



Leave No Child Be . . .

Have you been reading about the different states that have found teachers cheating?

Yes, getting that federal money is important, and the word is out, "GET THOSE SCORES UP!" The consequences of this are ironic. At a recent meeting I attended with an assistant to the superintendent of schools, I was told, "Yes, we have a library budget for schools. It's marked Library Materials and Supplies." But *supplies* also include toilet paper and janitorial items, leaving some school librarians a grand total of \$500 per year to update their collections, which include technology as well as reference materials, magazines, newspapers, and, pardon the expression, *books*.

Some school districts are coping with budget crunches by laying off librarians in great numbers. How are students and teachers going to find those newer books among the test papers? Publishers are complaining because public and school library budgets are shrinking. They are. And shrinking along with them are staffs of a number of publishing houses.

Fantasy Stuff

With the popularity of Harry Potter, I wonder why teachers aren't using such books more as a part of their curriculum. Many students out there will find total enchantment in Donna Jo Napoli's *Beast* (Simon & Schuster, 2002), Ellen Schreiber's *Vampire Kisses* (Harper Collins, 2003), Jane Yolen's *Sword of the Rightful King* (Harcourt, 2003), Nancy Springer's *I Am Mordred* (Puffin, 2002), Isobelle Carmody's *The Farseekers* (Tor/Starscape, 2003), Cornelia Funke's *Inkheart* (The Chicken House/Scholastic, 2003), Christopher Paolini's *Eragon* (Knopf, 2003), Alison Goodman's *Singing the Dogstar Blues* (Viking, 2002), Herbie Brennan's *Faerie Wars* (Bloomsbury, 2003), *Science Fiction Stories*, edited by Edward Blishen (Kingfisher, 2003), Eoin Colfer's *Artemis Fowl* (Hyperion, 2002), Orson Scott Card's *Ender's Game* (Starscape/Tor, 2002), Charles De Lint's *The Riddle of the Wren* (Firebird, 2002), Libba Bray's *A Great and Terrible Beauty* (Delacorte, 2003), M. T. Anderson's

Feed (Candlewick Press, 2002), Darren Shan's *Cirque Du Freak: A Living Nightmare* (Little, Brown, 2001), David Lubar's *Flip* (Tor, 2003), Neal Shusterman's *Downsiders* (Simon and Schuster, 1999), William Sleator's *The Boxes* (Puffin, 2000), John Christopher's *When the Tripods Came* (Simon Pulse, 2003), and *New Magics: An Anthology of Today's Fantasy*, edited by Patrick Nielsen Hayden (Tor, 2004).

I do admit that I have checked on a number of colleges and universities and found out that very few offer elective courses in fantasy and science fiction. What a tragedy! The traditional course of study over the four years is pretty much the same as it was in 1944 when I was an undergraduate student. Some English chairs admitted that they didn't have anyone on their faculty who felt qualified to teach such genres. So when a school finds out the interests of students, what then?

How Would You Like . . . ?

Recently, a school district encouraged middle school teachers

to update their curricula. One teacher, who attends all of the state English Council meetings, admitted she was familiar with many young adult authors, but never used their books. She did maintain a class library and encouraged her students to read these books on their own for which they could write book reports. Yes, she gave some credit for these writings, but they weren't as important as the required books. In addition, teachers admitted that, among the currently required authors, there were a few whom they didn't like to teach. They did not admit, however, that they were passing their dislikes on to the kids. So the new principal and curriculum coordinator asked, "What books would you like to teach? Some of these books could be purchased out of the new budget." No suggestions came in. No books were ordered by these teachers. A consultant was brought in to make suggestions based on the interests the teachers had expressed. Sample books were purchased for the teachers to read based on their preferences. None were read or reported on. The students deserve better!

In The Real World

In visiting school media centers, I find that the media specialists often do buy some nonfiction books; however, very few are checked out. Is it because the students are getting their information from the Internet? I am not talking just about reference books, but about well-done and interesting nonfiction.

Here are some newer nonfiction books I think students and

teachers should become familiar with: *Witch Hunt: Mysteries of the Salem Witch Trials*, by Marc Aronson (Atheneum, 2003); *Kennedy Assassinated! The World Mourns: A Reporter's Story*, by Wilborn Hampton (Candlewick Press, 1997); *Witness To Our Times*, by Flip Schulke (Cricket Books, 2003); *The Beginning: Voyages Through Time*, by Peter Ackroyd (DK, 2003); *A Day that Changed America: The Alamo*, by Shelley Tanaka with paintings by David Craig (Hyperion, 2003); *Surviving Hitler: A Boy in the Nazi Death Camps*, by Andrea Warren (Harper Trophy, 2002); *Voyages Through Time: Escape from Earth*, by Peter Akroyd (DK, 2003); *An American Plague: The True and Terrifying Story of the Yellow Fever Epidemic of 1793*, by Jim Murphy (Clarion, 2003); *The Life and Death of Adolph Hitler*, by James Cross Giblin (Clarion, 2002); *Linda Brown, You Are Not Alone: The Brown V. Board of Education Decision*, edited by Joyce Carol Thomas (Jump at the Sky/Hyperion, 2003); *Wonders of the African World*, by Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (Knopf, 1999); *Eleanor's Story: An American Girl in Hitler's Germany*, by Eleanor Ramrath Garner (Peachtree Press, 2003); *The Hero's Trail: A Guide for a Heroic Life*, by T. A. Barron (Philomel, 2002); *Tapestry of Hope: Holocaust Writing for Young People*, compiled by Lillian Boraks-Nemetz and Irene N. Watts (Tundra, 2003); *We Were There, Too! Young People in U.S. History*, by Phillip Hoose (Farrar Strauss Giroux, 2001); *Lives of Extraordinary Women: Rulers, Rebels (And What the Neighbors Thought)*, by Kathleen Krull

(Harcourt, 2000); *Words That Built a Nation: A Young Person's Collection of Historic Documents*, by Marilyn Miller (Scholastic, 1999); *Words West: Voices of Young Pioneers*, by Ginger Wadsworth (Clarion, 2003). I know I have omitted some of the excellent nonfiction books available, but I'm just interested in pointing out that these are books that might appeal to some students and teachers who might be inspired to explore the genre further.

