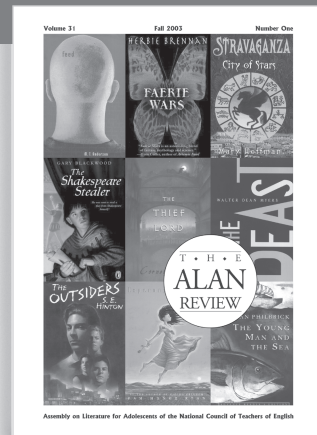


Volume 31

Number 2

Winter 2004



| | | |
|----------------------------|---|----|
| <i>Jim Blasingame</i> | From the Editors | 3 |
| <i>Lori Atkins Goodson</i> | Don Gallo Award & Barron Award | |
| | Call for Manuscripts | 5 |
| <i>Virginia R. Monseau</i> | Mining the Riches of Story | 6 |
| | Young Adult Literature and the Peaceable Classroom | |
| <i>Jim Blasingame</i> | Caring About the Topic: An Interview with Valerie Hobbs | 12 |
| <i>Jeffrey S. Kaplan</i> | Contrasting Points of View (And Then Some) | 16 |
| | The Research Connection | |
| <i>Diane P. Tuccillo</i> | Teens Meeting the Challenge | 23 |
| | Young Adults Gain a Voice Deciding What's Hot to Read: The Library Connection | |
| <i>Wendy Glenn</i> | Form Follows Function | 27 |
| | Structure Meets Content in Three of Karen Hesse's Novels | |
| <i>Lori Goodson</i> | Clip and File Book Reviews | 33 |
| <i>Bill Broz</i> | Assembly on Literature for Adolescents Loses a Pioneer | 41 |
| | The Professional Resource Connection with Richard F. Abrahamson, Terry C. Ley, Alleen Pace Nilsen, Ken Donelson, and Ben F. Nelms | |
| <i>Michael Cart</i> | What a Wonderful World | 46 |
| | Notes on the Evolution of GLBTQ Literature for Young Adults | |
| <i>Lori Atkins Goodson</i> | Single-handing: An Interview with Gary Paulsen | 53 |
| <i>Will Hobbs</i> | On the Trail with Jack London | 60 |
| | My Journey to <i>Jason's Gold</i> and <i>Down the Yukon</i> | |
| <i>Bonnie Kunzel</i> | An Invitation to the Writing Game | 66 |
| | Monica Hughes (1925-2003) | |
| <i>Kay Smith</i> | No More Just Making Do with What We Have Done | 68 |
| | The High School Connection | |
| <i>M. Jerry Weiss</i> | Leave No Child Be. . . : | 70 |
| | The Publishers Connection | |

T ♦ H ♦ E
ALAN
REVIEW

Co-editors James Blasingame,
Arizona State University
Lori Atkins Goodson,
*Wamego Middle School,
Wamego, Kansas*
james.blasingame@asu.edu
lagoodson@cox.net
Lori Atkins Goodson

YA Book Review Editor

**Middle School
Connection Editor**

Claudia Katz, *National Louis
University*

**High School
Connection Editor**

Kay Smith, *Utah
Valley State College*

**Research Connection
Editor**

Jeffrey S. Kaplan, *University
of Central Florida*

**Publishers Connection
Editor**

M. Jerry Weiss, *Jersey City
State College, Emeritus*

**Professional Resource
Connection Editor**

William Broz,
University of Northern Iowa

**Library Connection
Editor**

Diane P. Tuccillo, *Mesa Public
Library, Mesa, Arizona*

**Non Print YAL
Connection Editor**

Jean Brown, *Rhode Island
College*

Editorial Review Board

Lawrence Baines, *University of Toledo*
Katherine Barr, *San Francisco, California*
Kylene Beers, *University of Houston*
Jean Borren, *Northern Arizona University*
Cynthia A. Bowman, *Columbus, Ohio*
Linda Broughton, *University of South Alabama*
Jean E. Brown, *Warwick, Rhode Island*
John "Jack" Bushman, *University of Kansas*
Michael Cart, *Chico, California*
Melissa Comer, *Cumberland College*
Chris Crowe, *Brigham Young University*
Pat Daniel, *University of South Florida*
Kevin Dupree, *University of Southern Mississippi*
Joan Elliot, *Indiana University of Pennsylvania*
Bonnie Ericson, *California State University at Northridge*
Ted Fabiano, *Blue Valley Northwest High School*
Karen Ford, *Ball State University*
Nena Foster-Pritchard, *North Olmsted High School, Ohio*
Marshall George, *Fordham University*
Wendy Glenn, *University of Connecticut*
Gail P. Gregg, *Florida International University*
Robin Denise Groce, *Mississippi State University*
Kay Bushman Haas, *Ottawa, Kansas*
Kathy Headley, *Clemson University*
Sarah Herz, *Westport, Connecticut*
Ted Hipple, *University of Tennessee*
Rita Karr, *Oklahoma Road Middle School, Maryland*
Joan Kaywell, *University of South Florida*
Kathryn Kelly, *Radford University*
Patricia P. Kelly, *Virginia Tech*
Daphne Key, *Papillon, Nebraska*
Teri S. Lesesne, *Sam Houston State University*
Terry C. Ley, *Auburn University, Emeritus*
Rob Lockhart, *Morehead State University*
Caroline McKinney, *University of Colorado at Boulder*
Arlene Harris Mitchell, *University of Cincinnati*
William R. Mollineaux, *Sedgwick Middle School, Connecticut*
Elizabeth Poe, *University of West Virginia*
Suzanne Reid, *Emory and Henry College*
Gary Salvner, *Youngstown State University*
Barbara G. Samuels, *University of Houston at Clear Lake*
John S. Simmons, *Florida State University, Emeritus*
Robert C. Small, *Radford University*
Elaine C. Stephens, *Michigan*
Barbara Stover, *Chaffield Senior High School*
Lois Stover, *St. Mary's College of Maryland*
Alan Teasley, *Durham, North Carolina*
Mary Ann Tighe, *Troy State University*
Ellis Vance, *Fresno County Office of Education*
Elizabeth Watts, *Broward County, Florida*
Ann Wilder, *Durham, North Carolina*
Carole Williams, *St. Louis, Missouri*
Susan N. Wood, *Florida State University*
Gerri Yaccino, *St. Charles Middle School, Illinois*
Connie Zitlow, *Ohio Wesleyan University*

Instructions for Authors

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 copyright owner.

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 (MLA). A 3 1/2-inch IBM compatible disk in a recent version of Word 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:

Dr. James Blasingame, Co-Editor, *The ALAN Review*, Department of English/English Education, college of Liberal Arts and Sciences, P.O. box 870302, Arizona State University, Tempe, Arizona 85287-0302.

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.

