of the disappearance, torture, and murder of 14-year-old Emmett Till, a Black teen who was visiting Greenwood, Mississippi, from his Chicago home during the summer of 1955.

When Hiram convinces his parents to let him spend the summer in Greenwood, he finally begins to understand why his father had to leave; he begins to appreciate his father's stance against injustice and prejudice. The lessons require that he learn about the ugly side of his own grandfather's past, and the man's part in the murder of Hiram's young Black friend, Emmett Till.

Crowe never lets the story line lag for the sake of adding historical details. Instead, he expertly infuses fact with human feeling. He shows us how desperately Hiram wants to help when he sees Emmett Till tortured by White kids, who gut a fish and hold let the blood drip all over Emmett, a scene that foreshadows the torture and murder that a group of White men later commit. Crowe helps us feel the humidity and heat of the Mississippi courtroom when the men responsible for Emmett's death are found innocent. And he teaches us the power of a teen's strength, hope, understanding, and love, even in the face of the prejudice and hatred of adults around him.

The book is reminiscent of Mildred Taylor's *Roll of Thunder, Hear my Cry* in Crowe's powerful treatment of a serious subject and his graceful, careful use of language.

Sissi Carroll

Green Slime and Jam by Lila Guzman,
Eakin Publications, 2001, 166 pp. \$11.95

Fantasy/Fiction
ISBN 1-57168-483-2

Three famed literary characters are plucked from the pages of books when an explosion of green slime splashes on their pictures inside the books. Their landing spot is a modern day school in Texas. The literary figures, Lazarillo de Tormes (a famous character from Spanish literature), Alice in Wonderland, and the Jabberwock, are now only inches tall in a modern day world of giants. Fortunately, The Spanish orphan Lazarillo finds a safe place to stay, and someone who is willing to help him get back into his own Spanish story. Lazarillo also faces the challenges of finding Alice so she can be safely returned to her book, *Alice in Wonderland*, with the Jabberwock.

Jason, the boy who caused the explosion, and his sister Courtney are determined to find a way to get Lazarillo, Alice, and the Jabberwock back into their books. When the solution is finally figured out, Lazarillo decides that he does not want to return to his book; instead, he wants to stay with his new friends in the real world.

This action adventure is an enjoyable read for young adolescents. Coupled with illustrations and characters students would already be familiar with, the book is an open door from which to begin to look at literary figures across time.

Casey Burgs
Fort Lauderdale, Florida

The White Horse Talisman, by Andrea Spalding
Orca Book Publishers, 2002, 185 pp., \$12.95

Fantasy
ISBN 1-55143-1874

Ages have passed. The Wise Ones of ancient Celtic Lore have awakened as the "stir of evil" enters the Milky Way Galaxy, slowly finding its way toward Gaia, the misty blue planet which hides the tools of power.

The Wise Ones attempt to warn the people of Gaia, but their star showers are seen by mere mortals only as a beautiful phenomenon. Clearly, the people of Gaia understand no warning. The Wise Ones realize that the people who once believed in them and their powers no longer exist, and these non-believers are all that's left. They recognize that the children of Gaia, the ones that still have the ability to dream and imagine, may be their last and only hope.

Andrea Spalding creates a world that is a layer above our own. Magical horses and dragons enter the dreams and realities of children, taking them on fantastical adventures on Earth and beyond. Suitable for classroom and/or individual reading, this book, the first of four in the series *The Summer of Magic Quartet*, will have children of all ages dreaming of magic, enchantments, and adventure.

Jennifer Bentz
Orlando, Florida

Young Adult Books In Review Recently Published Titles

Jeff Kaplan, Editor

3x5 inches to "Clip & File"

T • H • E
ALAN
REVIEW

<p><i>Sweep: Book of Shadows</i> by Cate Tiernan Puffin Books, 2001, 192 pp., \$4.99</p> <p>The search for identity is an issue all young adults seem to find themselves tangled in, and sixteen-year old Morgan Rowlands is no different.</p> <p>Young Morgan has noticed that she is not the prettiest girl, like her friend Bree, and she is definitely not among the smartest, like some of her other friends. In fact, Morgan is downright confused about where she belongs in her life, until she meets the one guy who ever really treated her like she mattered, Cal Blaire. The only problem is that Cal is involved in an ancient religion: Wicca.</p> <p>This revelation comes as exciting news to Morgan, until she finds herself in a Wiccan circle for the holiday of Mabon. It all seems like innocent fun until Morgan is swept off her feet by some uncontrollable power during the circle. All of a sudden, Morgan wonders, "Was this phenomena the result of the power of Wicca streaming inside her?" "And has Morgan finally found where she belongs, or will her families' Catholic background drive her away from this strange religion?"</p> <p>This novel is an intriguing read about a young, vulnerable teenager who finds herself drawn to a "strange phenomena," that raises more questions than it gives answers.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Michael Cush Orlando, Florida</p>	<p><i>Girls Got Game: Stories and Poems</i> Edited by Sue Macy Henry Holt and Co., 2001, 152 pp., \$15.95</p> <p><i>Sports/Women Athletes</i> ISBN: 0-8050-6568-7</p> <p>The familiar taunts that echo back to those first days on the playground when little boys could be heard repeating over and over that common phrase, "You can't play, you're a girl!" are challenged in the terrific collection of eighteen stories and poems in the <i>Girls Got Game</i>. Girls show that they can play defense in a football game, pitch against a skillful batter, and make a shot that's all net; these are just some examples of the ways the girls in this collection prove those taunting little boys wrong. In <i>Girls Got Game</i>, numerous popular female writers celebrate the joy and passion of being involved in a variety of sports, while they create characters that face more than simply the challenge of the game but the challenge of life.</p> <p>Skillful characterization and vivid imagery flow from authors who know their sports to make this collection a must for any reader who appreciates the thrill of the game, and the ability of an athlete, man or woman. This good book is effective in providing examples of how gender barriers can be broken and stereotypes shattered. <i>Girls Got Game</i> proves that anyone can cheer for female athletes, making this compilation a slam-dunk.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Sean Fitzgibbons Orlando, Florida</p>
<p><i>The Letters</i> by Kazumi Yumoto Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2002, 176 pp., \$16.00</p> <p>Dealing with Death/Coming of Age ISBN: 0-374+34383-7</p> <p>When Chiaki hears about the death of Mrs. Yanagi, her former landlady from childhood, she decides to go to the funeral. Now in her late twenties, Chiaki remembers her experiences with this woman and the significant role she played in her life. At six years old, as a result of her father's sudden and untimely death, she and her mother moved into one of Mrs. Yanagi's apartments at Popular House. There, she stayed with Mrs. Yangi and healed, while her mother worked.</p> <p>With Mrs. Yanagi's daily care, the two form a lasting and loving bond. More intriguingly, Chiaki also learns about this woman's personal mission of delivering letters to the dead from the loved ones that they have left behind. This inspires Chiaki to write letters to her own deceased father, asking Mrs. Yanagi to deliver them for her. Thus, through the art of contemplation and reflection, young Chiaki eventually begins to deal with her father's death by expressing her thoughts and feelings through her letter writing.</p> <p>This is a beautifully written, heartwarming story about hope, and overcoming the most difficult of tragedies, death. The author, Kazumi Yumoto, has crafted an incredible story that can be enjoyed by a wide audience, especially the lives of young people who are just coming to terms with the circle of life.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Melissa Fyfe Orlando, Florida</p>	<p><i>Hole in My Life</i> by Jack Gantos Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 2002, 200 pp., \$16.00</p> <p>Autobiography ISBN: 0-374-19988-3</p> <p>In this bittersweet autobiography, the future author Jack Gantos is looking for a way off his homeland of St. Croix, an island full of racial turmoil and personal stagnation. He wants to go to the United States and try his hand at college so he can fulfill his dreams of becoming a writer. One day, the opportunity of a lifetime lands in his lap, and he finds that he cannot say "no." All he has to do is help smuggle 2,000 pounds of hash on a boat from St. Croix to New York. For this, he could receive ten thousand dollars, and his ticket to school. Desperate to leave, Gantos falls prey to this crime of convenience, and as fate would have it, he lands in prison.</p> <p>This surprising book recounts the popular YA author's late-teen life, his subsequent arrest and imprisonment. It is frank, harsh, and beautifully truthful at times – especially about life in prison. Above all, this is the story of a young writer trying to find inspiration for his work. Ultimately, he finds the greatest inspiration within himself.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Thomas Nigel Hames Orlando, Florida</p>

Saving Jasey by Diane Tullson
Orca Book Publishers, 2002, 172 pp., \$6.95

Domestic Violence/Terminal Illness
ISBN: 1-55142-220-X

Living with a brother and father who abuses him physically and emotionally, Gavin finds compassion and love in his best friend Tristen McVeigh's family. In fact, the McVeigh family is the exact opposite of Gavin's, for they openly express their love and concern for one another.

This genuine caring and tenderness is put to the test when a tragic terminal illness suddenly befalls a member of the McVeigh family, and everyone is forced to deal with this serious issue. All of a sudden, a once happy and supportive family falls apart, and Trist now needs Gavin more than ever. To complicate matters Gavin falls in love with Tristen's older sister, Jasey, as he tries to help her deal with this tragic illness in her family. Even though Jasey appears to have everything together on the outside, she is breaking apart inside, and Gavin knows it. At the same time, Gavin still has his own dysfunctional and abusive family to deal with.

This is a good read for young teens interested in understanding the complicated world in which matters of life and death are never easy to resolve.

Ebony N. Jarrett
Orlando, Florida

Lorenzo's Secret by Lila and Rick Guzman
Pinata Books, 2001, 153 pp., \$9.95

Revolutionary War/Minorities
ISBN: 1-55885-341-3

This is a tale of the American Revolutionary War told from the unique perspective of a young Hispanic male named Lorenzo Bannister. Historically rich and accurate, this book provides interesting scenarios of life in New Orleans and Virginia at the time of the American Revolution. Real historical characters interact with our hero, Lorenzo, including none other than, General George Washington.

As the story begins, young, patriotic, and ambitious, fifteen-year-old Lorenzo dreams of becoming a soldier, but at present, he is studying to be a doctor. Suddenly, he is both. Beginning in New Orleans, the teen travels up the Mississippi River as a medic on a flatboat, delivering medicine and gunpowder to the American revolutionaries. A chance meeting with General Washington leads to his helping the American soldiers carry out their orders, and eventually, win their freedom from the British.

Told in an easy-to-read tone and filled with plenty of historical detail, this would be an excellent book to discuss this era of American history, with the appealing twist of perspective through the adolescent Hispanic narrator. This book is particularly good for learning about the contributions of the Spanish in fighting the British.

Shawn Keaton
DeLand, Florida

Dancing Naked by Shelley Hrdlitschka
Orca Book Publishers, 2001, 250 pp., \$6.95

Teenagers/Pregnancy
ISBN: 1-55143-10-2

Sixteen-year-old Kia thought she had found the right guy when she met Derek. He had something she couldn't explain – something that made her forget everything and everyone else. Once she got pregnant, however, her image of "perfect" Derek faded. Derek proves to be a non-supportive teen father, and suddenly, she is forced to make a decision that will change her life forever. The only fully supportive friend she has is youth group leader Justin, but she will find out, while she is grappling with her unplanned pregnancy, that Justin is hiding a secret of his very own.

This book chronicles the arduous journey of a young girl who has to stand up for what she believes in when everyone else is against her. Author Hrdlitschka gives us a real-life look at the fears, hopes, disappointments, and pain associated with teen pregnancy. This book is a good starting point to open up the communication in classrooms about pregnancy, birth control, and abortion, among other controversial issues. It shows how a child's life can change when they are forced to make very adult decisions.

Kristie Lehmen
Orlando, Florida

The Popsicle Journal by Don Trembath
Orca Book Publishers, 2002, 147 pp., \$6.95

Teen Issues/Alcoholism
ISBN: 1-55143-185-8

Harper Winslow is a high school student who has a unique after school job. He is working as a reporter for the local newspaper. His life is pretty quiet until one day he finds out his sister has a drinking problem. To compound his problems, his father is running for mayor, and refuses to have his son interview him for the paper. His turmoil is further exacerbated when his boss puts pressure on him to find a lead for a big story, and all his personal material — his sister's alcoholism and his father's candidacy — are forbidden discussion topics.

Adolescent readers will find the themes of alcoholism, ethical behavior, integrity, peer pressure, and family loyalty to be of interest to them. This is an easy book, designed for the accessibility of eager, young readers. Young people will also envy the relative freedom of the central character, Harper Winslow, in his job as a budding ace reporter, and his constant battle to prove his self-worth to his editors.

Renee Olson
Altamonte Springs, Florida

<p><i>Objects in the Mirror</i> by Ronder Thomas Young Roaring Book Press, 2002, 168 pp., \$15.95</p> <p>Coming of Age/Fiction ISBN: 0-7613-1508-2</p> <p>High school sophomore Grace Morrison is having a tough time. Nothing seems to be going her way. In the middle of her school year, She is transferred to a new school, and has to leave her best friend Diana. In a more serious vein, Grace's dad has had a stroke, and her family business is going under. To complicate matters, Grace's sisters are total screw-ups, and have ruined any chances for Grace to have a normal life. Finally, to top it all off, her new school has messed up her schedule, resulting in untold confusion, and ending with old Mrs. Sayers threatening to have her kicked out of school.</p> <p>At seventeen, Grace is quickly learning that objects in the mirror are closer than they appear...and often they are distorted. What she thinks is true is often not, as she realizes when her new friendship with Allison Anderson, the rich bad girl, quickly spins into a web of lies. Can Grace get out of it?</p> <p>A coming-of-age novel suitable for readers who like stories where the plot keeps turning on itself, and although the ending could be stronger, the characters are well-developed, and fun to read about.</p> <p>Amy Scarff Orlando, Florida</p>	<p><i>Making the Run</i> by Heather Henson Joanna Cotler of HarperCollins, May, 2002</p> <p>Friendship, Illusions ISBN: 0060297972</p> <p>In her first novel, Henson demonstrates her lyrical voice and her care for the thoughts and struggles of troubled teens. The narrator is Lu, a teenager who entertains herself and hides her feelings from others by taking photographs of her friends as they "get wild" with drugs and parties fast driving. Lu's alter ego is her best friend, Ginny. Teen readers will readily recognize that Ginny is unsure of herself and is self-destructive, despite her bravado. Ginny takes time to paint her fingernails with the freshest new colors, but plays "chicken" when driving, declaring, "I am invincible." She eventually suffers a fatal car crash while speeding through "Dead Man's Curve." The crash forces Lu and her dad, who thought Lu was in the car when Ginny crashed, to reexamine the relationship that exists between them. The connection between them has grown more and more strained since Lu became an adolescent, but it is especially crucial to her since her mother died when she was a child.</p> <p>Sensitive readers will enjoy the ways that Henson describes feelings with colors (and some may connect the use of colors with the effects of taking drugs). Many adult readers are likely to object to the attention she gives to the behind-the-scenes account of a "normal" group of teens, due to their drug use, drinking, and sex. In this case, however, the author's skill as an artist offers a strong rationale for making the book available to sophisticated teens who are interested in seeing life from the perspective of a female who hides feelings, trouble, pain from her family, friends, and herself.</p> <p>Sissi Carroll</p>
<p><i>Motherland</i> by Vineeta Vijayaraghavan Soho, 2001, 232 pp., \$23.00</p> <p>Coming of Age ISBN: 1-56947-217-3</p> <p>Using details from her own live, Vijayaraghavan takes us high into the mountains of South India through the eyes of Maya, a fifteen-year-old girl from Southern Indain, who has lived in New York City since she was four years old.</p> <p>Now Maya is fifteen-years-old, and like many teenage girls, she does not get along with her mother. Maya feels like her mother has abandoned her for more important priorities. However, while visiting her grandmother Amamma, her aunt, and her uncle in India during summer vacation Maya learns valuable lessons about her Indian heritage, customs, and her role as a woman. Moreover, she also learns what it means to be loved by a family, regardless of their failings. With the sudden death of Grandma Amamma, Maya discovers an old family secret that dramatically changes her own relationship with her mother.</p> <p>Author Vijayaraghavan keeps the reader glued to the plot with her use of rich, sensory language, and her smart incorporation of Indian life and culture. Readers will delight in the adventures and discoveries of this American teenager of Indian descent, and will connect with the innate human values that underscore this good read.</p> <p>Adrienne Schmittendorf Orlando, Florida</p>	<p><i>Crossing the Panther's Path</i> by Elizabeth Alder Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2002, 272 pp., \$19.00</p> <p>Native American/Historical Fiction ISBN: 0-374-31662-7</p> <p>Students usually learn the name Tecumseh in American history class, but, this book asks the question, who really was "Tecumseh the man?"</p> <p>Historical fiction has the ability to breathe life and color into distant times, places, and people. In <i>Crossing the Panther's Path</i>, Alder reveals much about Native American customs, values, and the adventurous spirit and lifestyle of the early American frontier, as she weaves historical fact through her fictional narrative puts a face behind the name.</p> <p>This book tells the story of Billy Caldwell, a teenager who joins Tecumseh in the battle to regain the Native American homelands between the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers in our early American history. Sixteen-year-old Billy is the son of an Irish military man and a Mohawk Indian, and a bright student at a Jesuit boarding school where he is fluent in several languages – including many Indian tongues. When he learns that the Americans are planning to take more and more of the wild and beautiful frontier that the Native Americas call home, he cannot passively stand by. He must join the great Tecumseh in uniting the Indian tribes to fight for their homeland. Young readers will learn much about a fascinating period in history, and of an early Native American hero whose name means "The Panther Passing Across."</p> <p>Nichole Snyder Orlando, Florida</p>

Three Clams and an Oyster by Randy Powell
Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2001, 216 pp., \$16.00

Friendship/Young Males
ISBN: 0-374-37526-7

High school juniors Flint, Beaterson, Deshutsis, and Cade have been best friends since grade school. They have grown into a life of familiarity and routine, one without risks and trying new things. Yet, as they enter another season of four-on-four football, they encounter something new: they are repeatedly let down by their fourth member, Cade, who would rather party than practice.