Important Issues Reflected In Literature

For many years I have worked with and/or supported those groups that have fought censorship. The notion that certain words might appear in school texts is enough to drive many teachers up the wall, even though kids will write the same words, without batting an eye, on school walls, school bathrooms, and even in their own notebooks when they're bored. Why the big deal if one of these words is in a novel used for class?

The usual answer is the fear that, if a parent picks up the book, starts reading it, and sees the word, he or she will start screaming, "This is the kind of language you are teaching my kid?" These same parents often won't admit that the students hear these words night after night on television or in their own homes. A stronger case has to be built by English teachers to justify the teaching of significant books that deal with issues that confront our students today in the language that is realistic to them. It is a harsh and painful world, as we all learned from Columbine.

Teenage angst can come from more than just growing up, and many cruel events take place in schools: name-calling, teasing, bullying, rejection, etc. Well-written books exist that will help young people deal with these issues; for example, books dealing with homosexuality, showing the pain and suffering of gay and lesbian students taunted by peers who don't recognize their humanity and disregard the laws about discrimination based on race, creed, color, gender, or sexual preferences. Abuse, mental illness, violence, rape, homelessness, and other problems face our youth on a daily basis. Here are a few books I think are extremely important in dealing with a variety of issues adolescents face: *America*, by E. R. Frank (Atheneum, 2002); *Things Change*, by Patrick Jones (Walker, 2004); *Someone Like You*, by Sarah Dessen (Puffin, 2000); *The Misfits*, by James Howe (Aladdin, 2003); *Dancing on the Edge*, by Han Nolan (Puffin, 1999); *Kissing the Rain*, by Kevin Brooks (The Chicken House/Scholastic, 2004); *Rainbow Boys*, by Alex Sanchez (Simon Pulse, 2003); *Love and Sex: Ten Stories of Truth*, edited by Michael Cart (Simon Pulse, 2003); *Girl Interrupted*, by Susanna Kaysen (Vintage, 1994); *Our Guys*, by Bernard Lefkowitz (Vintage, 1998); *Geography Club*, by Brent Hartinger (Harper Tempest, 2003); *10th Grade: A Novel*, by Joseph Weissberg (Random House, 2002); *Boy Meets Boy*, by David Levithan (Knopf, 2003); *Places I Never Meant to Be*, edited by Judy Blume (Aladdin, 1999); *On the Fringe*, edited by Donald R. Gallo (Dial, 2001); *Toxic Love*, by Linda Holeman (Tundra, 2003); *Rainbow*

Too many have suffered, often holding thoughts within themselves, even driven to dire acts and consequences. These books can help young people face life.

High, by Alex Sanchez (Simon & Schuster, 2003); *Hello, I Lied*, by M. E. Kerr (Harper Trophy, 1998); *Slap Your Sides*, by M. E., Kerr (Harper Trophy, 2003); *Don't Mean Nothing: Short Stories of Viet Nam*, by Susan O'Neill (Ballantine, 2001); *The Pepperland Diary*, by Mark Delaney (Peachtree, 2004); *The New Rules of High School*, by Blake Nelson (Viking, 2003); *Dirty Laundry: Stories About Family Secrets*, edited by Lisa Rowe Fraustino (Viking, 1998); *Prep*, by Jake Coburn (Dutton, 2003); and *If You Come Softly*, by Jacqueline Woodson (Puffin, 2000).

Different people will certainly react in different ways to these books, but our students live in these worlds. Too many have suffered, often holding thoughts within themselves, even driven to dire acts and consequences. These books can help young people face life. The greatest question I ever heard regarding proof that comprehension in reading is taking place is: "What impact is reading making upon the reader?" How does the teacher find out? With good discussions and writing assignments.

After Effects

I am still smarting from the comments of a couple of English teachers who attended a workshop I conducted and said, "You want our students to read such books instead of the classics?" In reply, there are several interesting definitions of the word "classic" in *Webster's Universal College Dictionary*. One is "an artist or artistic production considered a standard." Another is "Something noteworthy of its kind and worth remembering." How "classic" is daily life? The morals and values we live by and discuss, as well as teach, can and should be done in the context of the issues of today. That doesn't mean we can't use the past, and the literature of the past, as well. But we can reach many students by starting with the present and building upon their experiences to understand issues and ways of expression of previous generations.

In conclusion, I am not overlooking the many excellent writers honored by ALAN for their bodies of works. S. E. Hinton, Paul Zindel, through Norma Fox Mazer and Harry Mazer represent the highest standards and have been innovative in producing literature for our times. Yes, there is *Hamlet*. But there is also Wendy Wasserstein, and many others, who help us grasp new problems, concepts, and ideas.

Keep reading.

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