DEADLINES. Please observe 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 |

Cover credits: *The ALAN Review* cover was designed by Holly Kelly. Credit lines for individual book jackets as follows:

FEED. Copyright © 2002 by M.T. Anderson. Reproduced by permission of the publisher, Candlewick Press, Inc. Cambridge MA. FAERIE WARS by Herbie Brennan. Copyright 2003. Jacket Design by Lizzy Bromley. Reproduced by permission of the publisher, Bloomsbury USA Children's Books. STRAVAGANZA: CITY OF STARS. by Mary Hoffman. Copyright © 2003. Jacket design by Ian Butterworth. Jacket illustration by Carol Lawson. Reproduced by permission of the publisher, Bloomsbury USA Children's Books. THE SHAKESPEARE STEALER by Gary Blackwood. Cover illustration copyright © 2000 by Greg Call. Used by permission of Puffin Books, A Division of Penguin Young Readers Group, A member of Penguin Group (USA) Inc. 345 Hudson Street, New York, NY 10014. All rights reserved. Jacket illustration copyright © 2002 by Christian Birmingham from *The Thief Lord* by Cornelia Funk. Published by Scholastic, Ind. by arrangement with The Chicken House, UK. Used by permission. Jacket design copyright © 2003 by David Caplan from *The Beast* by Walter Dean Myers. Published by Scholastic Press, a division of Scholastic, Inc. Used by permission. THE OUTSIDERS by S.E. Hinton. Cover illustration copyright © 1997 by Robert Hunt. Used by permission of Puffin Books, A Division of Penguin Young Readers Group, A member of Penguin Group (USA) Inc. 345 Hudson Street, New York, NY 10014. All rights reserved. Jacket art copyright © 2000 by Joe Cepeida from *Esperanza Rising* by Pam Muñoz Ryan. Published by Scholastic Press, a division of Scholastic, Inc. Used by permission. Jacket art copyright © by David Shannon from *The Young Man and the Sea* by Rodman Philbrick. Published by The Blue Sky Press, an imprint of Scholastic, Inc. Used with permission.



From the Editors

For a 30th birthday party, it couldn't have been a bigger or better celebration. In our first official ALAN event as co-editors, we definitely struck it rich in San Francisco, as did hundreds of other fans of young adult literature, for the 30th annual ALAN workshop. And we hope that many of you were along for the celebration, as well.

But who says a celebration has to come to an end? We've decided to continue the festivities with this issue of *The ALAN Review*. We're especially proud of the authors and experts you'll find within these pages—in a themed issue we're calling “Meeting the Challenge.” And who better to lead the way in such an issue than two authors who continue to take us through exciting adventure after adventure. Again and again, their characters meet their challenges and find their own lives renewed by their courageous efforts. And we, the readers, are right beside them, absorbing a little of their courage along the way—courage that will help us meet our own challenges.

Gary Paulsen, complete with fresh stories of his own challenges that were truly Paulsen-esque—hilarious one minute, terrifying the next, not only took the stage at the workshop as a keynote speaker, but was kind enough to share more tales—of the outdoors, book-writing, sailing, and sled dogs (in no particular order) in an interview following his address.

Then there's Will Hobbs, who, with his gracious wife, Jean, made a special effort to slip us into his busy conference schedule. We were able to share quite some time with both of them—and be reminded, once again, why he, like Paulsen, is considered one of the best storytellers around. As educators, we've seen adolescent readers pledge their disgust regarding

books, only to be swayed by the escapades that fill Paulsen's and Hobbs' books. And, after our personal visits with them, we continue to be even more impressed.

In this issue we also visit Valerie Hobbs, whose books have recently dealt with meeting the challenge of disability (*Stefan's Story*), as well as the challenge of war (*Sonny's War*). Valerie gave us a delightful interview.

Speaking of the challenging and delightful, Jack Gantos has agreed to provide “a school appropriate” version of his ALAN breakfast speech in our next issue. For those of you who missed that, please know that we were laughing so hard the tears rolled down our cheeks during Jack's speech. The print version will be almost as good but only if readers can picture Mr. Gantos in person delivering it.

But we can't overlook some of the other wonderful developments at the workshop. For example, there was the announcement that Don Gallo, continually one of young adult literature's strongest allies, has opened another avenue to introduce educators to young adult literature. He is now providing a \$500 grant to help pay expenses for an educator to attend his or her first NCTE conference and ALAN workshop (specifics follow this column). This is a wonderful opportunity to kick-start someone's interest in the genre and all it can accomplish in the classroom.

As co-editors, we're thrilled with being a part of such a successful workshop—and to see the enthusiasm of attendees toting their books and visiting with teachers, authors, librarians, and others about how to make the most of young adult literature for the young people in their lives. All of that enthusiasm carries

back to our classrooms and our libraries and motivates us to push ahead with young adult literature because we know it's a key ingredient to our success in encouraging young readers.

Yes, we truly struck it rich in San Francisco, and we've extended the celebration in this issue of the journal. Fortunately, with young adult literature, there's really no end to the celebration—and the wealth of intriguing stories we can fall into at any time, just by grabbing a book off our shelves. Thank you, Mr. Paulsen, Mr. Hobbs, and all the other talented individuals who made last fall's workshop so successful and invigorating. ALAN may have gotten another year older, but it's certainly not showing its age.

Gallo Grants

The Gallo Grants were established in 2003 by former ALAN Award and Hipple Award recipient Don Gallo to encourage educators in their early years of teaching to attend the ALAN Workshop for the first

time. The grants provide funding—up to \$500 each—for two classroom teachers in middle school or high school each year to attend the ALAN Workshop. (The amount of a grant may be less than \$500 if the applicant lives within commuting distance of the convention location where airfare and housing would not be necessary.) The Workshop is held at the annual convention of the National Council of Teachers of English on the Monday and Tuesday prior

to Thanksgiving Day. Applicants must be teaching full-time; must have been classroom teachers for less than five years prior to the year in which they are applying; and must not have attended an ALAN Workshop previously. Membership in ALAN is not required for consideration, though applicants are expected to become ALAN members if they receive this grant.

Each applicant must fill out the attached grant application form and submit an essay of no more than

750 words explaining their interest in Young Adult Literature, what they hope to gain by attending this year's ALAN Workshop, and how they hope to use the experience in their classrooms in the future. A letter of support must also come from the applicant's school system. The deadline for submission is September 1. Applicants will be judged on their ability to articulate their understanding of the value of Young Adult Literature as well as their explanation of how they intend to use YA books and the information they gather at the Workshop in their own classrooms.

For further information about this grant, contact ALAN Executive Secretary Gary Salvner at gsalvner@ysu.edu or 330-941-3414. Information about the ALAN Workshop may be obtained from the ALAN Website—www.alan-ya.org. Information about the NCTE Convention may be obtained on the NCTE Website—www.ncte.org—or by writing to NCTE Headquarters at 1111 West Kenyon Road, Urbana, IL 61801.

2004 Gloria Barron Prize for Young Heroes

Boulder, Colo.—The Gloria Barron Prize for Young Heroes announces the launch of its 2004 awards. The prize, founded by author T.A. Barron and named in honor of his mother, honors outstanding young leaders ages 8 to 18 who have made a significant positive difference to people and our planet. Barron Prize winners each receive \$2,000 to be applied to their higher education or to their service project.

Since 2001, thirty young heroes have been selected as Barron Prize winners, representing great diversity from all across the country. Half of the winners have focused on helping their communities and fellow human beings; half have focused on protecting the health and sustainability of the environment.

Examples are Kyle Alderson, nominated by his public librarian for creating Project READ, a reading mentorship program based in his town's public library; Barbara Brown, who started the "Don't Be Crude" motor oil recycling program in her Texas county; Ryan Hreljac, who created a non-profit group that has provided clean drinking water wells for over 70 African villages; and Joying Brescia, who has cleaned up South Carolina's beaches with her "No Butts on the Beach" campaign.

Thank you, Mr. Paulsen, Mr. Hobbs, and all the other talented individuals who made last fall's workshop so successful and invigorating. ALAN may have gotten another year older, but it's certainly not showing its age.

Barron explains, “Nothing is more inspiring than stories about heroic people who have truly made a difference to the world. And we need our heroes today more than ever. Not celebrities, but heroes—people whose character can inspire us all. That is the purpose of the Gloria Barron Prize: to share positive examples of heroism with as many young people as possible.”