In order to move forward in their flag football success, this team of friends is forced to make a decision between staying in their comfort zone of old friends, and opening a door to someone new. Should they go with guys who are talented that they do not like, or should they pick someone who is natural athlete, but who happens to be a girl? Eventually, they decide on the girl and with this, they learn to test the mettle of their true convictions. On their road to coping with the challenges of their friendship, they discover the power that their friendship truly has.

With a keen sense of style and use of realistic young adult language, *Three Clams and an Oyster* is a glimpse into the life of a group of long-time young friends who are faced with realizing that change is inevitable. And on their road to coping with the challenges of their friendship, they discover the power that their friendship truly has.

Kelly Strecker
Orlando, Florida

Moonpie and Ivy by Barbara O'Connor
Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2001, 160 pp., \$ 16.00

Abandonment/Family Relationships
ISBN: 0-374-35059-0

Living in a single parent home, and not having the ideal relationship with her mother, twelve-year old Pearl must contend with a whole host of adult issues at a very early age. One day, her mother decides to leave her during the summer with her Aunt Ivy in rural Georgia, who to make matters worse, is a complete and total stranger to young Pearl. Suddenly, Pearl must learn to adjust to this new person, and above all, cope with the feelings that her life, as she knows it, is over. Nevertheless, Pearl puts her best foot forward, and challenges herself to overcome her most difficult and trying circumstances.

As the sweltering summer progresses, Pearl grows to appreciate Aunt Ivy and her odd-looking neighbor, eleven-year-old Moonpie. And through them both, she learns stories about her mother's past and her southern roots.

Being abandoned by a parent, and not knowing where you belong in society are issues Pearl shares with many young adolescents today. Using creative language and a richly written narrative, author Barbara O'Connor makes this a most pleasant and worthwhile read for youngsters coping with their own family problems and concerns. This is excellent book to discuss the dynamics of interpersonal relationships.

Cyndi Atkinson
Orlando, Florida

Labyrinth by John Herman
Philomel Books, 2001, 188 pp.,

Historical/Mythological Fiction/Horror
ISBN: 0-399-23571-X

Labyrinth is the story of young Gregory Levi, who is having difficulty in coming-to-terms with his father's suicide. Desperate and crazed, Gregory escapes into delirium and denial, which pushes him to become a roguish and rebellious teen, struggling to comprehend the meaning of life, death, and forgiveness.

In his dreams, Gregory confronts his demons with a mythological Minotaur, but during his waking hours, Gregory skips school, breaks into houses, and turns to a life of crime. As the novel progresses, Gregory's nightmares and waking life begin to mesh, and soon he splinters into a thousand self-reflecting pieces.

The intriguing qualities of *Labyrinth* are the blend of ancient history with myth, and the modernization of these two important elements of storytelling for the young, contemporary reader. Moreover, the author sprinkles these elements with a pinch of horror and suspense to make a veritable nail-biting story come alive with dread and death. The horrific, bloody scenes in this story add the perfect gory flavor that will mucilage the young reader's interests until the very end. Also, the story abounds in sassy sarcasm, and raw vernacular that are not gratuitous, but necessary for making believable situations, and plausible characters.

Robert C. Vickery
Orlando, Florida

Wild Man Island by Will Hobbs
HarperCollins, 2002, 184 pp., \$15.95

Adventure/Survival
ISBN 0-688017473-6

Fourteen-year-old Andy Galloway is with his mother on a sea kayak off the coast of Alaska. But Andy is on a mission. He leaves by himself on a personal pilgrimage to the site of his archeologist father's death. His planned escape, though, falls apart, when disaster strikes, and Andy finds himself marooned on Admiralty Island. He soon discovers that he is not alone, but is being observed by a "wild man" living on the island, hoping to avoid detection. This adventure is driven by secrets only the wild man – who befriends Andy – knows, and others that Andy discovers about the origin of the first Americans and when they arrived.

Consistent with Hobbs' other Alaska and Northwest Territory stories, readers ages 10 and up will find this novel exciting to read, and educational due to the true historical background that provides the context for the fictional narrative. I highly recommend it.

Edgar H. Thompson
Emory, Virginia

<p><i>Hush</i> by Jacqueline Woodson G. P. Putnam's Sons, 2002, 180 pp., \$15.99</p> <p>Family/Cultural Differences ISBN: 0-399-23144-5</p> <p>When thirteen-year-old Toswiah Green's father testifies against two police officers who murdered an innocent African-American teenager, her life is completely changed. Along with her family, Toswiah must seek refuge in the federal witness protection program. As a result, they must leave behind extended family, friends, and their own identities.</p> <p>As Toswiah struggles with accepting life as her new identity, she watches her father deteriorate mentally, her mother become absorbed in religion, and her sister plot to desert the family. Adolescent Toswiah, now Evie, copes as best as she can, taking up track and field in school, and trying to fathom who she is, and who she is becoming. By the end of the novel, Toswiah manages to move forward with her life as her newly formed identity, Evie Thomas, and leave her past behind her. Once again, Woodson, one of the best creators of characters in YA fiction, tackles difficult issues like racial profiling, police brutality and racism with sheer-eyed clarity and intensity.</p> <p>KaaVonia Hinton-Johnson Columbus, Ohio</p>	<p><i>Deep Doo-Doo and the Mysterious E-Mail</i> by Michael Delaney Dutton, 2001, 148 pp., \$15.99</p> <p>Mystery/Young Readers ISBN: 0-525-46530-8</p> <p>Sixth-grade inventor Pete, and his writer friend eleven-year-old gadget guru Bennett return in this follow-up to the adventures of <i>Deep Doo-Doo</i>. A pumpkin is discovered on top of the flagpole in front of the town hall, and the boys post this late-breaking news story on their Web site. The questions remain, though: Who put it there, and why?</p> <p>The young detectives Pete and Bennett investigate, thinking they have their culprit, but are scooped by Elizabeth, the editor of the school newspaper. Meanwhile, Bennett receives mysterious bad poetry in his e-mail. Eventually, the boys learn that all these strange comings and goings are linked to a hotly contested mayoral race, and find themselves in the midst of a storm of political chicanery.</p> <p>This is an enjoyable, but mostly predictable, easy reader mystery. Young adolescents will enjoy the fast-paced cyber-sleuthing plot. This is a good story, particularly for reluctant readers, but teachers should be cautioned – the young age of the protagonists Pete and Bennett, will probably limit the audience to middle school youngsters.</p> <p>Ed Sullivan Oak Ridge, Tennessee</p>
<p><i>Finn, A Novel</i> by Matthew Olshan Bancroft Press, 2001, 188 pp., \$11.59</p> <p>Child Abuse/Family Relationships ISBN: 1-890-862- 142</p> <p>With the help of her grandparents, teenager Chloe has left her violent childhood behind and gotten a new start. But when her stepfather and abusive mother reappear, Chloe decides to run away for good—accompanied by her Silvia, her grandparents' pregnant Hispanic maid. Traveling through slums and suburbs, Chloe encounters a host of people from all walks of life, who reveal to her that people, places, and experiences are not always what they appear.</p> <p>This story is a clever, affectionate homage to Mark Twain. Like Huckleberry Finn, Chloe is awakened to injustice and hypocrisy, but also finds hope in good-hearted people, and their ability to connect with others. Students familiar with <i>The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn</i> will appreciate the many parallels this novel has to the classic. One disappointing drawback, though, is Olshan's tendency to rely upon ethnic, racial, and religious stereotypes in depicting some of the characters Chloe encounters. Nonetheless, the spirited, resourceful, observant, and witty Chloe is a heroine who will keep readers engaged and interested.</p> <p>Ed Sullivan Oak Ridge, Tennessee</p>	<p><i>Echo</i> by Francesca Lia Block HarperCollins, 2001, 215 pp., \$14.00</p> <p>Searching for Identity ISBN: 0-06-028127-8</p> <p>Young Echo wants to be noticed, to be appreciated, to be touched, and unconditionally accepted. Above all, she wants to find her place in the world. In Francesa Lia Block's latest novel, <i>Echo</i>, human longings are expressed as the essence of adolescence, and like the title character, they echo throughout the book.</p> <p>Each chapter of this compelling tale of Echo's search for herself is a story in and of itself. It is told either through Echo's own eyes, or the eyes of those who deeply affect her. Infused with a magical quality that blurs the line between reality and fantasy, Block's writing delivers detailed sensory descriptions that propel the reader on Echo's journey toward discovering who she really is. Often, though, that journey is muddled because the story line jumps back and forth in time, place, and setting, leaving the reader to figure out who is talking about what and when.</p> <p>Still, readers who enjoy Block's fantastical journeys through time and space, will enjoy this life affirming tale of hope, love and belief in oneself.</p> <p>Julie Perdue Columbus, Ohio</p>

Journey to the River Sea by Eva Ibbotson
Dutton Children's Book, 2001, 336 pp., \$ 17.99

Adventure/Orphans
ISBN: 0-525-46739-4

Journey to the River Sea is similar to the Harry Potter series, but without the sorcery. There is an "every girl" orphan treated poorly by her relatives, a hero's quest, a case of mistaken identity, sly British humor, and a wild journey down the Amazon.

It is 1910, and young Maia has been living in a British boarding school in London ever since her parents' accidental death on an archeological dig. Although she is fairly happy at school, Maia longs for adventure. Unexpectedly, adventure arrives when distant relatives of young Maia request her presence on their rubber plantation in Brazil. Accompanied by a governess, Maia ventures forth to live with her Brazilian relatives, but along the way, discovers that her relatives are more interested in Maia's inherited fortune than in Maia herself.

As it turns out, Maia is able to escape the wrath of her greedy relatives through the help of new found friends, and her strongest ally, her governess. Together, they outwit the relatives, and live another day to embark on still more journeys to see the world. This is a wonderful adventure tale with the added advantage of a female protagonist.

Cindi Carey
Lacey, Washington

It's Love We Don't Understand by Bart Moeyear
Front Street, 2002, 127 pp., \$15.95

Family Relationships
ISBN: 1-886910-71-5

It's Love We Don't Understand is the bittersweet story of an unconventional family and its inherent struggles. In three separate scenes of their family life, a fifteen-year-old girl describes the sad, crazed and troubled relationships between herself and her siblings, and their self-absorbed, neglectful and often absent mother. Alternating between love and hate, these three stories tell pieces of the young girl's life in a single day, depicting the myriad of difficult family problems that engulf her, and how despite all, she manages to overcome life's obstacles with humor, grace, and resignation.

The central theme of all three short stories is how the subtle thread of love intertwines itself through a young girl's life, involving every detail of her being, and helping to shape her character, and ultimately, her destiny. The author's first language is Flemish, and all three of his books, *Bare Hands* (1998), *Hornet's Nest* (2000), and now, *It's Love We Don't Understand* (2002) have all been translated into English. Teenagers struggling with their own growing pains and boorish, unresponsive adults will relish a look into this unfortunate, yet revealing story of family dynamics.

Jeffrey Kaplan
Orlando, Florida

What My Mother Doesn't Know by Sonya Sones
Simon and Schuster, 2001, 259 pp., \$17.00

Romance/Poetry
ISBN: 0-689-84114-0

What My Mother Doesn't Know is a novel written in verse that reads like a journal. Sophie is a typical 15-year-old girl. She worries about school and likes to hang out with her friends, and much of her energy is devoted to boys. As the story begins, she has broken up with Lou, and is about to go out with Dylan. Then, she meets Chaz while chatting on-line, but quickly becomes disgusted with his perverted remarks. At a Halloween dance, Sophie is swept off her feet by a masked stranger never reveals his true identity. To be sure, Sophie is confused.

But Sophie is not as confused as her mother is. Sophie's mom is a stay-at-home mother who cooks, cleans, and watches soap operas. The trouble is that she is moody, and when her feelings are hurt, she retreats to the basement for days on end. Unfortunately, Sophie's dad is away on frequent business trips, leaving Sophie to cope with the mother whom she cannot reach. Restless, she longs for a stable relationship with someone she can completely trust. By chance, at an art museum in her hometown of Boston, Sophie meets just such a boy, Murphy, who proves to be her soulmate in love and conversation.

What Sophie's "mother doesn't know" is what Sophie learns on her own in this quirky, yet endearing teen romance: that good, lasting, important relationships must be built on mutual understandings.

Cindy Carey
Lacey, Washington

Attaching in Adoption: Practical Tools for Today's Parents
by Deborah Gra
Perspective Press, 2002, 392 pp., \$24.95

Adoption
ISBN: 0-944934-293

As a psychologist who works with parents of adoptive children, I found this non-fiction book on the sum and substance behind the rule and regulations of today's adoption process to be particularly affective. And often in adoption, the toughest issue is "proper attachment," – or the matching of a child with adoptive parents.

Along with smart explanations of such challenges as self-esteem, childhood, grief, and limit-testing, this good book contains an abundant of resources on attachment-related situations. Included are personal vignettes of children and their adoptive families, guaranteed to convince kids of all backgrounds that their stories of coming into new adoptive families are not new or unique.

Attaching in Adoption zeroes in on children of special needs, adoptive foster families, adopting older parents, and children and parents of many cultures. This book is straightforward, easy to read, and perfect for youngsters and counselors wanting reaffirmation that their lives are similar to many others.

Paula Kaplan-Reiss
East Brunswick, New Jersey

Tourette Syndrome (Twenty-First Century Medical Library)
by Marlene Targ Brill
Twenty First Century Books, 2002, 112 pp., \$24.90.

Tourette
ISBN: 0-76132-1012

Tourette Syndrome is a disease that few know about yet from which many suffer. This volume, one of a series of excellent books published by the nonfiction house, Twenty First Century Books, is an excellent introduction for both lay and expert readers about this often misunderstood, yet common physical condition.

Scientists say that 1 in 2,000 people are often inflicted with this compelling physical phenomena which results in uncontrollable range motor ticks ranging from the simple (intermittent eye and finger movements) to the complex (persistent involuntary leg, arm, and head twitching). Solid facts and captivating vignettes fill this slim, accessible volume of information about this disease that can often make life miserable for its unsuspecting victims. Moreover, proper medical, behavioral, and dietary treatment (all aimed at management, not cure), are thoroughly reviewed with the hope of helping those in need.

Young people who have this syndrome will find comfort in the case studies that depict lives, that are undoubtedly, similar to their own. A valuable resource for all interested.

Mary Little
Daytona Beach, Florida

Please see the Note from the Editor, Page 3, for information on how pre-service and in-service teachers and media specialists in your college or university program can become guest reviewers in an issue of the Clip and File section of *The ALAN Review*!

The Urban Experience in Recent Young Adult Novels

Sandra Hughes-Hassell and Sandy L. Guild

The year 1967 is often recognized as the birth of new realism in young adult literature (Donelson and Nilsen 1997). Two novels were particularly noteworthy that year: S.E. Hinton's *The Outsiders* and Robert Lipsyte's *The Contender*. Both novels presented the life of urban youth—a population that had been ignored in young adult literature to that point. Hinton and Lipsyte understood that urban youth, just like other adolescents, want to see their world represented in literature. Both realistically depicted the lives of urban teens who instead of living in “idyllic and pleasant suburban homes,” grew up in harsh and difficult places (Donelson and Nilsen 1997, 86). Hinton introduced us to the hostility and violence that often exists between social classes, and Lipsyte told us about Alfred Brooks, an African American teen who hoped to use boxing as his ticket out of the slums.

Today there are over 34 million teens living in urban areas and, just like the teens of 1967, these young adults want, and need, to see their lives represented in the literature they read. In a recent YALSA book discussion, a librarian from an urban community posted a message to the listserv asking for books that depict “life in the hood.” A 13-year-old African American male who lived in her library’s community had requested books about “teens just like him.” Teachers too recognize the need for realistic fiction about urban youth. In an article in the *New Progressive*, Rodney D. Smith, an English teacher in California, tells readers about how reading *The House on Mango Street* affected one of his students. Consuella, a gangbanger, paid very little attention in English class, often choosing to skip class altogether. Her behavior began to change, however, when Smith began to read aloud Cisneros’s book. Consuella’s attendance improved and she pleaded with Smith to extend reading aloud beyond its allotted time (Smith 1995). At the core of Consuella’s changed behaviors, just as in the case of the young urban library patron who prompted the listserv question, was the need to ‘put herself into the book,’—to read about a childhood and a neighborhood that could have been her own. Consuella describes it this way: “Sometimes I think back when we read this book [*The House on Mango Street*] and picture me being the main character...It is like, here is this Latino girl writing a book that I really like. I never have gotten into a book like I do now. And that is the truth” (Smith 1995, 38).

Despite the ground-breaking work of Hinton and Lipsyte, only a handful of young adult novels set in urban areas are published each year.

Despite the ground-breaking work of Hinton and Lipsyte, only a handful of young adult novels set in urban areas are published each year. A recent study found that between 1990 and 1999, only 20 novels depicting the lives of urban minority youth were published and reviewed positively in standard selection tools (Guild and Hughes-Hassell 2001). As Walter Dean Myers observed in his acceptance speech for the 2000 Michael Printz award, the lives of inner-city adolescents remain all but absent from the literature (Myers 2000).

While the number of books written about urban youth is indeed small, the outstanding young adult novels that have been published demonstrate a genuine sensitivity toward the lives of urban youth living in the United States. Urban teens can see themselves in the pages of these books. They can hear the language of their neighborhoods. They can feel what the characters feel as they interact with their friends and family. And they can see teens like them

struggling with the same issues they must cope with and perhaps learn from the decisions that the characters make.

Why do these books speak to urban teens? What characteristics do they share? In this article, we will use 14 novels to illustrate nine characteristics we believe exemplify the best young adult novels written about urban youth. The novels, published between 1990-1999, were chosen because in their characters, their settings, and the problems that drive their plots, they respond honestly and with understanding to the needs of urban teens to read about people “just like” them.

Common Characteristics

Characteristic 1: The racial and ethnic make up of the urban communities varies.

Recent census data show that America’s inner cities have a more racially diverse mix of minority population groups living in close proximity to each other than can be observed in either suburban or rural populations. Within the neighborhoods of these inner cities, however, the mix of population groups varies widely. The best young adult literature about urban youth reflects this reality. It shows young adults living in ethnically and racially diverse neighborhoods, as well as in more ethnically homogeneous communities of inner cities across the United States.

In *From the Notebooks of Melanin Sun*, Melanin describes his Brooklyn neighborhood as “a world of first generation West Indian and Puerto Rican people. A world of akee and pasteles, of salsa and calypso” (Woodson 1995, 9). Slam’s Harlem neighborhood, in *Slam!*, is also diverse—an ethnic blend of African Americans, Arabs, and West Indians. In contrast, *Forged by Fire* is set in a mostly African American community in Cincinnati, Ohio. Danny, in *Shadow of the Dragon*, too, lives in a homogeneous neighborhood. He and his family live in an Asian community in Houston. Manny (*Parrot in the Oven*), César (*Crashboomlove*), and Eddie in (*Buried Onions*) live in predominantly Mexican American neighborhoods in Southern California, while *Babylon Boyz* portrays a largely African American neighborhood in East Oakland. For Rania (*The White Horse*), the streets of the city are her home. Homeless since the age of fourteen, Rania sleeps in laundromats, on street corners, in shelters, or when she has pan-handled or stolen enough money, in hotel rooms.

Characteristic 2: A broad range of socioeconomic levels is represented.

The lives of urban youth are not monolithic. Urban adolescents grow up in middle class neighborhoods, ghettos, barrios, and upper class sections of the city. They live in two-parent and single-parent homes. Some live alone or with relatives while others live in foster care or rely on friends for a place to live. Their parents are doctors, lawyers, ministers, and storeowners, as well as persons who are unemployed or living on welfare. The best literature about urban youth portrays the variety of lifestyles found in America’s large metropolitan cities.

In *Fast Talk on a Slow Track* Denzel’s family lives in a Tudor house in the Addelsleigh Park area of New York City—home to “local politicians and celebrities” (Williams-Garcia 1991, 13). In *If You Come Softly*, Miah’s father is a famous movie director and his mother is a recognized writer, both featured on the cover of prominent national magazines. In contrast, Jolly, in *Make Lemonade*, is a 17-year-old unwed single mother living in the ghetto. She grew up in a foster home, dropped out of high school and is having difficulty supporting her two children. Kata, in *Party Girl*, lives with her alcoholic mother and her “gabacho” boyfriends in a poor neighborhood in Southern California. Manny, in *Parrot in the Oven*, lives in an urban project in which most of his neighbors receive welfare. Though Manny’s family struggles and would clearly qualify for welfare, his parents refuse to make application out of a sense of pride: “But you know how the Welfare is...A social worker comes over acting like we’re criminals. Then the whole neighborhood knows we’re getting Welfare...Besides, I have never done anything in my whole life that would make me beg” (Martinez 1996, 24-25).

Characteristic 3: Perceptive authors capture the language of modern urban youth.

The language of urban youth varies, and the best books about urban youth reflect this diversity. Perceptive authors capture the language of modern day American youth living in the city—youth whose speech may include standard English, Black English vernacular, hip-hop, the language of their parents or grandparents (i.e. Spanish, Vietnamese, etc) and/

or slang associated with the drug culture. By incorporating the realistic speech patterns of the teens about whom they are writing, the authors create novels that have a ring of authenticity and familiarity that is important to their intended audience.

Babylon Boyz, for example, takes place in East Oakland in a neighborhood the characters describe as “a war zone after dark” (Mowry 1996, 50-51). The characters’ speech reflects the harshness of the neighborhood and can be described as Black English vernacular commingled with drug culture slang: “The fat boy smirked. ‘Y’all sellin’ your soul for a buzz?’ Then he saw Dante’s scowl. “Okay. Long’s you ain’t gonna try an’ cap me again” (Mowry 1997, 118). In this example, buzz is slang for “high” and “cap” for shoot. Similarly, in *The White Horse*, Rania’s speech and the speech of the other homeless teens is strewn with drug slang and profanity: “You were gonna leave me, you asshole, you junkie” (Grant 1998, 45).

Parrot in the Oven, *Crashboomlove* and *Buried Onions* are set in the barrio. In Manny’s, César’s, and Eddie’s neighborhoods, Spanish and English coexist: “‘Que curiosos se miraban,’ she said. ‘How curious they looked’” (Martinez 1996, 83.). The dialogue in *Shadow of the Dragon* reflects the Vietnamese character of Danny’s neighborhood and his home: “You must be very good and courteous so the Kitchen God, Ong Tao, will give a good report to the Jade Emperor in Heaven” (Garden 1993, 116). In *From the Notebooks of Melanin Sun*, Melanin’s mother attends law school and standard English is spoken in their home. On the streets of his neighborhood, however, Melanin experiences a rich mixture of Black English, West Indian, Spanish, and Southern slang, so much, in fact, that Melanin refers to himself as “bilingual” (Woodson 1995, 9).

Characteristic 4: The best young adult books about urban adolescents convey a strong sense of community.

To use Rudine Sims Bishop’s term, there is a “we-ness” evident in the best young adult novels about urban teens (Sims Bishop 1991, 38). Sometimes the community is the neighborhood, sometimes it is a group of friends, and at other times, it is the broader ethnic or racial group—African American, Asian American, or Latino American.

In *Make Lemonade* the community is the neighborhood. LaVaughn learns from her mother that “you can’t trust the city to keep the bad elements out”; instead you have to rely on your neighbors. LaVaughn’s mother, captain of the Tenant Council, works to keep the neighborhood safe. She and the other members of the community write letters to the mayor, attend city council meetings, and patrol the neighborhood: “I get off the bus & I walk the half-block and the Watchdog lady patrolling the street nods her head at me...The Watchdog lady today is a tough one, she teaches the self defense class for girls only” (Wolff 1993, 15).

In *Babylon Boyz* the community is a group of friends who form an alternative family of sorts. Dante, Pook, and Wyatt have been friends since childhood: “I knowed you bruthas all my life! That make us homeys” (Mowry 1997, 38). They take care of each other physically, emotionally, and spiritually. They also take in other teens, like Jinx who is addicted to crack and Radgi who is homeless, providing them with a safe place to sleep, food, and friendship.

For Gayle, in *Like Sisters on the Homefront*, the commu-

nity is the broader African American ethnic community. When Gayle is sent to live with her uncle and his family in Georgia, she initially resists her family's preoccupation with family history. It is only after she spends time caring for her frail grandmother, Miss Great, that she begins to understand the history of her family, from Africa through slavery to freedom, always holding onto their faith. When Miss Great makes her the next keeper of the family's oral history, the Telling, Gayle finally understands her responsibility to honor the struggles of those ancestors and the power of their faith.

Characteristic 5: The dangers of inner-city life are realistically depicted.

Authors of the best literature about urban youth do not shy away from the dangers many urban adolescents face, specifically violence, drug addiction, drug dealing, and prejudice. Instead, they incorporate these harsh details into their stories as a way of authenticating the experiences of numerous inner-city youth.

Violence can touch the lives of urban adolescents in a number of ways. Some urban adolescents experience the horrors of child abuse and domestic violence. In *Forged by Fire*, Gerald becomes the protector of Angel, his step-sister, when his stepfather beats, then sexually abuses her. Gerald must use his wits to both successfully intervene and to convince Angel that he can help her. In *Run for Your Life*, Kisha's father, tormented by his inability to find a job after the gas station at which he worked closed down, shoots his wife in the leg, the conclusion of a bitter argument about his unemployment and his wife's assumption of the provider role in the family. Kisha, unable to face the pain of what has happened, leaves home to live with one of her teachers.

Other urban adolescents experience the consequences of gang warfare. Several novels provide a vivid look at gangs. *Party Girl*, set in Southern California, begins with the funeral of Ana, a fourteen-year old girl, killed by an enemy gang member. Kata, Ana's best friend, describes Ana's death this way:

The back window rolled down, and a sawed-off shotgun pointed at us from a backseat. The shadowy face over the gun yelled an enemy gang name in a low, growling voice...I sprang from behind the Dodge as angry white fire split the night. Ana and I rolled to the ground with gunfire spraying over us, hitting trees, chipping the cement curb, and shattering car windows...Ana's blood covered my blouse. Tiny rivulets streamed down my arms and legs (Ewing 1998, 17-19).

Eddie and Danny, in *Buried Onions* and *Shadow of the Dragon*, respectively, also experience firsthand the consequences of gang violence. Both lose their cousins to gang warfare: Eddie's cousin Jesús, is stabbed; Danny's cousin

Sang Le is brutally beaten by members of a white supremacist gang.

In *If You Come Softly*, Jacqueline Woodson reminds readers that urban victims of violence are often innocent casualties in the wrong place at the wrong time. Miah, a well-to-do African American adolescent, meets with the realities of gun violence, despite the privileged life he leads. Though his father has warned him about the need to comply immediately with police commands, Miah, innocent and lost in his thoughts, fails to respond to a police command. The police fire at him and kill him, a mortal consequence of his failure to stay alert in a threatening, though familiar, environment.

Another threat to the safety of urban teens is the prevalence of drug use and drug dealing. In some urban neighborhoods, drug-dealing activities circumscribe the daily lives of teens, forcing them to plan their movements in the neighborhood to avoid street corners designated for dealing, and to make an uneasy peace with those who control the trade. In *Run for Your Life*, Natonia lives too close to Filbert Street, the main drug dealing thoroughfare, to be able to avoid it.

In this scene, she instructs a friend on the protocol of walking down Filbert, after having just observed a drug deal:

'Don't point,' Natonia whispered nervously. 'Don't ever point.' 'Forgot,' I said. 'You can't afford to forget. They'd just as soon kill you as look at you,' Natonia warned. 'The only people who point at them are pointing them out to someone who has no business knowing who they are and what they're doing.' (Levy 1996, 14)

The best young adult novels about urban youth also provide a strong and clear model of decision-

making about drug use without being heavy-handed. In *Slam!*, for example, Slam refuses to believe that his best friend is dealing crack: "Anyway, crack was the wrong road and anybody that lived in the hood knew where that was at, you don't have to teach fish to deal with water." (Myers 1996, 74). In *Babylon Boyz*, the boys refer to Air Torch, the local dealer, as a "reptile" (Mowry 1996, 16) and discuss dealing in terms of how it affects the neighborhood—"what sista or brutha you wanna burn" (78). Darren, the track coach in *Run for Your Life*, requires the girls stay clean of drugs, not get pregnant, and do well in school in order to participate on the team. In *The White Horse*, the imagery of cocaine as "a pet" a "white horse ballooned to carousel-size with staring eyes and a frozen mane," combined with the death of Rania's boyfriend and the abuse Raina suffers at the hands of her addict mother, send a clear message: drug use is a dead end street (Grant 1998, 216).

Prejudice is a subtle danger, but nonetheless a real danger, that threatens the well being of many urban adolescents. The best books show adolescents struggling with prejudice, especially stereotyping and racism. As Slam explains, "[Stereotyping] is what happened to brothers in the hood. People check us out and ran down who we was without even seriously checking us out" (Myers 1996, 134). In *Shadow of a*

Dragon, a local storeowner will not give Danny's cousin, Sang Le, a job because someone told him Sang Le was a Vietcong. In *If You Come Softly*, when Miah transfers to an exclusive private school in Manhattan, the other students think he is on scholarship and administrators place him in remedial classes, though his school record indicates no need for remediation. César, in *Crashboomlove*, becomes more and more marginalized because of the reactions his classmates have to his language and cultural differences.

The best books also work to counteract stereotypes of urban teens by creating characters from various economic and social backgrounds who in the details of their lives challenge social expectations borne of stereotype: teens like LaVaughn, in *Make Lemonade*, who are successful in school and plan to attend college, teens like Slam, in *Slam!*, who understand and choose to avoid the dangers of drug use, teens like Kata in *Party Girl* who leave gang life behind, and teens like Gerald in *Forged by Fire* who sacrifice their own safety to care for their families.

Characteristic 6: One theme shared across books written about urban youth is a sense of survival, both physical and psychological.

Although the best young adult novels about urban teens do not always end "happily," they do provide urban teens with a sense of survival, both physical and psychological. In *Forged by Fire*, Gerald and Angel survive a number of ordeals by relying on their constant love and caring for one another. In *Make Lemonade*, Jolly, with LaVaughn's encouragement, goes back to school where she learns skills that change her life and the lives of her children. Even in *Buried Onions*, which seems at times to be an overwhelmingly bleak portrayal of the consequences of urban poverty and violence, Eddie decides to join the Navy at the end of the novel, suggesting that perhaps Eddie will finally be able to leave his bad-luck and sense of despair behind in Fresno.

The unmistakable message in all of these books is that creating a future depends on the ability to first see that choices do exist in life, and then to make the tough ones. Dante, in *Babylon Boyz*, says it best: "Life won't be easy. Maybe it never would. But there were choices, and it was better when you had friends to help you make the right ones. There was a way out of Babylon, but you had to have perspectives to find it" (Mowry 1997, 188).