To nominate a young hero, or to download a “Bibliography of Heroes” or a Reader’s Guide to *The Hero’s Trail*, visit www.tabarron.com or www.barronprize.org, or contact:

Lori Fox
Account Supervisor
Linhart McClain Finlon Public Relations
2340 Blake Street
Denver, CO 80205
(303) 383-4610
lfox@mcclainfinlon.com
or
Barbara Ann Richman
Executive Director
Gloria Barron Prize for Young Heroes
ba_richman@barronprize.org

Call for Manuscripts

Please consider the following themes when preparing manuscripts for submission. Themes are meant to be flexible enough to allow for many possible approaches; however, submissions need not fit one of the themes to be considered for publication in *The ALAN Review*.

2004 Fall theme: Borders and Bridges (Deadline July 15)

Submissions to this issue might include articles about young adult literature dealing with borders and bridges, both literal and/or figurative, between nations, cultures, ideologies or groups of any kind, between YA literature and canonical works, between disciplines. Border cultures could also serve as a topic or any creative approach to the theme.

2005 Winter theme: The Art of Young Adult Literature (October 15)

Submissions for this issue will follow the theme of the 2004 ALAN Workshop in Indianapolis. More information on this theme will be forthcoming in the next issue of *The ALAN Review*.



Mining the Riches of Story:

Young Adult Literature and the Peaceable Classroom

Adapted from Dr. Monseau's keynote address at the 2003 ALAN Workshop in San Francisco.

How can we teachers help our young people cope with the increased violence we are seeing in the world today? I find this question haunting me more and more as I watch the television news and read the daily newspaper. What must it feel like to be growing up at a time when death and destruction have made their way from the somewhat more distant worlds of movies, TV, and video games to the more immediate worlds of school, church, and neighborhood?

In an attempt to answer these questions, as editor of the *English Journal* I devoted an entire issue to the subject back in May of 2000. The theme of the issue was "A Curriculum of Peace." I hoped that teachers would submit articles that would help all of us learn to teach for peace in our classrooms. This was shortly after the Columbine incident, and in my editorial I lamented what I saw as "a lack of respect and understanding among teenagers toward difference, their uncontrolled frustration when faced with disappointment or rejection, and the resulting violent acts we were seeing in our schools" (15). This was more than a year before the events of 9/11. Since that horrific day when thousands of people lost their lives in the World Trade Center destruction, our young people have not only had to face the violence and death of others in their schools and neighborhoods, but they have been forced to face the possibility of their own death at the hands of terrorists striking at random, bent on destroying them and their way of life.

I ask myself, "What does a fourteen-year-old know about infidels? What does a fifteen-year-old know of a god that supposedly rewards people for killing others? And how can even an eighteen-year-old rationalize the murder of classmates by an alienated peer? What is our responsibility as adults to help?"

Reading the opening passages from two young adult novels may help us explore this last question. You may recognize the works from which they come:

I don't know just why I'm telling you all this. Maybe you'll think I'm being silly. But I'm not, really, because this is *important*. You see, it was different! It wasn't just because it was Jack and I either—it was something much more than that. It wasn't as it's written in magazine stories or as in morning radio serials where the boy's family always tease him about liking a girl and he gets embarrassed and stutters. And it wasn't silly, like sometimes, when girls sit in school and write a fellow's name all over the margin of their papers. I never even wrote Jack's name at all till I sent him a postcard that weekend I went up to Minaqua. And it wasn't puppy love or infatuation or love at first sight or anything that people always talk about and laugh. (Daly 3)

Then there's this opening passage—a famous one that may sound familiar:

Sybil Davidson has a genius I.Q. and has been laid by at least six different guys. She told me herself, the last time she was visiting her cousin, Erica, who is my good friend. Erica says this is because of Sybil's fat problem and her need to feel loved—the getting laid part, that is. The genius I.Q. is just luck or genes or something. (Blume 9)

I've chosen these two particular stories because, in my experience, they evoke such different reactions in readers, especially female readers. You may have recognized the first passage, which comes from

Seventeenth Summer, written by Maureen Daly in 1942 when she was a college student. The story takes us back to a time when girls waited patiently at home for boys to call for a date, when premarital sex was taboo for young women, when smoking and drinking were something only “bad girls” did. The second passage comes from Judy Blume’s 1975 novel *Forever*, which treats premarital sex among teenagers matter-of-factly, emphasizing the importance of protection rather than abstinence, getting a progressive grandmother in on the procurement of birth control, and even adding a bit of humor to the sexual experience by referring to a certain appendage as “Ralph.”

Both of these books were on my classroom shelf for an Independent Reading class I taught to eleventh graders some years ago. They were magnets for the females in the class once word got around about their content, and eventually just about every young woman in the class had read them. I always required the students to have a conference with me after they finished a book, and I was quite surprised one day when Kelly, who happened to have a less than virtuous reputation around the school, began talking passionately about *Seventeenth Summer*. She loved the book, she said, because it made her see that not all boys “want something” from girls when they go out with them. She especially liked Jack because he respected Angie and didn’t force her to go beyond kissing him as they sat together on a particularly romantic date. “I wish things could be like that today,” she said, adding, “Boys don’t respect girls anymore.”

In their book *Literature for Today’s Young Adults*, Ken Donelson and Alleen Nilsen classify *Seventeenth Summer* as a “wish fulfillment romance.” If my experience with Kelly is any indication, they are exactly right. Though Angie’s experience in the book is the polar opposite of Kelly’s real-life boy/girl experience, Kelly found the story engaging and heartening because it fulfilled a need that she may never have realized in herself—the need to find love based on respect.

To my surprise, she didn’t care for *Forever*, saying that she would never let her thirteen-year-old sister read it because she didn’t want her to start having sex with boys. Though she avoided talking about her own experience, she clearly felt protective of her sister and perhaps saw this book as hitting a little too close to home.

I tell Kelly’s story because this experience changed my thinking as a teacher. I’ve always believed that adolescents gravitate to books that reflect their lives and to characters that resemble them or people they know. Interestingly enough, the opposite was true in Kelly’s case. But I hadn’t thought that much about a story’s power to fulfill an unrecognized emotional need. Being an admirer of Louise Rosenblatt’s work and an advocate of reader response in the classroom, I always start class discussions with the students’ response to a story and work toward a deeper examination of the work we’re reading, but my experience with Kelly has prompted me to pay more attention to the “why” of student reaction.

Rosenblatt’s book, *Literature As Exploration*, has had a great influence on me as a teacher, yet I think I’ve focused too much on the “literature” and not enough on the “exploration.”

I think back to all the family stories I heard growing up, listening to adults reminisce around the dinner table. At the time I felt bored at hearing the same stories over and over, but I did listen, maybe because those stories fulfilled my unconscious need to know about the early lives of my parents and grandparents; and now, as an adult taking time to explore my reactions to those stories, I realize just how valuable they are to me. I remember feeling angry and sad when my father told of being attacked as a ten-year-old by a gang of boys who stole the small chocolate cake my grandmother had allowed him to buy as a reward for going to the grocery store for her. And I remember admiring my grandmother’s courage in approaching the owner of a local department store during the Depression when my grandfather was out of work to ask for credit so she could buy my father a suit to wear to his high school graduation. When she told that story, she always emphasized that she paid off her debt in full as she had promised. As a child, I was annoyed by her repeated emphasis, but as an adult I realize that she was making a statement to us about her character—a statement she felt the need to repeat each time she told the story.