Characteristic 7: Young adult novels about urban youth deal with issues of importance to all teens.

One of the key characteristics of the best young adult novels about urban youth is their appeal to all teens, not just urban teens. While the novels are set in inner cities, the issues the teens struggle with are familiar to all teens: coming of age, identity development, the need to belong, friendship, sexual identity and curiosity, relationships with parents and other family members, death, drugs and alcohol, fear of failure, school, and teenage pregnancy, just to name a few. As Melanin says: "The world turns upside-down when you are thirteen-going-on fourteen. I want to ask someone right

now—when will it right itself again" (Johnson 1995, 6). The best books address that "upside-down" feeling teens occasionally experience during adolescence.

Parrot in the Oven, *Slam!*, *From the Notebooks of Melanin Sun*, and *Shadow of the Dragon* are coming of age stories. *Like Sisters on the Homefront* and *Make Lemonade* both deal with teenage parenting. The themes of independence, value of education, and love of family are at their core. *Fast Talk on a Slow Track* deals with fear of failure and fear of change. *Forged by Fire* and *Run for Your Life* explore the horrors of domestic violence and its impact on families. *The White Horse* looks at teenage homelessness and drug addiction. *Crashboomlove* and *Buried Onions* focus on isolation and the impact it can have on a teenager's self-esteem. *Babylon Boyz* and *If You Come Slowly* are ultimately stories about family, friendship, and love. And *Party Girl* is about loss, betrayal, and survival.

Characteristic 8: Celebration of family is an important feature of young adult literature about urban youth.

Although identification shifts from parents to the peer group during adolescence, family relationships are still important to most teens (Elkind 1998). The best books for urban young adults portray teens struggling to achieve independence from adults, but at the same time, remaining cognizant of the significance of family in their lives.

In *Shadow of the Dragon*, for example, though Danny yearns to escape his responsibilities as Anh-hai, the eldest son, when his girlfriend's skinhead brother kills his cousin, Danny reports him to the police:

I did remember something, sir. I remembered that the blood of a dragon flows through my veins. Just as it flowed through my cousin's veins. An honorable, brave dragon that will do anything for his family, no matter what the cost. Yes, I did remember something after all, officer. I remembered who I am. (Garland 1993, 303)

Manny, in *Parrot in the Oven*, joins the Callaway Projects gang in order to fit in with his peers. When one gang member steals an elderly woman's purse, however, Manny discovers that he doesn't belong in that world: "In that instant of trying to call out to Eddie, everything changed. It was like I'd finally seen my own face and recognized myself; recognized who I really should be" (Martinez 1996, 210). In that moment, Manny realizes that his place is at home with "the squiggly TV, the lumpy cherub angels on the frame of the painting, the glass top coffee table" and his sisters sleeping on the couch (Martinez 1996, 215).

In *The White Horse*, Rania, a homeless child and new mother struggles valiantly to 'create' a family for herself and her new daughter, finally allowing herself to trust a teacher who adopts both her and her daughter. This new family structure lets an adult care for her as a daughter, for the first time in her life.

Even in *Babylon Boyz* where the primary focus is on the alternative family the boys have created, Dante's father and Wyatt's mother provide stability and serve as positive role models for the boys and their friends. Dante expresses love

The best young adult novels about urban youth also provide a strong and clear model of decision-making about drug use without being heavy-handed.

and admiration for his father who works on a towboat. The boys think "Wyatt's mom cool" (187). When Radgi gives birth, it is Wyatt's mother and Dante's dad who they depend on to "figure out what to do" (187).

Characteristic 9: Much of the literature about urban young adults incorporates some aspect of cultural history or heritage and conveys a feeling of ethnic pride and identity.

Much of the literature about urban young adults features African American, Asian American, and Latino American teens. Cultural heritage and ethnic pride is one theme shared across the best books. In *Shadow of the Dragon*, Garland weaves authentic details about Vietnamese lore and customs into the story. In *Like Sisters on the Homefront*, there is a strong sense of racial pride in the heritage and oral traditions of Gayle's Georgia relatives. Manny's grandmother and father too tell stories—stories about life in Mexico in *Parrot in the Oven*.

Ethnic pride and identity are often revealed in subtle ways. In *Run for Your Life*, for example, Kisha demonstrates an appreciation for the rich hues of skin color as she evaluates the new track coach's appearance: "I like the way he looks. Nice hair, clipped real short, big full lips. And real chocolate skin, like my dad's" (Levy 1996, p. 21). Miah, in *If You Come Softly*, describes feeling "warm inside his skin, protected," (Woodson 1998, 5) and in *Buried Onions* and *Parrot in the Oven* there are references to traditional Mexican foods.

Conclusion

It is clear that young adult literature is able to provide the urban adolescent reader with protagonists "just like him." But the best of these books offer much more. Books like those we have considered in this article provide the teen reader with vicarious experiences in the responsibilities of growing independence, sympathetic recognition of the challenges of urban experience, reaffirmation of the significance of cultural, ethnic and individual differences, and a realistic sense of optimism about the future.

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Facilitating Student Connections to Judith Ortiz Cofer's *The Line of the Sun* and Esmeralda Santiago's *Almost a Woman*

Denise E. Agosto

Introduction

Both Judith Ortiz Cofer's *The Line of the Sun: A Novel* (1989) and Esmeralda Santiago's *Almost a Woman* (1998) tell the story of a young Puerto Rican girl who moves to the mainland U.S. These texts represent the best in Hispanic fiction for young adult readers. *The Line of the Sun* was nominated for the Pulitzer Prize, and *Almost a Woman* received the prestigious Alex Award from the American Library Association. Both works feature lushly written prose combined with adventurous storytelling.

At first glance it may seem that *The Line of the Sun* and *Almost a Woman* are so deeply embedded in Puerto Rican culture that they lack widespread student appeal and relevance. By leading students to forge personal connections with these books, teachers can broaden their appeal and turn them into springboards for classroom discussions of more universal issues, including the immigrant experience, the process of Americanization, and the role of mothers as guardians of family culture. Methods for facilitating personal connections are discussed below. Suggested discussion questions and essay topics are also offered in relation to each major of the themes discussed.

Windows on the Immigrant Experience

Although Ortiz Cofer's and Santiago's texts employ different genres, both authors tell strikingly similar tales. Ortiz Cofer weaves together fact and fiction, narrative and folklore, to tell the tale of her parents' and grandparents' lives in rural Puerto Rico and her own life in Paterson, New Jersey. She calls her resulting fact-fiction mixture "creative nonfiction" (Bartkevicius 58). Set in the 1940s and 1950s in the small Puerto Rican village of Salud, the first half of *The Line of the Sun* centers on the lives of Marisol's maternal uncle, and the uncle's parents and siblings. The second half of the novel begins shortly after Marisol is born, when she and her mother Ramona have moved to Paterson, New Jersey. There they live in El Building, an urban tenement populated primarily by recent Puerto Rican immigrants. As the

tale continues throughout Marisol's childhood and adolescence in Paterson, Marisol comes both to appreciate her Puerto Rican background and to learn to live in the Caucasian-dominated culture of the mainland.

Santiago's *Almost a Woman* is the second entry in the author's two-volume memoir. It begins after thirteen-year-old Esmeralda, her mother (whom she calls "Mami"), and her siblings have moved to Brooklyn from Puerto Rico. Their father has stayed on the Island, leaving Mami to raise her eight children on her own. The book is as much about

These works center around the emotional struggles involved in the immigration process. Marisol and Esmeralda find themselves torn between the comforting familiarity of their native island culture and the alluring ubiquity of mainland culture.

Esmeralda's entry into womanhood over the next eight years as it is about Mami's struggle to support her family in a foreign, often hostile, culture. In the end, Esmeralda leaves her mother's house to move to Florida with a love interest, recognizing simultaneously that her deep bond to Mami is unbreakable and will endure both physical distance and time.

These works center around the emotional struggles involved in the immigration process. Marisol and Esmeralda find themselves torn between the comforting familiarity of their native island culture and the alluring ubiquity of mainland culture. Both young women are caught between two cultures, the culture of the island that they have left, and the mainstream culture of their new homeland.

Marisol is a typical adolescent, searching for her identity in an exploration complicated by her living "in a state of limbo, halfway between cultures" (Ortiz Cofer 222). Esmeralda, too, is caught between two cultures. She wants to become "Americanized," yet she dreams of returning to the Island. She learns English quickly, but she continues to think in Spanish and to translate her thoughts into English to speak.

If approached effectively, these two texts can serve as windows on the immigrant experience. It can be difficult to teach young adults who have never experienced a move from their homeland to empathize with the emotional turmoil caused by being forced to survive in a foreign culture. But

almost every teen has experienced the feeling of being in between childhood and adulthood as a condition of teenhood. For example, young adults often yearn for the autonomy that adulthood brings, yet they simultaneously long for the relative lack of responsibilities associated with childhood. They may long to have a car of their own, but they may be unprepared to take on the accompanying financial responsibilities.

This simultaneous pull toward adulthood and childhood results in young adulthood as a state of in-between. Teachers can lead their students toward empathy with Marisol's and Esmeralda's living in between cultures by presenting both the immigrant experience and the young adult experience as similar states of emotional turmoil and in-betweenness. **The following discussion questions/essay topics can help students to make this connection with the texts:**

1. To what extent are Marisol's and Esmeralda's experiences as immigrants to the U.S. uniquely theirs? To what extent are they representative of the Puerto Rican immigrant experience? To what extent are they representative of the experiences of other ethnic groups that have immigrated to the U.S.?
2. Did reading *The Line of the Sun* and *Almost a Woman* bring to mind any of your own life experiences? If so, what were they?
3. Both Marisol and Esmeralda find themselves living in between the culture of Puerto Rico and the culture of the United States. Have you ever experienced this feeling of in-betweenness? How and when?
4. As they age during the books, both characters also find themselves living in between childhood and adulthood. How do they change emotionally and intellectually as they age? Are you experiencing any similar changes?

The Americanization Process

By the end of both books, Marisol and Esmeralda have become largely "Americanized." They have learned to speak English, to dress in mainland fashions, to prefer mainland American music to Puerto Rican music, and to play the role of native in a previously unfamiliar culture. Marisol's transition into mainland culture is largely the result of necessity. As her mother fades into a melancholic state, she must step in to lead her family.

Esmeralda's transition is more the result of her desire to become Americanized. After moving to the mainland, she begins to lose her Puerto Rican identity with amazing rapidity. After only two days in Brooklyn, she can already feel the respect and humility she has been taught to hold for her mother slipping away, to be replaced with more typically mainland independence and resolve. Young Esmeralda wants to conform to her image of typical "American" girls, wearing makeup, sipping sodas in malt shops, and going on dates. Yet even though she is eager to join mainland culture, Esmeralda mourns her withdrawal from Puerto Rican culture: "I silently grieved the dissolution of the other me, the Spanish-speaking Puerto Rican girl most at home in a dusty, tropical dirt road" (Santiago 74).

Perhaps the strongest evidence of Esmeralda's eventual Americanization is that although author and narrator Santiago thought and spoke Spanish as she experienced most of the events in *Almost a Woman*, she chose to write her autobiography in English. Similarly, although Ortiz Cofer

thought out the first half of her novel in Spanish in her head, she translated it into English as she wrote because Spanish for her is purely an oral language used only to communicate with family members (Ocasio and Ganey 144).

Again the key to leading students toward empathy with the characters lies in making connections between their life experiences and the Americanization process detailed in the books. Without experiencing it, few people can comprehend the life impact of Americanization. But most teens do understand the power of peer pressure. Translating Esmeralda's longing to go on dates and to wear short skirts into responses to peer pressure can enable students to understand the incredibly strong draw toward American culture that she felt.

Another method of impressing upon students how radically the two young women change within the texts is by encouraging them to imagine themselves similarly changed in a few years. **The following discussion questions and essay topics should lead students down these two paths:**

1. Esmeralda's picture of mainland American culture is that portrayed in the Archie comic books. How accurate is this view?
2. How does Marisol view mainland American culture?
3. How would you characterize mainland American culture?
4. Why did Esmeralda want so badly to be "American?"
5. Have you ever wanted to change your image as badly as Esmeralda wanted to? How? Why did you want to change? Did you change? How?
6. Imagine that it is ten years from now, and you have just completed writing your memoirs...in Chinese (or any other language unknown to you). How would your life have to change between now and then for this to occur? What kinds of experiences would you likely undergo? What kinds of emotions would you likely experience? What aspects of your current life do you think you would miss?

Mothers as Keepers of Family Culture

Understanding the roles of Ramona and Mami is crucial to understanding these books. Leading students to build connections between these two characters and their own mothers (or, for students who do not have mothers, fathers or other guardians) can help them to understand that Ramona and Mami are not merely representatives of Puerto Rican mothers, but of mothers and other caregivers in general.

Both Ramona and Mami play strong roles in their daughters' lives, serving their daughters as preservers and protectors of Puerto Rican culture. Their resistance to mainland culture is in part due to the fact that neither mother moves to the mainland based solely on the desire to do so. Ramona moves because her husband is stationed in New Jersey. Mami moves to seek medical care for her injured son.

Living in El Building, Ramona and her women friends recreate their Island culture, and Ramona rarely strays outside the edges of her transplanted Island world. Ramona and the other El Building women prepare traditional Puerto Rican dishes, wear fashions popular on the Island, listen to Puerto Rican music, tell traditional Puerto Rican folktales, and even hold a spiritualist meeting to ask the dead for help in dealing with their problems, a traditional Puerto Rican reaction to unhappiness and fear. Ramona never leaves

Puerto Rico emotionally, despite living in New Jersey for more than two decades. She is a passive figure who perpetuates Puerto Rican culture in part by avoiding mainland culture, rarely venturing outside of El Building.

As is the case with Ramona, Mami's lack of English is a disadvantage on the mainland, and she must rely on her children to navigate the complicated U.S. government bureaucracy for her. Living in the unfamiliar world of Brooklyn, Mami fears constantly for her children's safety, terrified that algo (something) will happen to her children. That something might be crime, drugs, injury, illness, or moral downfall. Mami raises her children as if they still lived on the Island, believing that a traditional Puerto Rican upbringing can protect them from many of the algos of New York. She struggles to prevent mainland culture from enveloping her children while consciously working to perpetuate Puerto Rican culture among them.

Despite the determination of both mothers to foster Puerto Rican culture in their daughters, both young women eventually become more comfortable in mainland culture than in their native Island culture. After Marisol's family moves out of El Building into a suburban house, Ramona lapses into silence, withdrawing from society into herself. Marisol is forced to assume Ramona's role as household head. This pattern of immigrant daughters pushing their mothers into subordinate positions is common in immigrant narratives (Szadziuk 121), and it appears in both *The Line of the Sun* and *Almost a Woman*.

On the other hand, both mothers do achieve some level of success since neither daughter fully loses her ties to Puerto Rican culture. Marisol knows that she will "always carry [her] Island heritage on [her] back like a snail" (Ortiz Cofer 273). Her Puerto Rican heritage becomes "both a comfort and a burden [that] she must carry everywhere" (Bruce-Novoa 67). At the end of her story, Esmeralda finally comes to understand that if her boyfriend left her, "there would be another man, but there would never, ever be another Mami" (Santiago 310). She realizes that no matter how hard she tries, she cannot sever herself from her maternal heritage, or from the Puerto Rican culture that frames that heritage.

The role of mother as keeper of family culture is not unique to Puerto Rican culture. In many cultures and in many families, it is the mothers who work the hardest to maintain family (including cultural, ethnic and other) traditions. In other families, fathers play a similar role. Teachers can lead students to understand that in working to foster their family cultures and to protect their children from the perceived dangers of a unfamiliar culture, Ramona and Mami act not only as Puerto Ricans, but as mothers acting in the best interests of their children. **The following discussion questions and essay topics can lead students to see the similarities between Ramona's and Mami's perspectives and that of their own mothers, fathers, and other guardians:**

1. In *Almost a Woman*, Jurgen's friend Flip jokes that all women turn into their mothers. In what ways is Esmeralda like Mami? In what ways is Marisol like Ramona? How are the young women different from their mothers?
2. Do Ramona and/or Mami remind you of your own mother? Of your father? Of your guardian? If so, how?
3. In many ways, Ramona and Mami represent Puerto Rico in the eyes of their daughters. What does your own mother, father, or guardian represent to you?
4. What aspects of Puerto Rican culture did Ramona's and Esmeralda's families maintain after they moved to the mainland? What traditions does your family maintain? How are these traditions maintained within your family, and by whom and for what reasons?
5. The fathers in both books are absentee parents. How do their roles as fathers differ from each other? How are they the same? How are they the same or different from your own father's role? From your mother's role? Your guardian's role?
6. Mami feared that "algo" might happen to her children. What was "algo?" How did she try to protect her children? In what ways does your mother, father, or guardian try to protect you? Why?