So stories, whether fictional or true, can satisfy the emotional needs of both the teller and the listener or reader. In the case of young adults, however, those needs can be difficult to determine. I was a bit surprised to learn, on doing a survey recently with ninth and eleventh graders in a suburban school, that

most of them were primarily concerned about immediate needs such as grades, parental expectations, and relationships with friends. Out of fifty students surveyed, only three or four mentioned war or terrorism as primary concerns. Somehow I had expected more students to share these concerns, given what's been happening in the world. But then again, maybe they do. Maybe it's safer and easier to list the usual concerns teens are expected to have. To go any deeper is risky—and not cool. So they keep their fears to themselves.

But there are other young adults whose deep-seated concerns manifest themselves in frightening ways, and some of them may have been sitting in those classes I surveyed. Jon Katz demonstrates this disturbingly well in his book, *Geeks: How Two Lost Boys Rode the Internet Out of Idaho*. A roving journalist, Katz writes for a web site called Slashdot, which, he says, “became the focal point for geek misery in America” after the Columbine killings. According to Katz, the site collapsed repeatedly under the weight of e-mailed stories from kids all over the country. One boy told of standing up in social studies class and saying he could understand on some level the kind of hate and rage the Columbine killers felt after being made fun of and excluded time and again by their peers. As a result of his comments, he was called to the principal's office and forced to undergo five weeks of counseling or be expelled. A girl told of being escorted by two security guards to the nurse's office upon entering the school building wearing a trench coat, then being told by the nurse to undress in a private room, while the guards outside went through her coat. She was then grilled by the principal, who asked her if she was a member of a hate group (she wasn't) or if she played games like Doom or Quake (she didn't). Though she was determined to be brave and defiant, she told of falling apart during the questioning and crying uncontrollably.

Katz tells of other stories he's heard:

From police in a Massachusetts town I heard of a fourteen-year-old boy sitting in his bedroom with his father's shotgun in his mouth, a computer screen open to Slashdot. His life was simply unbearable, for all the usual reasons, and the Columbine coverage persuaded him it would only get worse. It took the cops and other frightened adults three hours to persuade him to put the gun down. It was an incident I declined to share with Slashdot readers, nor did I tell them about a fifteen-year-old in the Midwest with a history

of emotional problems who e-mailed me every day for weeks after Columbine asking for help. He routinely had his books stolen, got punched and kicked, was laughed at when he spoke in class and ignored by teachers He said he had twice tried suicide. (154-55)

We all have students like these in our classes. But what, if anything, can we do to help them? And how would we try? As Katz tells us, “Unhappy, alienated, isolated kids are legion in schools, and voiceless in media, education, and politics. But theirs are the most important voices of all in understanding what happened and perhaps even how to keep it from happening again” (149). When I read that, I thought of one of the articles that appeared in the *EJ* peace issue that I mentioned earlier. In developing a Hip-Hop-influenced slam poetry unit that teaches for peace, Heather Bruce and Bryan Dexter Davis worked with their students to help them express their emotions verbally rather than acting on violent impulse. The teachers note, “This is particularly crucial for male students, who are much more likely than females to act in violent and aggressive ways” (120). Bruce and Davis point out that, while emotional development is usually supported for girls, it is discouraged for boys, and research has shown “a high correlation between lack of facility with verbal expression and aggression and delinquency” (120).

An excellent article that I think is a must-read for any English teacher is G. Lynn Nelson's “Warriors with Words: Toward a Post-Columbine Writing Curriculum,” also in the May 2000 *English Journal*. His essay won the NCTE/*English Journal* Hopkins Award the year it was published, and I must admit that when I first read it upon submission to the *Journal*, I was filled with emotion. Nelson says that we must have personal story at the center of our curriculum. “Deny me my stories,” he says, “. . . and I will eventually turn to the language of violence” (43). He adds:

We don't seem to understand that our stories *will* get published, one way or another. In a society where our own voices cannot be heard over the shouting of commercials and the blare of entertainment and within a curriculum that values a heartless critical essay over personal story, our stories sit in us, waiting to be told, to be acknowledged. . . . In such a society and in our schools we are literally dying to tell our stories. The tragedy of Columbine High School, like all such violence, was a publishing of untold stories, unheard needs, unhealed hearts. (43-44)

Not content with just telling us about the importance of story in the English class, Nelson shows us, concluding his article with a poem written by a student in his Native American first-year composition class at Arizona State University:

**Broken Arrows, Broken Hearts:
I Will Fight No More by Kyle Wilson**

When I was twenty years old, I found myself away from
Dinetah,
Away from my mother, away from my home.
I found myself filled with rage, violence, and anger.
It led me to the back of a police car, caged like an animal.
While the handcuffs cut into my wrists, my heart bled,
and I
thought back to when I was eight years old:
I played Cowboys and Indians.
Always the heroic Cowboy.
I was never Geronimo,
never dreamed of Crazy Horse . . .
While my father was fighting his own war against
himself,
40 miles away in the arms of another lover,
I chased my brother, shooting silver bullets out of my
forefinger.
When I was out of rounds, he fell and lay on the earth
and bled.
As he lay in the dirt, I asked, "Why didn't the Indians
fight back?"
Colen smiled, formed two fists, one behind the other,
drew back the bowstring and shot me with a magic
arrow.
The cowboy died young.
At the precinct, Officer Carson took off the cuffs without
noticing
that I was bleeding. I formed two fists and shot him with
Colen's
magic arrow. An Indian warrior was born. Officer Carson
laughed
and told me those days were over; then he left to round
up more Indians.
In the holding cell, I realized I was fighting a war with
Geronimo,
Crazy Horse, and my father.
No, I was behind Basha's in Pinon, Arizona,
drinking Kool-Aid flavored hairspray.
Or was I in the hospital in Fort Defiance, treating
an old Navajo man because his grandchild
beat him up for ten dollars. Ten dollars.
Or I could have been burying my friend Rodney
Johnson who went AWOL—or was it MIA—
and then DOA.
An Indian murdered Rodney. The same killer stole
the lives of Chris and Fernando. Indians
fighting Indians.

Senseless violence. Broken Arrows. Broken Hearts.
Earlier that night, I had waged a war with
my brother.
I formed a fist and hammered at his face with
clumsy rage.
For many nights before, I dreamed I was fist-
fighting my way through life.
Some of my opponents were my own people, my
brothers and sisters.
We all fought for our lives. Communal efforts
didn't exist in these cages. There were only
bloody mouths and bruised hearts, clenched
fists and clenched teeth.
Then my brother grabbed my shoulders and shook
me from my dream to exorcise the demon that
possessed my body. My soul.
I felt like taking my baptismal vows all over again. I
was reborn.
Heroic Cowboy turned Young Indian Warrior.
This savage wanted to end this war.
I wanted to be a doctor,
Travel back in time,
And cure Christopher Columbus of the disease
that ate his soul.
Exorcise the demon.
I wanted to cook frybread and eat fried potatoes
with corn stew like Grandpa.
I wanted to kiss my mother on the cheek as she
held me close.
I wanted to hug my brother and say,
"I love you."
But most of all, I wanted to fight no more. We all
have bled enough
while fighting with Broken Arrows, Broken Hearts. (45-
46)

Nelson adds that, for the logo on his portfolio, this student had drawn a bow, stretched taut—but in place of the arrow he had drawn a pencil.

In some ways this young man was both the speaker and the audience for his story. In telling it, he fulfilled a need to put his life in perspective and move forward positively. I can't help but wonder: if Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold had been given the chance to tell *their* stories, would the Columbine massacre have ever happened?

Just how different are the needs and concerns of adolescents today from thirty or forty years ago? "Not much," we might say, if the students in my survey are any indication. "Very," we might say, if the young people John Katz writes about are indicative, and probably Angie Morrow of *Seventeenth Summer* and Sybil Davidson of *Forever* would agree.