This simultaneous pull toward adulthood and childhood results in young adulthood as a state of in-between. Teachers can lead their students toward empathy with Marisol's and Esmeralda's living in between cultures by presenting both the immigrant experience and the young adult experience as similar states of emotional turmoil and in-betweenness.

Conclusion

Of course, these two texts are also ideal vehicles for introducing Puerto Rican culture to young adult audiences. To read them is to visit Puerto Rico and selected Puerto Rican neighborhoods on the mainland. But above all, these books serve to express the universal search for identity so fundamental to adolescence. If approached properly in the classroom, both books are sure to fascinate young readers, Hispanic and non-Hispanic alike. The key to using them effectively lies in helping young adults to build connections between the texts and their own life experiences. Hopefully, both books will find places in school classrooms and library collections for many years to come.

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A Tribute to Virginia Hamilton



Author Jane Yolen wrote about Virginia Hamilton: "If there is a Great Spirit in the world of children's books, Virginia is it. She has been a True North to the rest of us, and we are all the better for her having guided us."

Virginia Hamilton, award-winning author of more than 35 books for young readers, died on February 19, 2002, of breast cancer. Ms. Hamilton, wife of poet Arnold Adoff, was the recipient of every major award in her field, and was the only author to ever receive the Newbery Medal, the National Book Award, and the *Boston Globe-Horn Book Award* for one book, her *M.C. Higgins, the Great* (1974). Ms. Hamilton wrote in many genres. Two of her Newbery Honor books, *The Planet of Junior Brown* (1972) and *Sweet Whispers, Brother Rush* (1982) are fiction; the third, *In the Beginning: Creation Stories from Around the World*, is a collection of myths. Two of her most memorable works are the collections of African American folktales, *The People Could Fly* (1985) and *Many Thousand Gone: African Americans from Slavery to Freedom* (1993).

Ms. Hamilton was also the only children's writer

ever to be awarded the MacArthur Fellowship. In addition to the numerous awards for her books, Ms. Hamilton received four honorary doctorates, and taught in the Education Department Graduate School, Queens College, New York, and at The Ohio State University Graduate School. The Virginia Hamilton Conference in Multicultural Literature for Youth was established at Kent University in Ohio, and continues as the oldest annual event of its kind.

The grandchild of former Ohio slaves, Hamilton described her work as "liberation literature." Those who have read it recognize her innovations as a story teller who has, as her Blue Sky Press editor Bonnie Verburg notes, "a fine ear for the sound of oral literature and [a] remarkable ability to capture its essence in written form."

Virginia Hamilton's upcoming novel, *Time Pieces*, will be published by the Blue Sky Press of Scholastic in October, 2002.

Thanks to John Mason, Director of Library and Educational Marketing, Trade Books, Scholastic, for providing us with information for this tribute.

—psc

Monk, Bird, 'Trane, and Miles: Jazz in the English Language Arts Program

Francis E. Kazemek

My mother tells me she dreamed
of John Coltrane, a young Trane
playing his music with such joy
and contained energy and rage
she could not hold back her tears. . . .
(Levine, 1992, p. 63)

'Trane. Jazz. Satchmo. Duke. Lady Day. Bird. Ella. Miles. Taking the A Train. Taking 5. Taking Giant Steps. Taking a ride with Wynton Marsalis on Harriet Tubman's railroad. Taking John Coltrane's saxophone to a fire-bombed church in Alabama and mourning over the dead bodies of children. Taking improvisation to new insights and expressions. Taking poetry: taking Ntozake Shange and Langston Hughes. Taking the music sorrowful and joyful: winter ice on the face and peppered summer on the lips. Taking Jazz. Jazz.

This essay is about jazz and its natural connection to literature and literacy education. It is about an art form that is uniquely American, but can be heard in small clubs far above the arctic circle, in remote regions of Africa, and in cities throughout the world. My primary purpose is to explore why jazz and books about jazz deserve a respected place in the English Language Arts curriculum. Accordingly, I have divided this essay into four main parts. First, I discuss why I believe jazz is important for English Language Arts education. Second, I briefly describe some contemporary literature for young adults that I and others have found to be engaging. Third, I present some general strategies for incorporating the music and literature into the English Language Arts program. And, fourth, I explore in more detail one specific strategy and provide some examples of students' responses.

Why Jazz?

First, although some jazz historians might debate specifics, almost all agree that jazz is *the* uniquely American art form which originated in the southern part of the United States at the beginning of the twentieth century. It is rooted in African-American experiences and their related musical expressions, for example, blues, spirituals, work songs, brass band marches, ragtime tunes, minstrel show music, and West African and West Indian rhythmic patterns and drum music. Moreover, certain European melodic patterns can also be

found in the roots of jazz (Mitchell, 1992).

Although grounded in America and African-American experiences, jazz has spread during the last century beyond nationality, race, and class. This truly American music has been embraced by people around the globe. Thus, for Americans, it is an important part of our cultural heritage, as important, I maintain, as any other literary or artistic "canon." For students and people from other countries, jazz offers an important lens through which they might explore aspects of America, a more important lens, I believe, than, say, bluegrass music, rap, or rock and roll. George Economou (cited in Hutchinson & Suhor, 1996, p. 85) says: "To grow up in America is to grow up with the sound of jazz nurturing our souls along with our speech and our oceans, winds, waters, and birds. Jazz is our land's musical nature."

Second, jazz is fun and can move the spirit. Langston Hughes says that jazz is the sound of surprise, is a "playing *with* music, for fun" (Hughes, 1982, p. 40); it helps keep us intellectually and emotionally alive. Our reactions to it are often as unpredictable as the music itself. Furthermore, the poet William Matthews maintains that jazz, like poetry,

*Thus, jazz as metaphor can show us
how we can be ourselves, play our own
variations on a piece of music, while at
the same time remain connected to the
larger band, the greater community.*

is "about what it feels like to be whole" (Komunyakaa & Matthews, 1992, p. 654).

Thus, third, and especially for English educators, jazz is a natural rhythmic complement to poetry. "Jazz seeps into words," according to Langston Hughes (cited in Hutchinson & Suhor, 1996, p. 85). Poetry readings accompanied by or to jazz have a rich tradition in the United States, from the Beat readings in the 1950s to the poetry slams held around the country today. Moreover, some educators too have recognized the possibilities of making this jazz and poetry connection with their students (Hutchinson & Suhor, 1996).

Fourth, jazz reflects America's pluralistic vitality and can provide us with a valuable metaphor for democracy. Improvisation is the essence of jazz. A quartet, for example, might open a number by clearly stating a theme, but then each member improvises or plays off that theme; finally, all of the musicians together return to the original statement at the end of the piece. Thus, jazz as metaphor can show us how we can be ourselves, play our own variations on a piece of music, while at the same time remain connected to the larger band, the greater community.

Finally, jazz also offers a metaphor for reading and teach-

ing. The improvisational process in jazz involves rethinking and reinventing previously held ideas. And that's what critical reading at its best is about: rethinking, reconsidering, re-visioning, and being open to unexpected flashes of insight from the text, oneself, and others. Similarly, English educators know that:

Expert teaching is much closer to *improvising* over "changes" than rendering an accurate reading of a score (a "lesson plan"). A teacher, like an excellent jazz improviser, is well prepared to deal with moment-to-moment problems and opportunities encountered on the fly. (Elliott, 1992, p. 12)

Some Books about Jazz

In this section I briefly describe a handful of books about jazz that I have found to be vital with students and teachers. (There is a growing body of picture and chapter books appropriate for children, adolescents, and adults, and I encourage interested readers to explore them.) I have grouped the books into the following categories (although most of them cross categories): Jazz, Poetry, and Art; Biographies of Some Famous Jazz Musicians; History of Jazz; and Jazz and Issues of Race and Social Change.

Jazz, Poetry, and Art

i see the rhythm (1998), with text by Toyomi Igus and paintings by Michele Wood, chronicles poetically the history, mood, and movement of African-American music. This Coretta Scott King Award winning picture book includes major sections on jazz, for example: Swing, Jazz Women, Cool Jazz, and others. The brief definitions, time lines, expressive paintings, and poetry ("I see the rhythm of be bop,/ the music of those jazz hipsters/who refuse to play the dance rhythms of swing. . .," p. 19) make this an especially fine book for middle school and high school students and teachers.

Ntozake Shange's lyrical poem, *i live in music* (1994), is complemented with twenty-one paintings by the noted American artist Romare Bearden. Together the poet and painter pay tribute to the language of music and the magical, often mystical, rhythms that bring people together. This is a beautiful book that belongs in the library of anyone who cares about poetry, visual art, and jazz:

. . . sound
falls round me like rain on other folks
saxophones wet my face
cold as winter in st. louis
hot like peppers i rub on my lips
thinkin they waz lilies. . . .

Biographies of Some Famous Jazz Musicians

There are many different biographies of jazz musicians, including those for young children; an example is Andrea Davis Pinkney's Coretta Scott King Award winning *Duke Ellington: The Piano Prince and His Orchestra* (1998). There are also numerous collective and individual biographies for adults, such as Lewis Porter's *John Coltrane: His Life and Music* (1998). Here I want to highlight a single book that is full of stunning artwork and is informative and accessible to secondary students and teachers alike, especially those with little or no background in jazz: *Jazz: My Music, My People* (1994) by Morgan Monceaux introduces the reader to many

of the seminal figures in jazz from its earliest years, for example, the trumpeter Buddy Bolden, to the modern era, for example, with the jazz singers Lena Horne and Johnnetta. Monceaux typically provides a one page biography of each artist and complements it with one or two expressive paintings that literally and symbolically capture the musician's life and style.

Monceaux divides the biographies into three eras: "The Early Years: Shaping Jazz"; "The Swing Years: Dance Music"; and "Bebop and Modern Jazz: What Comes Next?" The musicians included range from Louis Armstrong to Billie Holiday to Miles Davis and John Coltrane. The Coltrane entry, for example, states that "Coltrane is often looked on as a prophet in jazz, and sometimes it's hard to separate myth from fact." However, Monceaux highlights Coltrane's continuing influence: "An obsessive, driving figure, he has inspired rock musicians as well as those working with the jazz tradition" (p.57).

With its chronological arrangement and glossary of musical terms associated with jazz, this collection of brief biographies and striking paintings is a fine introduction to the artists who have helped to create the music we know as jazz. It surely will inspire the reader to go out and listen to some of the music.

History of Jazz

There are several excellent histories of jazz for teachers and more able student readers who become especially interested in the topic. Ted Gioia's *The History of Jazz* (1997) is a standard and more scholarly work, while Ward and Burns' accompanying volume, *Jazz: A History of America's Music* (2000), to the 10-part television series is a popular work with over 500 photographs. However, there are various shorter histories that will introduce both teachers and students of different reading abilities to the development of jazz.

The poet and jazz aficionado Langston Hughes wrote *The First Book of Jazz* (1982) which is a brief introduction that focuses on the historical development of jazz up to around 1950 and defines such key elements of jazz as "improvisation," "syncopation," "riff," and so forth. This short illustrated book is accessible to less-than-skilled readers.

Giuseppe Vigna's *Jazz and Its History* (1999) chronicles the development of jazz from its origins to the present day. It highlights various artists, styles, and the connections between jazz and larger social and historical movements, for example, jazz during WWII and the rise of "Free Jazz" during the Civil Rights struggles in the United States during the 1950s and 1960s. It is a beautifully-illustrated book with both drawings and photographs, and the short two-page entries, for example, "Jam Sessions," "Bebop," and "A Modern Art Form," make it an engaging reading experience for all students and teachers.

Jazz: An American Saga (1997) by the noted jazz critic and novelist James Lincoln Collier is a short (104 pages) book which examines the origins of jazz, its variety, and the achievements of individual artists. Collier's discussion of what improvisation is all about in his chapter titled "Making It Up as You Go Along" is one of the clearest I've encountered:

It is the same when you are standing around at the bus stop talking with some friends. You have not come there with a

prepared speech. Instead, you “improvise” your conversations as you go along, responding to what others are saying, adding things that pop into your head, and so forth. But once again, you are prepared: you understand English, know the foibles of the teacher the gossip is about, are familiar with the hot musical groups the talk turns to. (pp. 88-89)

If I had to recommend one history for the secondary classroom it would be Gene Seymour’s *Jazz: The Great American Art* (1995). This book highlights major artists and jazz in its many manifestations, discussing how the music reflects the experiences of African-Americans. With its black-and-white photographs, glossary of terms, recommended lists of books, videos, and recordings, and vivid, evocative writing style (“It was as if, during these final years, there was a battle between [Billie] Holiday’s interpretive imagination and mortality’s icy grip. Mortality scored a victory in the end. But not before Holiday got in a few sharp blows of her own,” p. 64), Seymour’s book is both enlightening and accessible to a reader with little or no background in jazz.

Jazz and Issues of Race and Social Change

Jazz offers students and teachers a unique lens through which to examine the struggles of African-Americans in the United States. I personally have found this aspect of jazz to be most powerful, whether exploring the music and topic with young adults or university students, both in the United States and abroad. Here are some musical examples that capture this connection between jazz and the experiences of African-Americans. (Note: all of the particular jazz pieces I mention below can be found on [often many] different recordings by the particular artists; thus, the reader should browse an artist’s recordings or inquire at a music store with knowledgeable employees to locate a CD or audio tape with the specific recording on it.)

Louis Armstrong asks in his recording of “(What Did I Do to Be So) Black and Blue” a question that many African-Americans continue to ask in various ways. John Coltrane in his “Song of the Underground Railroad” and Wynton Marsalis in his “Harriet Tubman” celebrate the heroic struggles against slavery. Charles Mingus in “Fables of Faubus” ridicules the governor of Arkansas who used the National Guard to block Black students from entering a Little Rock high school in the late-1950s. John Coltrane mourns the bombing death of little girls in a Birmingham church in his almost-unbearably sad “Alabama.” And Max Roach in his “We Insist! Freedom Now Suite” captures the Black Power consciousness of the 1960s.

Perhaps the most powerful and disturbing work is Billie Holiday’s recording of “Strange Fruit,” a tale of lynching in the American south. Holiday’s lament of these terrible lyrics is unnerving: “Southern trees bear strange fruit,/. . . Pastoral scene of the gallant south,/The bulging eyes and the twisted mouth. . . .” David Margolick’s *Strange Fruit: The Biography of a Song* (2001) tells the history and impact of this song written by a White Jewish schoolteacher.

Some General Strategies

Jazz and books about jazz can easily be incorporated into the English Language Arts program and indeed across the whole curriculum. From my experience, team teaching and collaborative efforts between English and music teachers

produce the most exciting projects. Some obvious strategies which I and others have used include the following:

- Listen to jazz. Simply bring into the classroom various jazz recordings that reflect different eras and styles. You and your students will find those that you like. Use the discographies in Collier (1997), Seymour (1995), Vigna (1999), and Ward & Burns (2000) as beginning sources to explore.
- View selected segments of Ken Burns’ 10-part, 20 hour PBS series on jazz: *Jazz: A History of America’s Music*. It is available for purchase, or teachers may copy it from broadcast and use it legally for up to one year in the classroom.
- Explore with your students the web site for Burns’ *Jazz: A History of America’s Music* at <http://www.pbs.org/jazz/>. It will connect you to other jazz sites, teacher resources and lesson plans (some first-rate), biographies of jazz artists, discographies, and a variety of other jazz-related things. This is a must site to check out.
- View Wynton Marsalis’ four VHS tapes in which he introduces children and adults to different aspects of jazz, for example, rhythm, improvisation, and so forth. Then read and listen to the accompanying book (Marsalis, 1995) and audio CD that are based on the television series.
- Read the books that I have described above and others. My suggestions are only a beginning. Use the books to investigate the biographies of particular musicians and as entrees into studies of particular historical periods and events.
- Create visual responses to the music listened to, books read, and poetry performed in class. Various artistic styles are displayed in the books I’ve discussed above. *i see the rhythm* (1998), *Jazz: My Music, My People* (1994), and *i live in music* (1994) offer students many intriguing options.
- Read and perform poetry backed by jazz music. You will be able to find appropriate jazz pieces to complement any poetry; however, you might want to highlight poems about jazz or those that have been influenced by jazz. Three fine edited collections are: Lange & Mackey’s *Moment’s Notice: Jazz in Poetry & Prose* (1993); Feinstein & Komunyakaa’s *Jazz Poetry Anthology* (1991); and Feinstein & Komunyakaa’s *The Second Set: The Jazz Poetry Anthology (The Jazz Poetry Anthology, Vol. 2)* (1996).