As people who work with young adults, we have to recognize that, although today's students seem to have many of the same concerns we had about grades, friends, and social standing, these concerns take on a different dimension when placed in the context of a world where young people have unfettered access to adult information and where retaliation against bullying can take the form of shotgun blasts from easily acquired weapons.

In her book *The Peaceable Classroom* Mary Rose O'Reilley asks, "Is it possible to teach English so that people stop killing each other?" (9). I want to answer, "Yes! Yes!" But, as we know too well, the challenge lies in putting such a huge leap of faith into action. I've always been troubled that we focus so much more on competition than cooperation in our schools. Students compete for grades, they compete for awards, they compete for a place on the team. Even in the arts students compete for first chair in the orchestra, for the meatiest part in the play, for first prize in the art show. Yes, I know, we have to prepare them for what they'll encounter in the real world, and I suppose some degree of competition does have its place, but who says the real world must dictate what happens in our schools? Could it possibly be the other way around? If we're educating tomorrow's leaders, why can't we make more of an effort to teach them how to understand and get along with others, both in their immediate world and beyond? Perhaps we can lead by example.

As I say this, some of you may be thinking, "I have state standards to meet, and I have to get my students ready to pass the proficiency tests. I don't have time to listen to their stories and worry about whether they know how to get along with others." But in the midst of state standards and mandated testing, isn't it more important than ever to remember our shared humanity as we teach? (And, as O'Reilley points out, isn't it curious that the word *rigor* is common to the vocabulary of both teachers and morticians?) A softer approach to teaching need not be at odds with concerns about standards and assessment, as the wise teacher will find ways to incorporate relevant content into the pursuit of goals for a more cooperative classroom.

Think for a minute about our classroom discussions of young adult literature. Who's asking the questions? If we are doing the asking, then we're most

likely not going to get much in the way of storied response. Students are smart enough to know that any question a teacher asks must have a "right" answer somewhere, which plays right into the competition model. On the other hand, if our *students* are asking the questions, those questions are most likely based in their own curiosity about a story and, when explored more fully by others in the class, may result in students learning more about the work and about each other. And they're exercising their critical thinking skills, as well, one of the most essential skills students must have to pass any test.

Now let's think about accountability measures. How do we make our students accountable for the reading they do in our classes? Do we give them an objective test on, say, *The Chocolate War*, with perhaps an essay question thrown in at the end? Do we ask them to write a paper on an approved topic of their or our choosing? Would we ever consider letting students take a partner or group test with classmates, where they would have time to discuss each question and write their answers collaboratively? Would we consider asking our students to work cooperatively writing questions for the test? Of course, the first thing we worry about is cheating—back to the competitive model again. But would it really be so bad if the student who hadn't done the reading really learned something from other students by answering questions cooperatively or writing test questions collaboratively? After all, isn't student learning our goal? Maybe we need to think more about how we try to achieve it.

We have a long academic tradition of thinking that reason is king, criticism is all, and that feelings and emotions have no place in the pursuit of knowledge. The academy has always valued the "hard" sciences like physics, chemistry, and biology over the "softer" disciplines of literature, music, and art. Yet it is these "softer" pursuits that allow us to explore what it means to be human—not in the way our bodies are constructed or how their forces act on each other, but in the way we respond to beauty, to love, to tragedy. I will never believe that it's more important to compete with other human beings than it is to understand them.

Mining the riches of story in our classrooms will certainly take time and patience, whether we're encouraging students to write about their lives, or inviting them to speak their stories in response to the

young adult literature they read. But in teaching this way, we are taking a step toward a more peaceable classroom. Young adult literature is the perfect vehicle for achieving this goal, for good YA literature helps young people make sense of their lives. I'm not talking about a touchy-feely encounter group approach or a hand-holding session. I'm talking about creating an atmosphere of reciprocal respect and compassion, where students can discover that their stories are as significant as the fictional ones they read, and that they can learn from each other as well as from books. If I've learned anything in my twenty-five years of teaching, it's that students *want* to tell their stories—and they want to listen to ours. The surest way to get the attention of a class is to tell them about something that happened in your life—whether it's a revelation of an embarrassing moment, an amusing experience you had with your children, or just an admission of a shared fear or concern. All of a sudden you become “human” to them. I can't help but regret the many times over the years that I've felt uncomfortable in class discussion when a student began connecting his or her story to the literature we were reading. Instead of listening, I was mentally scrambling to find a way to redirect the conversation. “We have to stick to the text,” was my rationale. I was too goal-driven to realize that those students were creating their *own* text in response to a need.

I'm not Pollyanna. I know that we have material to cover and accountability to worry about. But there are lots of studies out there that show that *how* students are taught affects learning more significantly than *what* they are taught. Giving more attention and credence to story in the classroom may result in unexpected gains—and may be a small step toward Mary Rose O'Reilley's wish that we teach English so people stop killing each other.

Mitch Albom, the author of *Tuesdays with Morrie*, has written another book called *The Five People You Meet in Heaven*. It's about an old man named Eddie, who dies trying to save the life of a little girl when a ride at the amusement park where he works goes haywire. Eddie discovers that heaven is a place where you meet five people from your past who help you understand the meaning of your life on earth. At the end of the book, Albom writes:

Lines formed at Ruby Pier—just as a line formed someplace else; five people, waiting, in five chosen memories, for a little girl named Amy or Annie to grow and to love and to age and to die, and to finally have her questions answered—why she lived and what she lived for. And in that line now was a whiskered old man, with a linen cap and a crooked nose, who waited in a place called the Stardust Band Shell to share his part of the secret of heaven: that each affects the other and the other affects the next, and the world is full of stories, but the stories are all one. (196)

Regardless of what our concept of heaven is, or whether we even have one, stories make us human. They satisfy our need to connect. Why not fulfill this need by making a place for story in our classrooms as we pursue the kind of knowledge that will surely make our students richer in their understanding of one another—and the world?

Virginia Monseau is a professor of English and English Education at Youngstown State University in Youngstown, Ohio, where she has been teaching since 1986. She is the former editor of the English Journal and a past president of the Assembly on Literature for Adolescents of the National Council of Teachers of English. Among her works are Reading Their World: The Young Adult Novel in the Classroom, 2nd ed. (Boynton/Cook-Heinemann, 2000), ed. with Gary Salvner; Responding to Literature (Boynton/Cook-Heinemann, 1996), Presenting Ouida Sebestyen (Twayne Publishers, 1995), and Missing Chapters: Ten Pioneering Women in NCTE and English Education (NCTE, 1991) ed. with Jeanne M. Gerlach.

Works Cited

- Albom, Mitch. *The Five People You Meet in Heaven*. New York: Hyperion, 2003.
- Blume, Judy. *Forever*. New York: Pocket Books, 1975.
- Bruce, Heather E. and Bryan Dexter Davis. “Slam: Hip-hop Meets Poetry—A Strategy for Violence Intervention.” *English Journal* 89.5 (2000): 119-127.
- Daly, Maureen. *Seventeenth Summer*. [1942] New York: Simon & Schuster, 2002.
- Katz, Jon. *Geeks: How Two Lost Boys Rode the Internet Out of Idaho*. New York: Broadway Books, 2001.
- Nelson, G. Lynn. “Warriors with Words: Toward a Post-Columbine Writing Curriculum.” *English Journal* 89.5 (2000): 42-46.
- Nilsen, Alleen Pace and Kenneth L. Donelson. *Literature for Today's Young Adults*, 6th ed. New York, HarperCollins: 2000.
- O'Reilley, Mary Rose. *The Peaceable Classroom*. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook-Heinemann, 1993.
- Rosenblatt, Louise M. *Literature As Exploration*. New York: Modern Language Association, 1995.

Caring About the Topic:

An Interview with Valerie Hobbs

With *Stefan's Story* barely off the presses, Valerie Hobbs is already deeply into her next project, *Letting Go* of Bobby James: Or How I Found My Self of Steam. Valerie not only captures adolescence in fiction but also teaches writing at the University of California, Santa Barbara, and perhaps even more challenging, she makes school visits to help kids understand that reading is not about taking tests but rather about developing "a natural love of reading." We know of no better way for kids to develop this love of reading than by reading one of the great works of Valerie Hobbs.



sity of California at Santa Barbara had caught fire from Berkeley, and, of course, the infamous bank burning took place in Isla Vista.¹ I was there with my brother, who had just come back from Viet Nam. We couldn't believe our eyes, of course. Nobody could. Then the riot police from LA arrived, riding in dump trucks and wearing riot gear and plastic masks. Our local sheriff flew passes over our heads, yelling through a megaphone to clear the streets. It was all very surreal and, of course, we ran for our lives,

choking on tear gas. I was involved in sit-ins, teach-ins, marches, consciousness raising stuff. But not as involved as I could have been, which may have given the book impetus, who knows? Hind-sight gives us all these chances to be bigger than we were!

TAR: Your novel *Sonny's War* (Frances Foster Books/Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2002), a story of teenage life in Viet Nam era California as told through the eyes of 14-year-old Corin Davies, captures the spirit and specifics of the 1960's perfectly, from a day in the life of a typical teenager to a myriad of conflicting opinions about the war in Viet Nam. You actually were a teenager during that time, one of the most eventful, colorful, violent and volatile in our history. What can you tell us about your own experiences with Viet Nam, the Peace Movement, the Civil Rights Movement, political activism in general, various social revolutions, and a new focus on youth (don't trust anyone over thirty)?

TAR: Your treatment of that time in our history seems carefully, thoughtfully done, including the fact that the ending was not a black and white, predictable, melodramatic tearjerker. You seem to have a lot of respect for your readers; do you consciously avoid beating the reader over the head with social and political messages?

VH: I was in college during the protests. The Univer-

VH: I'm conscious only of the fact that I don't like to be lectured to, told what to think. I don't think any of us do, especially when we're young and, often, see more clearly than we do later. I do respect

young people, especially those who do attempt to think for themselves. The media is so much more overwhelming now than it was in the 60's, which makes it even harder to do that.

TAR: You first introduce us to fictitious Ojala, California, in 1995 as the setting for *How Far Would You Have Gotten if I Hadn't Called You Back?* and continue through *Sonny's War*, also set in Ojala. How different and how similar is Ojala, to Ojai, California, to where you, just like Bronwyn Lewis, moved from New Jersey as a young woman? Did you experience the same culture shock?

VH: Ojai is pretty much as I found it in the late '50s. It was a great culture shock for me. I lived an innocent, almost idyllic life as a teenager in Scotch Plains, New Jersey (sock hops, chocolate cokes at the juke joint, Italian boys who looked like John Travolta.) At least at school, I did. But Ojai was gun racks and pickup trucks, horses tied up in front of the police station. And then all those teens cruising mile-long Ojai Avenue from noon until after midnight, back and forth, back and forth, like wind-up toys. But that's hindsight. I thought it was all thrilling at the time.

TAR: Stefan, the protagonist in both *Carolina Crow Girl* (Frances Foster Books/ Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2002), and its sequel, *Stefan's Story* (Frances Foster Books/ Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003), or Stefan Millington Crouch the Third, as the reporters refer to him when he blocks the path of the logging trucks with his wheel chair, is physically challenged. How is Stefan the same or different from any other teenage boy? Will readers easily identify with Stefan?

VH: Stefan was one of those "gifts" you hear writers talk about now and then. He came rolling out of that mansion as Carolina (and I) watched. I don't know how else to account for him and, no, he isn't different from any other teenage boy whom I've known. He does have different problems. When I speak with kids about Stefan, they don't talk about him as if he's different, and they're very matter-of-fact about his disability. Mainstreaming children with disabilities has made a difference, I think. Of

course kids would rather ride broomsticks than wheelchairs, so maybe it's a bigger problem than I know.

TAR: Also in *Stefan's Story*, we meet Hank (Henry Macias), a goodhearted and honest Paul Bunyan, who is on the opposite side of the controversy from Stefan and Carolina over logging the Haskell's Bay old growth forest. It's hard not to like Hank or wonder how he will support the family if he loses his source of income. As you were writing, you might have chosen to let Mr. Farnsworth, rich and powerful owner of Coastal Lumber represent the logging industry by himself. He would have been much easier to hate. Why did you choose to create Hank?

VH: It's the workers who get pinched in these things, people like Hank who are just trying to make a living. It's hard to be magnanimous about trees if your family is going to go hungry. Most people mean well (and do well if they can afford to—the rain forests are rapidly disappearing in countries where people have no other resources). Of course there's greed, there are the Farnsworths. But even he might have a story, if I wanted to give him one, a penurious childhood or something. But I don't think he's worth the trouble.

TAR: *Tender*, the title and topic of your 2001 work about Liv Trager who is forced to go and live with her father, an abalone diver, when her grandmother dies, has multiple possibilities for meaning. A tender is the person who handles the breathing line that keeps an undersea diver alive while working, but it also serves as a metaphor for the role that certain characters play for each other in the book. In addition, the adjective tender can mean "easily broken" but can also mean "loving" or "caring" (Merriam-Webster, 1210), which surely can apply to Liv, as well as to her father and his girlfriend, Samantha. Did the story come first or the title? How did you arrive at deep sea diving as a vehicle for the story?

VH: My first husband was an abalone diver, so I spent some time as a tender. Thirty years later, I'm driving south on 101, looking out at the ocean, and

almost watching this one come together. The title came with the job, so to speak, one of those wonderfully fortuitous things. And it came early. So I don't know how much it actually influenced the creation of Liv, her father, and Samantha, who are all very human, I think, which is to say loving and caring, broken and patched, as you point out the word tender can also mean.

TAR: You were a writing teacher at the University of California, Santa Barbara for 20 years or more. You have read and responded to hundreds of thousands of papers. What do you think the qualities of good writing are?

VH: Caring about the topic. Unfortunately, somewhere after middle-school all that gets forgotten and kids begin writing to teacher assignments, often about teacher-chosen books. Children love to write. Most of my college students hate it. Something happens in between that breaks my heart.

TAR: Who are your favorite authors and books, young adult or otherwise, and what do you read for enjoyment?

VH: I read almost nothing but fiction (I guess we can include newspapers in that category!). I try to read a lot of middle-grade and YA novels. Not only do I enjoy them, but I also learn from the masters like Paterson and Spinelli. I just finished *Stoner & Spaz* (Candlewick Press, 2002) by Ron Koertge and thought it was terrific, heartwarming and thought-provoking at the same time. *Durable Goods* (Random House, 1993), Elizabeth Berg's first novel, was, for me, such an eye-opening look at the way the voice of an adolescent can capture you, the reader. I've read it several times.

TAR: What did you learn about life when you worked as a waitress at the same time you were working on your graduate degree? Do any of those experiences end up in your writing?

VH: Well, I continually told myself that I wasn't "really a waitress." I was getting an advanced degree, after all. Certainly as far as my writing goes, I learned as much from waiting on people as I

did studying great literature. I worked for many years in a restaurant on the breakwater here in Santa Barbara, a wonderful setting overlooking the old fishing boats. The sun would set about the time I started work, turning the hills above the harbor the most beautiful golden-pink. I knew I was living a special time in my life then, though I never got over thinking the work was somehow beneath me. That restaurant, as well as some of the harbor characters, has turned up in several of my short stories published in literary and women's magazines. I keep flirting with the idea of setting a novel there, and may do it one of these days.