Writing Poetry to Jazz

Certainly the most enjoyable and linguistically-playful activity in which I’ve engaged students is poetry writing to jazz music, and this has been viable with both first and second language learners. I’ll briefly describe below some specific writing activities I used with students and teachers while I was on a Fulbright Scholarship to Norway during the 1999–2000 school year. All of the students with whom I worked, both at the secondary and college levels, had learned or were learning English as a foreign language (EFL).

Form Poetry

Students who have little experience writing poetry usually find different kinds of form poems to be fun and easy to

write. Three that I found especially viable in Norway were: cinquain poems, alphabet poems, and color poems. I'll briefly describe each.

A *cinquain* is a 5-line poem that typically follows the following format.

- First line: one word that names the subject of the poem
- Second line: two words describing the first line
- Third line: three "ing" or action words
- Fourth line: four years that express a feeling about the subject
- Fifth line: a synonym for the first line

Here is a typical jazz cinquain written by *Ungdomsskole*, or lower secondary (grades 8 – 10), students in Norway:

Jazz
Cool, hot
Soloing riffing wailing
We want to dance
"Bird"

Alphabet or *acrostic* poems similarly are easy to write:

Jazz
Alto
Zesty
Zip

These can be extended in a variety of ways, for example, as some students did:

Jazz, jumping, jamming, (in a) joint
and
Zah, zah, zah-do, zah-be
as in scat singing.

Color poems encourage students to capture the color essence they see and feel when listening to different pieces of jazz. I used as catalysts such things as: "Hotter than a burning stick" (for the color red); and "Sweet like summer honey" (for yellow). This led to a blue poem such as:

Blue as an early-evening sky
Blue when I feel bad
Blue when I feel glad
Blue like my best friend's eyes

More Open Poetry

Form poetry by its nature is relatively easy to write; however, as present readers know, it is also limited in its development, imagery, and language play. The best poetry written by students in Norway was created after I encouraged them to write after listening to various pieces of jazz with their eyes closed and minds open to the imagery that the music called forth. Here are three different poems written in response to ballads by Duke Ellington and John Coltrane.

"A Bar Night" was written by a 15-year-old in the Norwegian settlement of Longyearbyen, the administrative center of the high arctic archipelago of Svalbard. This young man had never been to a bar or a jazz club, but the music called forth both a longing and a lovely poem:

Jazz makes me feel
a way I never felt before.
I feel like a man dancing
with a woman in a red dress
on a late Saturday night.
The people in the bar
are drunk and asleep
at their tables or the bar.
We are dancing all alone.

Jazz makes me wanna dance all night.

Here's another from a young female in the 9th grade in a small town south of Oslo:

Jazz
The war is over,
Music fills my ears,
The war is over,
No more tears.
I'm sitting in a bar
Having a cup of tea,
The war is over,
And the music is the sea.
I want to be the ocean
Because my love is there.
She drowned a long time ago,
She cannot be here.
It is the war's fault
The music fills my ears.
I want to be the ocean
Because my love is there.

And last, here's one by a college student preparing to become an English teacher. She titled it "Lonely Morning":

Monday morning
The kids have left for school
Loneliness, where do I start?
The radio is on
This smooth tune
Clears my mind, calms my body.
It's time for tea
On a Monday morning.

Conclusion

Jazz is the uniquely American art form that has transcended its origins and become a truly universal language from Chicago to Oslo to Tokyo to Moscow and to all corners of the globe. It offers English Language Arts educators at all levels a wonderful opportunity to explore the relationships among reading, writing, music, poetry, history, art, and popular culture. But more, listening to jazz offers students and teachers a way of looking at literacy. Gene Seymour (1995) concludes his history of jazz by saying that the listener to jazz can be as much of a player as the musician. Substitute "reader" for "listener," "author" for "performer,"

and "text" for "music" and you'll have a fine description of how we should encourage our students—and ourselves—to read:

As a listener, you are as much a "player" as the singers or musicians. You bring your own feelings to a performer's work the way a performer puts everything he or she has into a song. This is true of all music, but what makes jazz especially exciting is that your own reactions can be as unpredictable as the music. It isn't necessary to understand the technical aspects of what a musician is doing. Often, you find your own meaning to a piece of music. (Seymour, 155)

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Popular Postmodernism for Young Adult Readers: *Walk Two Moons, Holes, and Monster*

Stephenie Yearwood

One of the ongoing debates in children's and young adult literature recently has been over the issue of whether, and how, and to what extent the literature, broadly defined, is becoming "postmodern." In *The Pleasures of Children's Literature*, Perry Nodelman (1996) describes children's literature as being (among other qualities) simple, action-oriented, and didactic (190). Swedish critic Maria Nikolajeva argues, in *Children's Literature Comes of Age: Toward a New Aesthetic* (1996) argues, to the contrary, stating that children's literature (which, for her, includes YA literature) was showing more and more postmodern qualities. She holds that although "genre" books still dominate the field, more and more "auteur" books, literary, sophisticated, and complex have been appearing (207). In 1998, Nikolajeva replied specifically to Nodelman by arguing that "an ever-growing segment of contemporary children's literature is transgressing its own boundaries, coming closer to mainstream literature, and exhibiting the most prominent features of postmodernism, such as genre eclecticism, disintegration of traditional narrative structures, polyphony, intersubjectivity and metafiction" (Nikolajeva, "Exit" 222). As I examine these arguments from the point of view of 2002, it seems to me that if we focus exclusively on young adult literature, we will find that one part of the larger world of "children's literature" has now fully embraced the postmodern mode. To put it a bit differently, whereas the distinctively postmodern YA works have, until recently, been "fringe" or "auteur" books, beloved of critics, they have not been popular favorites. Now they are.

Three recent YA books that are very popular provide examples of works that fearlessly use postmodernist ideas and techniques: Sharon Creech's *Walk Two Moons*, Louis Sachar's *Holes*, and Walter Dean Myers' *Monster*. The first two are well-known Newbery Award winners of 1995 and 1998 respectively, and the third is a 1999 winner of the ALA Michael Printz Award, the Coretta Scott King Award, and a finalist for the National Book Award. Sales figures for these books indicate that they clearly are mainstream reading. Their

literary qualities move them out of the historical tradition of simplicity and didactic morality which Nodelman describes, and into the mode which Nikolajeva defines as postmodern. What's more, there are many others like them. The tide has turned, and the turn of this century also marks a turning point for YA literature.

Nikolajeva's definition of postmodernism is comprehensive and functional; however, I will refine and focus it somewhat in order to clarify the essential qualities of these three novels and to highlight some of the striking similarities between them. First, I borrow Brian McHale's proposition in *Postmodernist Fiction* (1987) that, whereas the central question in modernist fiction is epistemological, postmodernist

fiction is focused on ontological questions (9). Essential questions of being, McHale says, expand to include other ontological queries: "What world is this? What is to be done in it? Which of my selves is to do it?" (11). From Linda Hutcheon, I borrow the "important postmodern concept of the 'presence of the past'." Hutcheon explains the postmodernist use of,

and obsession with, history as being "not a nostalgic return" but "a critical revisiting, an ironic dialogue" (4). Finally, from the Bakhtinian tradition I take the idea of dialogics or intertextuality as central to postmodern fiction—the notion that texts or narratives set up dialogues with other texts, either other previously-written literary texts or other stories, creating new stories in the interstices and frictions and contradictions of various other stories. These three YA novels are all marked by an ontologically-impelled querying of the past within a densely intertextual narrative structure. To various degrees, they all center around gaps (vacancies, missing pieces, unknowns, uncertainties, or holes) and the questions (often unanswered questions) generated by those missing pieces. All are centrally concerned with history (either personal or political), what it is, understanding it, remaking it, and the uncertain relationship between past and present. Finally, all of them foreground issues of intertextuality or internarrativity. They create realms of intertextual reference where multiple stories affect/reflect/interact as the past is questioned, prodded, retold, recovered, or remade. Inter-

Interestingly, this postmodern "recipe" for YA literature turns out to be extraordinarily well-suited to raising and exploring some of the oldest themes of the genre: identity, self-fashioning, and self-knowledge.

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Walk Two Moons

Creech's story is marked strongly from the outset by its missing piece: Salamanca Tree Hiddle's mother. It quickly becomes obvious that the mystery in the novel is more than the epistemological issue of figuring out what happened to her. As we collect Sal's clues, we come to realize that even though we don't know yet what happened to Sal's mother, our narrator Sal surely must know. But in her present state of being, she cannot face what she knows. Sal's ontological essence, her very being, is in question as she pieces together for us and for herself a picture of the past and a self which can accept that picture. We are confused, and so is Sal. Although Sal's narration of Phoebe's story engages us, and the rambunctious grandparents add a wonderful dimension to the tale, the central story here is Sal's—she gropes to answer her ontological question of how she can continue existence in a world where her mother is dead.

Creech's narrative technique highlights the uncertain and quirky relationship between past and present through the story. The entire story of Phoebe is told by Sal to her grandparents as they travel west to see her mother. The earlier story of Sal's life with her mother and father before she met Phoebe is recounted in an even more fragmented and allusive way as events in Phoebe's tale trigger memories in Sal. It is as though the deep turmoil of that earlier history causes it to break through, push up and intrude into Phoebe's tale. Sal's own history/mystery (and that of her mother) is lost to her conscious recollection and only reassembled as it is re-experienced vicariously through Phoebe, then as that story is retold to her grandparents. Sal knows but does not know this history, and she and Phoebe both try out alternative historical hypotheses about their missing mothers. Has Phoebe's mother been kidnapped by the lunatic? Is she in Paris? Hidden in a well? Murdered by Mrs. Cadaver? Is Sal's mother alive and well and waiting for Sal in Idaho? Is she alive but disabled? Is she coming home? Is she dead? Sal's past is reconsidered, remade and retold in multiple layers here; and it can emerge fully only when she has successfully constructed a new identity for herself—an identity which can face the history.

Finally, this story is made of stories, by stories, and in between stories. Sal tells us initially that, "The story of Phoebe was like the plaster wall in our old house in Bybanks, Kentucky" (3). That wall is the one where her father chipped and chipped away at the plaster to find an old brick fireplace underneath. Sal is aware that "beneath Phoebe's story was another one. Mine" (3). But the internarrative connections in the story are even more complex than that. Other threads of embedded narrative serve as reflecting surfaces in which Sal reads her own, or a difference from her own. There

is the mini-tale of Ben's mother in a mental hospital, a woman who reminds Sal strongly of her own mother (370). There is the Blackfoot myth of Napi who created men and women; it reminds her that "People die" (150). The story of Mrs. Cadaver, whose husband was killed and mother blinded in the same car accident, makes Sal think, "It was as though I was walking in her moccasins. That's how much my heart was beating and my own hands sweating" (220). And the enigmatic "messages" which appear on slips of paper at Phoebe's front door work their way into her very being. "All those messages had invaded my brain and affected the way I looked at things" (221). In the intertextual spaces and intersections and frictions between these stories, Sal resurrects her past and simultaneously constructs herself as a different being.

Holes

Louis Sachar's *Holes* uses the elements of this recipe differently. This story is based not on complex narrative technique, but on vacancy and missing pieces, and on a magically realistic reenactment of history which focuses on the intersecting stories of three different sets of characters generations apart. Ontological issues of being and nothingness interplay

through this story in a series of negative/positive afterimages. Stanley Yelnats (whose name is a self-reflective palindrome) is at Camp Green Lake (which is not a lake, but a desert where a lake used to be) because some famous sneakers go missing; his chief occupation there is to dig holes, and he attributes it all to something his mythical grandfather failed to do. Stanley himself is nearly a missing person. He is given the nonsense nickname "Caveman," as though he were himself a vacancy, and his best friend is nicknamed Zero.

The setting raises other ontological questions such as "What world are we in?" Initially, the idea of a juvenile detention camp set in a desert ringed by mountains seems realistic enough, until we learn about the yellow-spotted lizards whose bite is slow and

always lethal. Add to that the presence of a masochistic female camp warden who wears "black cowboy boots [. . .] studded with turquoise stones" (66) and who delights in concocting her own nail polish using rattlesnake venom so that

"it's only toxic while it's wet" (90), and we have bypassed fantasy altogether and edged out into the surreal.

Finally, the ontological stakes are raised even higher by the magical realism of the plot with its three intertwined stories. Stanley's often-retold family myth is that his great-great-grandfather was perpetually in the wrong place at the wrong time because he stole a pig from a one-legged Gypsy and was cursed (8). But it turns out that other family stories are just as relevant. It seems that after a Madame Zeroni helped this great-great-grandfather, he failed to honor his promise to carry her up a mountain to a place where a stream ran uphill to let her drink from it (28). Another important story is about the next Yelnats generation and his great-grandfather's encounter with Kissin' Kate Barlow. One hundred and ten years ago, we learn, the kind schoolteacher

*Finally, this story is made of stories,
by stories, and in between stories.*

*The story steadfastly refuses to resolve
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of the past.*

Kate Barlow of Green Lake (when it really WAS a Green Lake) encountered racism and the murder of her lover and transformed herself into the outlaw Kissin' Kate Barlow. We learn that the lake dried up as punishment for the transgressions of the community. We also learn that Stanley's great-grandfather was robbed by Kissin' Kate, left for dead in the desert, but managed to survive, saying only that he had "found refuge on God's thumb"(93). Another interwoven story is Stanley's own tale of being hit on the head with a pair of stolen sneakers and sent off to reform camp.

These related narratives coalesce into a truly magical and surreal story at the conclusion to *Holes*. Stanley has been trying to help out his fellow inmate Zero by teaching him to read, and after Zero escapes into the desert (with no water) Stanley decides to follow him. They survive by accidentally finding, in the midst of the dry lakebed, the skeleton of the boat in which Kate Barlow and her lover tried to escape, then drinking the 110-year old spiced peaches which were in the boat when it sank. Stanley carries the sick Zero (whose real name we learn is Hector Zeroni) out of the desert and up to the top of a strange-shaped mountain where they find a most unlikely water hole and the field of onions Kate's lover tended. As they escape, Zero explains that he is the one who stole the sneakers Stanley was caught and convicted for stealing. Along the way, Stanley realizes that they are on "God's thumb" where his great-grandfather before him escaped and survived. It becomes clear to all that Stanley has satisfied his great-great-grandfather's debt to the Zeroni family, re-enacted his great-grandfather's survival, and solved the mystery of who stole those sneakers. The runaway surrealism is capped when the two boys return to camp, are cornered by yellow-spotted lizards, find that the lizards don't bite people who have been eating onions for a week, locate the lost treasure of Kissin' Kate, prove their innocence, and expose the camp as a fraud.

In the introduction to *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community* (1995), Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy Faris point out that magical realism "creates space for the interactions of diversity. In magical realist texts, ontological disruption serves the purpose of political and cultural disruption: magic is often given as a cultural corrective, requiring readers to scrutinize accepted realistic conventions" (3). Indeed, that is precisely what happens here as the plot queries whether it takes magical intervention from four generations back to deal with the problems of children growing up in poverty and with an abusive system of "justice." The marvelously mythical tying up of all these intertextual loose ends creates for Stanley what he has never had before, an identity of himself as himself.

Monster

Myers' *Monster* is a book of a different flavor—grim, gritty and realistic—without the comic elements or easy resolutions of the others. Yet even in this form we find the postmodern concerns and questions about being, about understanding the past, and about intersecting texts and versions of that past. This story focuses even more than the

others on the question of how an identity is made and whether a writer can "rewrite the text," or in other words, shape the past into a coherent story and invent himself along the way.