TAR: What advice do you have for aspiring young writers and for teachers of writing?

VH: The late professor Douwe Stuurman, for whom I was a reader at the University of California, Santa Barbara in the late 1970s, once asked the 500 students in a lecture hall how many of them wanted to be writers. About two-thirds held up their hands. Then he asked how many were actually writing and most of those hands went down. "A writer is someone who writes," he said. "The rest of you are just dreamers."

Until I began writing in earnest, I thought being a writer, a real writer, meant you had to sit down everyday and write, confront the blank page or screen and get something down. But a lot of my "writing" takes place in my head, while I'm walking or doing laundry. I think we all discover our own writing process, if we're serious enough about it. I have a friend who writes exactly one page a day and finishes one 300+ page novel a year. I suppose I'd finally say that if we're compelled to write, we write, whether we get published or not. The desire to be a writer doesn't take us far, but the compulsion really does. I'm not sure if we're born with it or are infected with it. And sometimes it feels more like a burden than a gift. But you know when you've got it, that's for sure.

This could cost me my job (I'm kidding), but I don't believe, finally, that writing can be "taught." Beginning writers can learn from more experienced ones as apprentices learned from craftsmen or artists, perhaps by practicing technique, modeling, one-on-one guidance. Lessons out-of-context (that

is, unless they directly apply to something a student has written and wants to revise) are just so much wasted breath.

TAR: What is a typical day like for you?

VH: I walk just about every day, for about an hour. Or I work out at the gym. Then I'm either writing or agonizing about the fact that I can't think of anything worth writing about. In the afternoon I get to play with my year-old grandson, Diego, or teach my class at the university. I also teach a private class in writing for teens, which I enjoy tremendously. I haven't yet told these students I'm not teaching them anything because they're learning so much.

TAR: You are one of the brave authors who goes out to schools and works with the very students who read your books. What typically happens when you visit a school? Any interesting stories?

VH: I'm actually fairly terrified of school visits and don't do them often. I enjoy going to the Santa Barbara Montessori School and the Marymount School because the students there are great readers and are generally full of questions about my books. I avoid visiting schools that have adopted scripted reading programs or don't encourage kids to read "real" (as opposed to text) books. I'm very concerned about this move away from literature toward publisher-generated reading programs and tests. It's the fastest way to kill a natural love of reading that I know of.

TAR: What project are you working on now?

VH: It's so brand-new that I'm afraid to talk about it. I don't even know if I should be writing about the particular topic that has grabbed me, or if the book (a YA, I think) will be published when I'm finished. It's one of those things that feels bigger than I am, something Katherine Paterson wouldn't be afraid of, but that I'm afraid of; which lets me know I need to do it.

1. The incident referred to here happened in the community of Isla Vista, an area adjacent to the University of California Santa Barbara primarily composed of student housing. On February 25, 1970, during riots protesting the war in Viet Nam, the Bank of America building was set on fire. (Isla Vista Resources, 1)

Works Cited

- Hobbs, Valerie. *Charlie's Run*. New York: Frances Foster Books/ Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2000.
- . *Get It While It's Hot, or Not*. New York: Avon, 1998.
- . *How Far Would You Have Gotten If I Hadn't Called You Back?* London: Orchard Books, 1995.
- . *Sonny's War*. New York: Frances Foster Books/ Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2002.
- . *Stefan's Story*. Frances Foster Books/ Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003.
- . *Tender*. New York: Frances Foster Books/ Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2001.
- . *Carolina Crow Girl*. New York: Frances Foster Books/ Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1999.
- Isla Vista Resources. Feb. 13, 2001. Department of Special Collections, Donald C. Davidson Library, University of California, Santa Barbara. January 10, 2004. <http://www.library.ucsb.edu/speccoll/iwweb/iv1.html>
- Merriam-Webster, Inc. Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, tenth edition. Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster, Inc., 2001.



Contrasting Points of View (And Then Some)

Does art reflect life or does life reflect art? This might seem like one of those questions best reserved for late night college dorm “rap” sessions, but the question is certainly a legitimate topic for any thoughtful discussion about what is the role that art should play in a democratic society. And certainly in light of recent events—with the threat of global terror and the impending presidential election of 2004—it is probably best to ask the question, what role should young adult literature play in informing teenagers about the current political, social, and moral aspects of American life? Should young adult literature expose teenagers to exigencies of modern American life, or should literature reflect the true lives that they are living everyday?

At first, it might seem that I am asking the same question—should literature reflect life as teenagers know it? Yet, on second glance, as the following article reviews will reveal, two separate educators have very different ideas about what role young literature should play in students’ lives. They discuss passionately about how much literature really reflects what is

happening in their daily existence. Should students read books about events that they have never experienced—school violence, excessive brutality, and sexual assault—or should they read books that merely reflect popular culture and not what students know as their everyday reality? The questions are intriguing, and the following expounds upon this ever-present dilemma in public school instruction.

Enjoy the read, along with a few choice adolescent research websites as well.

Politicizing Young Adult Literature

An enlightening article and a must read is “Politicizing Young Adult Literature: Reading Anderson’s *Speak* As A Critical Text,” by Janet Alsup (*Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*, October, 2003). In this critical work, English educator Alsup discusses the impact of critical literature on the emotional and intellectual growth of young adults, using Laurie Halse Anderson’s acclaimed novel *Speak* as the basis for her analytical remarks. Her thesis is

that reading literature can be an ethical as well as intellectual process, and as such it can assist adolescents in coping with their tumultuous lives. In light of recent events—the rise in teenage bullying, school violence, and global terrorism—Alsup writes that English and reading teachers, like teachers of every discipline, can help students find good books that address these highly complicated and emotional issues.

Reading and English teachers, Alsup asserts, understand the power of literature. They know that literature can help young adults become more empathetic and critical thinkers, or, as she writes, “critical feelers.” This intangible quality is the ability to discern meaning from a literary work and expound upon its global understanding of the human condition. Reading makes us more human because we begin to see the world through the eyes of another. Citing the work of Rosenblatt (1938), Bushman and Bushman (1993), Nussbaum (1997), Donelson and Nilsen (1997), Yagleski (2000), and Carey-Webb (2001), Alsup underscores the special potential of literature to reveal to its readers the

commonality of the human experience. Creating world citizens, as Nussbaum writes, rests in literary creations that enable individuals to comprehend the motives and choices of people different from ourselves. By sharing stories from all walks of life, Nussbaum concludes, readers develop a “narrative imagination” and become more caring people.

The problem, though, Alsup contends, is that there are too few books for high school or upper adolescent audiences that address serious issues. Most young adult authors, Alsup writes, focus on a middle school aged audience because this age group is where publishing companies have identified the greatest potential for sales. Agreeing with her, Donelson and Nilsen (1997) have underlined several reasons for this marketing strategy, ranging from demographics (e.g., there are currently fewer children of high school age in the United States) to more negative pronouncements about today’s youth (e.g., older kids don’t read; they play video games). Another reason might be, they assert, that more middle school teachers are implementing whole language or “immersion” approaches to reading instruction, thus buying more trade books for their classrooms. Regardless, Alsup asserts, a mere glance at bookstore shelves reveals an apparent greater number of YA books with middle school age protagonists that address the concerns of early adolescence. Simply, topics like drugs, alcohol, violence and sex are seldom discussed in books aimed at older readers, and if so, they are few and far between.