The central question of this book at first seems more epistemological than ontological, for initially the story focuses on the uncertain, ambiguous, contradictory issue of what Steve Harmon actually DID in connection to the robbery/murder for which he is being tried. The entire story circles and recircles around that question, presenting us contradictory evidence from witnesses, from Steve himself on the stand, and from Steve's notes. The irresolvable epistemological contradictions are heightened into a philosophical perplex by the structural design of the book. The text we read is actually a film script written by Steve Harmon about his trial, framed and accompanied by Steve's notes which appear to be "handwritten," by photographs, and by occasional "handwritten" marginalia commenting on both. Even the contradictory testimony comes to us only through Steve's film script. An unreliable narrator? Yes, and unreliably unreliable, since he reflects his own contradictions, too.

All the same, ultimately the ontological questions predominate; all of this uncertainty as to what we know and what Steve did becomes the means of raising the question of how he can continue to exist, whether he will continue to be at all, and who he is. "When I look into the [mirror] I see a

face looking back at me but I don't recognize it. It doesn't look like me" (1). "I think to get used to this I will have to give up what I think is real and take up something else" (3). "They take away your shoelaces and your belt so you can't kill yourself no matter how bad

it is" (59). "If I got out after 20 years, I'd be 36. Maybe I wouldn't live that long. Maybe I would kill myself so I wouldn't have to live that long in here" (144). "[My attorney] thinks I am guilty. I know she thinks I am guilty" (138). "What did I do?" (140). "I knew [Mama] felt that I didn't do anything wrong. It was me who wasn't sure. It was me who lay on the cot wondering if I was fooling myself" (148).

Steve's only answer to this ontological maze is his film, his act of self-fashioning a being and identity. It includes flashbacks to scenes where he meets other participants in the robbery, a fantasy/fear sequence in which he is being put to death, and action from the trial. As with *Holes*, we are confronted with the question of what world we are in. The fact/fiction line is just as blurred as Steve's face in the photo on page 188.

The story steadfastly refuses to resolve either the epistemological or the ontological issues; hence its contradictory and confusing accounts of the past. Through varying accounts, we view and review the scene of the robbery/murder from a different point of view each time. Witness Lorelle Henry testifies she did not see him in the drugstore, and he testifies that he never entered the drugstore that day. But in his notes he writes, "I walked into a drugstore to look for some mints, and then I walked out" (140). And on page 220, we find two photos of Steve which appear to have been taken by a security camera in a store, with the "handwritten" marginalia "What was I doing?" and "What was I thinking." Are these actual evidence in the trial or shots he

Young adult works in the postmodern mode may not necessarily predominate, but they are now mainstream and readily accepted by readers.

envisions as part of his film? Steve Harmon re-fashions the past, again blurring the fact/fiction line.

The intertextual interaction in this novel is a significant element in its complex relationship to the past. The graphic layout of the novel provides us layer upon layer of "text," each with its own version of the past. Some of the text is linguistic, some of it graphic: scene descriptions, descriptions of camera shots, dialogue spoken by characters, Steve's notes, photos and marginalia. Differentiated by typestyles and layout, each of these elements interacts with, confounds, comments on, and clarifies the others.

But like the other novels, these postmodernist elements conspire to create a remarkable exploration of that most central young adult issue: identity. Throughout, Steve struggles with how others see him and how he sees himself. Is he the "monster" whom the prosecutor sees? The suspicious and unknown person his father sees? The innocent boy his mother sees? The guilty boy his attorney sees? Or the "good person" he wants to see in himself? He cannot answer; thus even at the conclusion of the story, five months after he is acquitted, the ontological question is still driving Steve, and he is still filming:

I have been taking movies of myself. In the movies, I talk and tell the camera who I am, what I think I am about. Sometimes I set the camera up outside and walk up to it from different angles.

Sometimes I set the camera up in front of a mirror and film myself as a reflection. I wear different clothes and try to change my voice[. . .]I want to know who I am. I want to know the road to panic that I took. I want to look at myself a thousand times to look for one true image. When Miss O'Brien looked at me, after we had won the case, what did she see that caused her to turn away? What did she see?
(*Monster*, 281)

No answers, no easy resolutions, no insight. Just a central ontological question, obsession and uncertainty about the past, and archaeological layering of text upon text.

Certainly there is room for legitimate debate whether this three-part "recipe" of ontological perspective, historical interrogation, and intertextual multilogue is an adequate definition of the atmospheric and omnipresent concept of "postmodernism" in young adult literature. But these elements highlight issues raised in these three novels and in many others which could have been selected: Creech's *The Wanderer*, Pullman's *His Dark Materials* trilogy, Paterson's *Gathering Blue*. I believe that a broader definition of postmodernism would only emphasize further the extent to which the "cultural dominant" has changed (McHale 9). Young adult works in the postmodern mode may not necessarily predominate, but they are now mainstream and readily accepted by readers.

Nor should this be any surprise since one of the common uses of the term "postmodern" is simply as a descriptive term for contemporary culture. Zipes (2001) voices reservations about how distanced criticism of children's and YA literature has become from the realities of the lives of contemporary young readers (Zipes 37). Nevertheless, it seems to me that in this case, the qualities of these three works that make them critically "postmodern" are exactly the qualities which reflect current anxieties, obsessions, and social realities. Sal's tenuous grip on an unbearable reality of loss, Stanley's near evaporation into a bizarre and corrupt juvenile justice system, and Steve Harmon's radical self-fashioning in the face of society's expectations of young black men: these are themes which invite both postmodern literary treatment and popularity with young readers in our postmodern culture.

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THE PUBLISHER CONNECTION

We Welcome Back Publisher Connection Editor, M. Jerry Weiss!

Rumbles! Bangs! Crashes! The Roar of Censorship

M. Jerry Weiss

To understand the roar of the censors and the concerns of their effects, one should have a clear definition of censorship. Henry Reichman (1993) in *Censorship and Selection: Issues and Answers for Schools*, defines censorship as “the removal, suppression, or restricted circulation of literary, artistic, or educational materials – of images, ideas, and information – on the grounds that these are morally or otherwise objectionable in light of standards applied by the censor,” and adds that:

Frequently, the simple occurrence of an offending word will arouse protest. In other cases, objection will be made to the underlying values and basic message conveyed – or said to be conveyed – by a given work. In the final analysis, censorship is simply a matter of someone saying, “No, you cannot read that magazine or book or see that film or videotape – because I don’t like it. . . .” By suppressing materials containing ideas or themes with which they do not agree, censors produce a sterile conformity and a lack of intellectual and emotional growth in students. Freedom in the public schools is central to the quality of what and how students learn. (pp. 2 and 4)

Although one can argue against censorship, one needs to recognize that many would-be-censors are well organized and funded. The impact often is intimidating, and a number of school administrators give in when a phone rings and someone complains about a book, movie, or video being used in a class or available in the school library, which can easily be chosen by a student to fill an assignment.

But in how many school media centers are these books available? Sometimes parents don’t want such materials available to their children. Censorship is a reality. With school budgets being greatly curtailed, some school personnel feel they might as well buy books that probably won’t cause any commotion within the community. If students really want to read risky books, they can check them out of the public library.

When I was in high school, I wrote a book report for my English class. The book I chose was Hemingway’s *A Farewell to Arms*. I was asked to meet with my teacher and a school administrator shortly after the day the paper was due. They wanted to know where I got the book. I told them I checked it out of the public library.

“Do your parents know that you were reading this book?”

“I don’t know. My parents let me read anything I want. They encouraged me to go to the library.”

“Then who gave you permission to read such a book?”

“No one. I just took it and read it. Why?”

“Don’t you know the book has vulgar language and sex?”

“Yes. I know that. After all, I read the book. But I didn’t read it because of that stuff.”

“Then why did you read it?”

“Because I like the way the author writes, and I had to do a report on a book by an American author.”

Well, to make a long story short, the report was not acceptable. I had to choose something more appropriate. In the meantime, I could expect a lower grade for the marking period.

I did not sneak the book out of the public library into my house. As I stated, my parents gave me the freedom to choose books that appealed to my interests and that would hold my attention. Hemingway was that kind of author. But he was too contemporary at the time. This was the type of book available through Book of the Month Club and was for adults. And besides, the book’s popularity would probably disappear quickly.

I know the feeling of being censored and can empathize with those who have heard or read about incidents. Many articles have appeared on various aspects of censorship. I have chosen to write about a few cases that have affected me while I have served on intellectual freedom committees of the International Reading Association and/or the National Council of Teachers of English. All of these are genuine.

Sin and Snakes and Alice Walker

Invited to speak at a state meeting about censorship, I was prepared to talk about issues, cases, and to make suggestions for preventing or handling censorship actions. It was a lively session, well attended, and the audience was very responsive.

Following the meeting, I started to pack my briefcase. A gentleman approached and introduced himself as a principal-teacher in a small rural community. He had kind words about my session, and then he went on to tell me the following story:

One day an English teacher in his school was standing by her classroom door, waiting for her students to enter. She overheard three girls discussing enthusiastically a movie they had seen over the weekend, *The Color Purple*. The teacher commented that she had seen and enjoyed the movie also. She added that it was based on a book written by Alice

Walker. She then went on to teach what had been assigned for homework.

The gentleman speaking to me told me that later that afternoon his telephone rang, and a person asked for meeting to be held with several parents, the English teacher and the principal. The principal replied courteously that he would be happy to meet with the group and was sure that he and the teacher could meet the following day after classes were out. All agreed.

Six parents arrived, and a couple was carrying paper bags with them. After greetings were exchanged, one of the parents asked the teacher if she had talked about a book, *The Color Purple*. The teacher told the parents the circumstances under which she had mentioned the book. "I heard the girls talking about seeing the movie, and I just mentioned that it was based on a book. That's all."

A parent asked the teacher if she knew how sinful the book was, if she knew what the book was about.

The teacher admitted that she had read the book and did not feel that the book was vulgar or sinful.

A parent then asked if the board of education had approved the book for use in the school.

The principal indicated that the book had never been submitted for approval.

The teacher interrupted to indicate that she had never recommended the book as part of the school curriculum, and she had never mentioned to the class that this was a book they should read. Her comment came after she overheard some girls talking about how much they had enjoyed seeing the movie.

A parent then stated that the teacher might not be "pure" enough to work with students in this school. The fact that she had made such a comment to these girls might be an indication that there was an evil force within her.

The parents now wanted the approval of the principal to test the purity of the teacher. Those who had brought the bags with them revealed that each bag contained a snake. They wanted the teacher to spend the night in her classroom with the snakes; if she were to survive the next morning, then they would know she was pure enough to be with students.

Of course, the principal denied the request, and indicated that he would have a conference with the teacher and straighten out their concerns. The parents were angry with that response, and they indicated he might hear further from them and others.

The parents left with their bags.

The principal and the teacher spoke, and both agreed never to mention anything that was not in the curriculum guide or in the textbooks.

The teacher was petrified by the experience. Yes, she was still at that school. Her husband had a job in the area, and she could not afford to relocate.

In conclusion, the principal said she was one of the best teachers on his staff. The students really loved her. But to

this day, she will never express her opinion on anything that is not in her textbooks.

"By the way, Dr. Weiss, what would you recommend in a case like this?"

Of Tenure and Timidity

A former student of mine had taken a young adult literature class in which Robin Brancato had come and talked about her books. The former student was a remedial reading teacher in a small community in New Jersey. This teacher was dynamic and creative. She had developed a small library for her classroom. When her students came in, she encouraged them to look at the books, and if anyone wanted to check out a book, she would let that person do so.

One day the principal and superintendent sent her a note to please meet with them after school. She went, unafraid and unassuming. When she arrived in the office, she was greeted warmly by both and offered some coffee. As they sat there talking informally, one of the administrators asked her to describe her room and her activities. She told them about

different things she was doing. Then one administrator asked her if she had a classroom library. She said she did. She had bought a number of young adult books over a period of time and she thought that some of her reluctant readers might give them a try.

She was asked about a book, *Blinded by the Light*. Did she know the book?

She replied she did and went on to tell how she had met the author and heard her describe her experiences in preparation for writing such a book. She assured them that it was a very good book.

The administrators looked at each other. Then one spoke that the book had never been approved by the board of education to be included as part of any school program. The books was not in the school library. Was she aware of that rule?

She admitted that she had not thought about the rule. She thought that if a book had received good reviews and been recommended by her college classes, that it would be permissible to include as part of a class library. No one was forced to read anything. After all, in a reading class she thought the objective was to encourage the students to read.

Yes, the objective was to get the students to read, but the reading had to be in those books approved by the board of education. There had been a phone call from a irate parent who found this paperback in her child's room. Never had she read such blasphemy.

"Now since you don't have tenure yet, and if you want to stay here, we would suggest you shut down your library until you have checked to see if the books have been approved. Let this be then one and only warning we can give to you. Thank you for coming to our little meeting."

This former student called me to describe in vivid detail what had happened to her. She was deeply hurt and somewhat terrified by the ordeal she had just endured. She thought it was her duty to tell me that I was endangering the jobs of hundreds of teachers by conducting such a course. It would

be a good idea to put out lots of warnings ahead of time of what might happen if people listen to teachers like me and then recommend such books to students. We have not spoken since. It was the end of a very good friendship.

Of a Forbidden Film

I was invited to a Midwestern community to spend a day with a group of English teachers, talking about some of the methods and materials that might be worthy of their thoughts and actions. I happened to believe that in some cases a good movie based on a fine literary work might be useful to enhance the reading and learning experience. At that time Zeffirelli's widely acclaimed film, *Romeo and Juliet*, had been released and was playing in many local communities. I referred to the film and went on to discuss other things.

Following the presentation, three teachers came up to me and thanked me for my presentation. They said that they had made

arrangements for their classes to see the Zeffirelli film, but when the chair of the department had heard about some "partially nude scene," she had cancelled the trip and had become very irate that her teachers did not have more common sense than to take high school seniors to see such a work of trash. The teachers thought I ought to know this.

Before I left the school, I thanked the chair for inviting me and asked her if by chance she had seen this movie. She tightened up and replied, "Not yet!" This meant she would never go.

As I left the school, I asked my driver if we could take a spin around the city. I would like to see the site of the major penal institution for which this town is well known.

Of Misconceptions and Reasoned Responses

A popular children's and young adult author was a speaker at a state librarian's convention. She was exciting as she described how she researched and wrote her books. The applause was thunderous.

Following her presentation, a number of librarians came up to speak with her and get their books autographed. A few wanted to know if she did school visitations. She assured them that she did and gave one of her cards.

One of the librarians went back to her elementary school and spoke enthusiastically about this author. Everybody agreed that she ought to be invited to speak to the students during the day and to the parents that evening. The librarian contacted her and the date and fees were acceptable. About ten days before her scheduled appearance, the author called me and said that her scheduled visitation had been canceled because some teachers and parents had read some of her books and thought they were inappropriate for their children. She knew that her young adult books dealt with a number of issues confronting adolescents

in the modern world, but she was bothered by the fact that they found objectionable items in her children's books.

I asked for the name of the school district that had called her and the name of a person I might speak with. She gave me the necessary information. I made a telephone call.

I spoke with the principal. He was cordial and we discussed the matter quite frankly. He pointed out that in one of the author's most popular works were the following words that one child called another: "tight-assed mosquito." He thought that this was definitely not in good taste.

I asked him if there were other objections. He replied that he did not know of any.

I went on to explain that the author had been invited to many schools and conferences and was greatly respected. Her books had appeared on several recommended reading lists, including the one in which he found the bothersome language. I also pointed out that the author had made an agreement to come to the school and should be paid in full and sent a letter of apology. I reminded him that the author had probably turned down another invitation for that date in

order to accommodate his school district. I told him that if he didn't work out some acceptable arrangements with the author that I would notify several major newspapers that would make him and his school the laughing stock of the state. I also planned to notify several groups, such as NCTE, ALA, IRA, and the National Coalition Against Censorship to urge they take some action against the school's stand. He had thirty minutes to reach a resolution.

Sure enough, he called within the time frame and said that the school had decided to honor the invitation. However, they would not permit the sales of her book on school grounds.

He and I called the author to tell her about the decision, and she thanked me for my anti-censorship efforts, I told her to call her publisher and tell of the school visit, not about the attempt of censorship, but to try to have a nearby book store publicize her appearance and to arrange sales of her

books. All this was accomplished.

When she returned home, she called again to thank me and said that the audience was great. Many parents wanted to know why the school didn't have copies of her book for sale. Since that incident, I have urged all author friends making school visits to which they

are able to drive to carry a carton of books in the trunk of their cars, just in case there are people interested in purchasing copies.

One author has vividly described how her book was burned on the steps of the Board of Education Building in a large Midwestern city because the book had the word "homosexuals" in it. It is a riveting Holocaust novel in which the author points out that homosexuals were sent to the concentration camps. It was an important part of her plot.

A school of nursing connected with a major hospital had

"Now since you don't have tenure yet, and if you want to stay here, we would suggest you shut down your library until you have checked to see if the books have been approved. Let this be then one and only warning we can give to you. Thank you for coming to our little meeting."

Yes, they had ruffled some feathers. But it was important for teachers of English to open their minds to the facts that some things might have to change in order to meet the many needs of a diverse student body.

worked out an arrangement with a local college to offer the necessary courses to allow those who wanted to meet the requirements for a Bachelor of Nursing degree to do so. One of the requirements was a course in world literature. The English instructor assigned to this class was a very popular teacher. She prepared a list of requirements and the reading assignments for the course. When the head of nursing saw some of the authors and books being recommended, she immediately called the president of the college to have a different teacher assigned who would have a more decent list of readings for "her girls." The president declined to make any changes. The course was offered for one semester, and then the program was canceled.

As chair of the English Department of an inner city college, I arranged for two nationally known authors to speak about their concerns on education matters. Both had books on *The New York Times* best seller list and were well versed on current problems involving young people. Over a thousand people attended this one-day event. After the first speaker had finished his presentation, a group of about ten teachers walked out in a huff. I had not idea what caused this. I could not leave the stage when this happened, since I had to introduce the second speaker.

Within three days a letter appeared on the college president's desk, protesting this conference as a fraud. "Dr. Weiss and the English Department were running a political campaign under the guise of an English conference."

The president called me in and asked if this were true. I assured him that this definitely was not true, and that these two outstanding speakers had received a standing ovation upon the completion of the conference. Yes, they had ruffled some feathers. But it was important for teachers of English to open their minds to the facts that some things might have to change in order to meet the many needs of a diverse student body. He agreed. However, since the conference had been audio-taped, he requested that the tapes be sent to his office. He had received a request form the State Commissioner of Education that report on the matter be sent to him. The president forwarded the copies of the tapes.

I never heard another word about this matter, but the tapes were never returned.

While attending a recent conference, a teacher told me that a superintendent had examined a newly-adopted social studies text. He noticed there was a picture of Michelangelo's David. Fearing consequences when this book was carried home, he had the teaching staff "paint shorts" on the famous nude statue.

My latest concern is the dangerous act of self-censorship taking place in classes and school libraries all over this country. As I have been invited to speak about the topic of censorship, I have been receiving newspaper articles and letters describing how books such as *The True Story of the Three Little Pigs* and other outstanding children's books are dangerous to the minds of the young. They are not mature enough to know right from wrong. A book such as *The Diary of Anne Frank* is unfit for children because it talks about a group of people who are not "the true religious believers." I could go on and on.

But why am I scared?

When people in one community are caught in the controversy over a book, schools around the community hear or read about it and librarians and teachers in these other communities decide not to order the books for their schools because the **might** have to go through a similar defense in their community. There are so many books being published anyway, why bother over a few titles? Just avoid them.

Let me assure you this last matter is not a small matter. I know good teachers and librarians that have told me that the issue is not whether or not "fuck" is used in a story. Words such as "damn" or "hell" or children disagreeing with adults are stuff enough to ban a book from reaching their shelves. We can't have unfit language and role models for students.

Of Schools' Stances and Censorship

The role of education is to make sure that children are given the books that foster proper manners, morals and values.

Whose?

In Judy Blume's new book, *Places I Never Meant to Be: Original Stories by Censored Writers*, she writes:

In this age of censorship, I mourn the loss of books that will never be written, I mourn voices that will be silenced-writers' voices, teachers' voices, students' voices – and all because of fear. How many have resorted to self-censorship?...
(p. 10)

Harry Mazer, one of the contributors to Judy Blume's book, adds:

Good books are created when authors can write freely, take risks, go where their imaginations lead them. Once the author begins to temper his language and writes not to his own standard, but to the standard of the feared censor, the quality of his work suffers.

Books belong to all who read. Readers need and want well-written, interesting books. And since what interests me may not interest you, we need more books. More authors. More varied points of view. Books are our windows on the world. The permit us to safely experience other lives and ways of thinking and feeling. Books give us a glimmer of the complexity and wonder of life. All this the censor would deny us.
(p. 97)

This means that schools should have a good policy on the selection of materials for all classes and the school media center. There should also be a policy guaranteeing teachers the freedom to use methods that stimulate learning and thinking and creative expression. There should be a policy for handling complaints that is fair to all. The school should have a good communications network with religious, civic, political groups, including parent and student organizations. Of course, there should be effective procedures for working with the media so that they can present accurate information concerning issues that might impede intellectual freedom.

In conclusion, I recommend these four books as valuable resources for protecting the freedom of teachers, the freedom of students to have access to materials, and the freedom of all to learn, to grow, and to express themselves:

Blume, Judy. *Places I Never Meant to Be: Original Stories by Censored Writers*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1999.

Karolides, Nicholas J., Margaret Bald, and Dawn B. Sova. *100 Banned Books: Censorship Histories of World Literature*. New York: Checkmark Books, 1999.

Reichman, Henry. *Censorship and Selection: Issues and Answers for Schools*. Chicago and Arlington: American Association of School Administrators and American Library Association, 1993.

Simmons, John S., ed. *Censorship: A Threat to Reading, Learning, Thinking*. Newark: International Reading Association, 1994.

NON-PRINT YAL CONNECTION

We Welcome our New Column Editor, Jean Brown

Audio Books in the Classroom Bridging between Language Arts and Social Studies

Jean E. Brown

The increasing popularity of audio books is a 21st Century tribute to the roots of our oral tradition: hearing the stories, legends, and myths passed down from one generation to the next. Traditionally, these accounts provided answers to ancient questions and posed new possibilities through stories and explanations for our ancestors. They became the glue of common experience, the source of answers, and the transmitters of wonder and joy. Audio books are today's expression of that oral tradition, the telling of and listening to stories that reveal the human experience, its triumphs and its pains. Additionally, they can make a valuable contribution to the learning experiences of students both in the classroom and independently.

Just before school began last fall, two members of an 8th grade middle school team, a language arts teacher and a social studies teacher, contacted me, seeking advice about new ways to integrate content in their classes. I suggested that we explore the potential benefits of using audio books in their classes. I related the positive experiences that my students had reported about their listening experiences in both my Young Adult Literature classes and my Children's Literature classes. Many of my students revealed that listening to audio books provided them with heightened enjoyment and a different type of literary experience, allowing them to hear the evolution of characters, the nuances of the narrator's voice, and the subtle interaction of characters. Several local teachers had also told me of the successes they had had with using books on tape in their classrooms. While we had reports of their value in literature classes, the social studies teacher expressed concerns about using audio books in her American history classes.

Audio Books in the Social Studies Classroom

An effective book on tape captures the elements of characterization, theme, tone, setting, and other significant aspects of the text that may contribute to a lively study in an English language arts class. How, potentially, might audio books contribute to students' understanding of social studies? I thought briefly of some expository texts, but they seemed to fall short of providing a vital connection between the two disciplines. I then thought about some quality works of historical fiction that I have on tape. The use of historical fiction seemed logical because it has effectively established a cross-curricular value between English and history/social studies classes.

In a meeting with the teachers, we discussed the units they were going to be teaching. The social studies class would begin the year studying colonial America. The languages arts teacher was flexible, but he indicated that he wanted to involve his students in literature circles early in the year.

I sought titles of historical fiction that would be appropriate to use in an 8th grade class English language arts class to use with literature circles and bridge to a social studies class studying American history. I reviewed a number of audio books from my library and selected seven titles that seemed to meet the needs of both teachers. I had listened to the audio books of each of these books as well as having read them. The teachers reviewed the books and listened to sections of the audio books. They choose five core books to use in both classes. We then discussed ways to use literature in the social studies classroom.

We began with the recognition that literature is used in a social studies classroom to provide a context for actual events, rather than for literary experience. Historical fiction can serve to put a human face on the past and help student to realize that the events happened to people like them. Hopefully, it will also help them to recognize that they are apart of on-going history. While social studies teachers might assign an historical novel as outside reading; they do not devote class time for in-depth discussion of literature. More appropriately, using excerpts from a book will provide social studies teachers with the means for honing in on passages that will present listeners with insights about the times and events. The details in historical fiction reveal an accurate account of period and the people who lived through it. These accounts give the story authenticity. For example, in an American history course, the following audio books might be used: *Witch Child* relates the story of immigration to colonial America in 1659 and the rigid structure of Puritan society; *Sign of the Beaver*, set in 1768 territory of Maine, explores the challenges of settling the wilderness; *My Brother Sam is Dead* chronicles the period of the American Revolution and explores the complexities of the choices between the Loyalists and the patriots; *Fever, 1793* examines the impact of the Yellow fever epidemic in our first capital of Philadelphia during George Washington's second Presidential term; and *The Slave Dancer* depicts life on a slave ship in 1840. Each of these books explores a significant facet of the evolution of our country.

***Witch Child* by Celia Rees**

Candlewick Press, 2002

Read by Jennifer Ehle with Carole Shelly

Listening Library, Random House Audio, 2001

5 hours, 38 minutes

Mary Newbury is alone after the death of her grandmother. As the granddaughter of a witch, Mary is unsafe in England so she travels to America with zealous group of Puritans. The diary format makes it easy to use excerpts. For example, diary entries could be used to show the hardships of 17th century ship travel. The tape also captures the hardship the newcomers endured and also the type of hysteria that claims of witchcraft created. The one weakness is that the narrator sounds more mature than 14 years old. The book could be used in conjunction with Ann Rinaldi's *A Break with Charity*, Elizabeth George Spear's *The Witch of Blackbird Pond*, or Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*.

***Sign of the Beaver* by Elizabeth George Speare**

Dell Yearling, 1983

Read by Greg Schaffert

Listening Library, Random House Audio, 1998

3 hours 9 minutes

Matt and his father embark on a trip into the wilderness of Maine before the Revolutionary War to establish a homestead. After planting crops and building a house, his father returns to Massachusetts to get the rest of the family, leaving Matt to maintain homestead and mind the crops. One reader effectively relates the story. Excerpts from this tape might be used to capture a sense of the wilderness and the hardships of settling in the wilds, and the grave responsibilities that were placed on Matt at such a young age. Also excerpts that depict the cautious and guarded relationship between Matt and Attean might be discussed as they characterize the relationship between settlers and the Native Americans.

***My Brother Sam is Dead* by Christopher and James Lincoln Collier.**

Scholastic, 1974

Read by John C. Brown

Audio Bookshelf, 1996

4 1/2 hours

Perhaps the most effective excerpts of this audio book are those that capture the significant conflict that occurs between Sam and his father as they dramatically represent the division among the colonist, those who wish to remain loyal to England and those who sought the freedom that only independence could bring. Other excerpts that provide a sense of the times are those that describe the hardships that the war caused for the civilian population. Perhaps the most significant element of the book is the irony of both Sam's and his father's deaths. Excerpts of the text could be used in class to have students discuss the circumstances of the deaths of these characters and the implications that the deaths have for understanding the Revolutionary War.

***Fever, 1793* by Laurie Halse Anderson**

Simon and Schuster, 2000

Read by Emily Bergl

Random House Audio Books 2000

5 hours 45 minutes

The narration of this tape is particularly effective, because the young woman who reads the book sounds appropriately youthful. As with the diary entries in *Witch Child*, *Fever, 1793*, uses dates for each chapter that provides the reader with a sense of the chronology of the epidemic that wracked Philadelphia in 1793. It also makes identifying and using excerpts easy. The passages that deal with public panic and fear provide a potential springboard for refocusing to recent events in this country. Social studies teachers could also refer the accounts of medical procedures and treatment to science or health classes, in addition to discussing the conditions and procedures in the historical context of the day. Other effective excerpts that could be used include those that describe the deserted city or the return to the city of President Washington.

***The Slave Dancer* by Paula Fox**

Dell Publishing, 1973

Read by Peter MacNicol

Bantam Doubleday Dell Audio Publishing, 1996

4 hours

This audio book would be more effective if multiple readers were used to differentiate the voices of various crewmembers. Listeners will gain insights about the legal attempts to eliminate slavery prior to the American Civil War and the risks that ruthless shippers were willing to take for the lucrative trade. Excerpts about the capture of Jessie and his impressment on the ship provide insights about the harshness of child labor. The most compelling excerpts from the book include the accounts of the transport and shipboard treatment of the slaves. These passages will provide today's listeners with a sense of the gravity of the inhumane treatment and cruelty that the slaves were forced to endure or die. The conditions on the ship are reminiscent of Tom Feeling's *Middle Passage*.

Excerpts from each of these books present a facet of the early days of our country. Using excerpts will provide listeners in a social studies classroom with a context for the factual events that they are studying in the class. If these books are also being used in literature circles in the English language arts class, the use of excerpts in the social class will serve to reinforce student recognition of the aspects of the books that are true to the history of the times. These five audio books are representative of available works of historical fiction. Quality YA audio books are increasingly available. This increased availability will provide teachers with appropriate resources to use with their students.

In the next column I will share an evaluation form for audio books and use it to review a number of audio books. I developed the form with my sister, an educational researcher, and I'm currently completing a field test of the form with local teachers.

Jean Brown, co-author with Elaine Stephens of several books and articles on YAL, and co-editor of our Research Connection, is currently a faculty member at Rhode Island College.

The Writing Conference, Inc.
is pleased to announce
PHYLLIS REYNOLDS NAYLOR
as the 2002 Winner of
THE HEARTLAND AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE
in **YOUNG ADULT LITERATURE**
for her book
JADE GREEN

published by Simon & Schuster

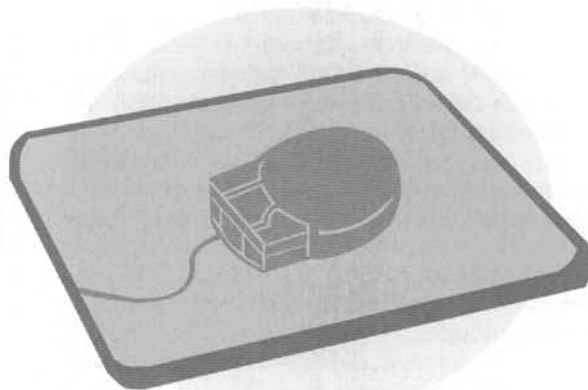
JADE GREEN was chosen by young people in voting nationwide.

Please visit our Web Site for the 10 Finalists for the 2003 Heartland Award and how you and your students can participate in selecting the 2003 Heartland Winner.

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Dr. John H. Bushman, Director

**Have you
tried these
Web sites yet?**



ALAN:

<http://www.alan-ya.org>

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."

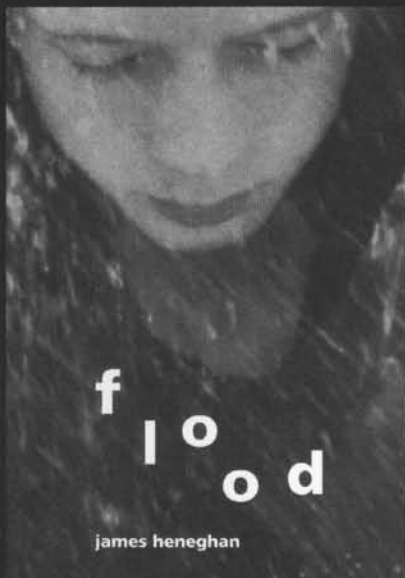
It will be featured on studyweb.com in the near future.

"Will engage readers to the last page."

—*Booklist*

flood

James Heneghan



"An engaging and optimistic tale of loss, recovery, and a little bit of magic. When weeks of rain cause the rivers and creeks of North Vancouver to sweep away bridges, roads, and houses, Andy Flynn escapes the fate of his drowned mother and stepfather thanks to the help of the Sheehogue, a.k.a. the Little People." —*Kirkus Reviews*

"A worthy and warmly written book about coming to terms with a parent's death."

—*School Library Journal*

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