Alsup’s thesis is that English and reading teachers must find these texts and use them in their respective classrooms to motivate young people—especially older adolescents—to talk about these difficult, and often, explosive issues. They must be read and discussed in high school classes, Alsup pleads, because whether we like it or not, these issues—violence, drug use, and sexuality—are real in students’ lives.

This is the reason Alsup finds Laurie Halse Anderson’s *Speak* (1999) such an admirable and desirable young adult text. She argues that this fictionalized account of the aftermath of the raping of a young high school girl is a perfect vehicle to help English teachers redefine and broaden the use of young adult literature in a high school classroom. For, unlike most young adult novels, the character is squarely a high school student—not a prepubescent middle schooler—but a full-fledged young adult whose is victimized by an adult crime. And while sometimes teachers are reluctant to use such books for fear of possible resistance from administrators and parents, controversial texts, Alsup argues, must be made available to students. These difficult yet engaging works can be a valuable first step towards helping students come to terms with the difficult issues that they often face.

Alsup chose *Speak* because it is about girl named Melinda who is raped at a beer party the summer before her first year of high school. As a result, she becomes depressed and alienated, retreating into silence throughout most of the novel. The book is written in an

unconventional style including short vignette-like chapters and life-like visual representatives of Melinda’s report cards (her grades steadily fall throughout her freshman year). What makes the novel so powerful, however, Alsup argues, is that the reader does not learn about the rape until the very end of the novel (although there is much foreshadowing of it). We simply know that Melinda is intensely unhappy, none of her former friends will talk to her, she is failing in school, and she cannot talk to anyone about it, not even her parents. What keeps Melinda going is her own ironic, subtle sense of humor that sustains her, even in her darkest moments. And although Melinda hardly speaks aloud, the reader senses her palpable pain with great sadness and vigor.

Speak, Alsup writes, is a perfect vehicle for high school students because it ‘speaks’ to teen readers about dating violence, divisive peer groups, powerful cliques, feelings of isolation, and school alienation. And while, some conservative districts might have a problem with teenagers reading a book about violence, drugs, alcohol, and sexuality, all teachers—regardless of discipline—should make controversial books available and thereby politicize their classrooms. Controversy is not to be avoided, Alsup argues; it is to be relished.

Moreover, self-censorship is to be avoided. Self-censorship is when teachers do not introduce books into their classrooms for fear of what retribution might occur, not what has already occurred. “While teaching or making available a

book such as *Speak* might be a risk,” writes Alsup (2003, 162), “we can no longer draw a thick line between what students are really doing after school hours and what we can talk about in school.” Teachers can no longer waste the ethical possibilities that literature provides in the face of increasing teenage apathy, anger, and violence. The stakes are too high.

In the remainder of Alsup’s article, she describes specific strategies that teachers can use to engage their students in the novel *Speak*. She also notes the handful of books, geared to older adolescents, which address controversial issues. They are Melvin Burgess’ *Smack* (Avon, 1996) about teenage heroin addicts; Stephen Chbosky’s *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* (Pocket Books, 1999) (drug addiction); Chris Crutcher’s *Whale Talk* (Greenwillow, 2001) (school violence); Alex Flinn’s *Breathing Underwater* (HaperCollins, 2001) (violence towards women); Walter Dean Myers’ *Monster* (HarperCollins, 2001) (reality of life in the inner city); Leslea Newman’s *Fat Chance* (Putnam, 1994) (bulimia); Todd Strasser’s *Give A Boy A Gun* (Simon Pulse, 2002) (school gun violence); and Ellen Wittlinger’s *Hard Love* (Aladdin, 1999) (lesbian relationships). Each of these novels, as Alsup contends, is difficult in its own right, but they are must-reads for young people. They address controversial issues in an engaging manner, heightening their significance and dilemma in a fictionalized account for older adolescents.

When Alsup writes of politicizing the curriculum, she is asking teachers, especially high school

teachers, to expand upon the established literary canon of traditional English literature texts and to reach out to more contemporary and relevant young adult authors. This politicization of the curriculum, she writes, is filled with risks, but the need to address these issues is paramount if a new cultural narrative is to become the embodiment of the high school curriculum. Such moves are bold, she asserts, but essential to developing a new generation of critical and creative thinkers. Truly, Alsup has written a significant treatise on the power of literature to transform curriculum.

Reality Check – Violence in Young Adult Literature

In “Reality Check” (*School Library Journal*, October 2003), middle school educator Kathleen Isaacs presents a slightly different point of view than Alsup’s need to confront serious issues head on in young adult novels, and thus, is worth reading for its apparent contrast in content and tone.

Isaacs discusses the growth of violence in books for young adults. She mentions that, yes, sex and violence have been staples of young adult literature since its inception, but that most of the action and victims have been offstage. And, moreover, when graphic sex and violence first appeared onstage in single scenes, as in Robert Cormier’s *The Chocolate War* (Pantheon, 1974), and Judy Blume’s *Forever* (Bradbury, 1975), they caused an uproar that was felt throughout the young adult literary community. But now, 30 years later, Isaacs contends, the violence,

especially in young adult literature, is pervasive, and the passages are even more descriptive and disturbing.

Isaacs is dismayed by this recent trend in the growing escalation and depiction of violence in young adult literature, a trend she feels is being patterned after the continued display in graphic films and video games. She arrives at this conclusion after reading hundreds of recommended titles for the American Library Association booklist called Best Books for Young Adults from over the past two years (2001-2003). Her careful research and learned observations leave her wondering where this sensational description of violence is coming from and what effect it might have on teen readers.

To defend her thesis, Isaacs cites some recent examples from well-regarded books for young adults. In Kevin Brooks’ *Lucas* (Scholastic, 2003), the protagonist is nearly raped by her brother’s friends, and the title character seems ready to cut the rapist’s private parts with his knife. In the rarefied world of Nick McDonnell’s *Twelve: A Novel* (Grove, 2000), the brother of a party-giver displays his love for guns and weaponry with a horrendous and bizarre shoot-out. Isaacs remarks that even the book’s cover appears to have been splattered with blood as if violence is an everyday event in teenagers’ lives. In Dennis Foon’s *Skud* (Groundwood, 2003), readers are shown four different techniques for managing anger and violent impulses through the lives of four unique male icons. They are a brutal hockey player, a seemingly perfect air force cadet, a hardened

criminal, and a young boy who aspires to play the role of a punk. As Isaacs asks: is this how young boys' lives are now defined in contemporary America? And do readers need to know all the gory details?

Isaacs continues her lament by noting that such violence as child abuse was once only carefully alluded to in stories of hostile, angry teenagers. Now, stories of child abuse are front and center in young adult novels. In such recent works as E.R. Frank's *America* (Atheneum, 2002), Teresa Toten's *The Game* (Red Deer, 2001), and Jeanne Willis' *The Truth or Something: A Novel* (Holt, 2002), the painstakingly hidden memories of sexual abuse are revealed in graphic detail. Moreover, she writes, in Adam Rapp's *33 Snowfish* (Candlewick, 2003) and Paul Fleischman's *Breakout* (Cricket Books, 2003), the sexual abuse is part of daily living and a regular occurrence in the book.

Not stopping there, many young adult novels, Issacs notes, depict violence in other aspects of human endeavor. The brutalities of detention centers are vividly exposed in books like Jack Gantos' *Hole in My Life* (Farrar, 2002) and Rebecca Fjelland Davis's *Jake Riley: Irreparably Damaged* (Harper Tempest, 2003). Issacs questions whether we need to see the protagonist of *Irreparably Damaged*, Jake Riley, abusing young calves or read with vivid certainty about the creation of a killer in John Halliday's gruesome *Shooting Monarchs* (McElderry, 2003). How important is it, asks Isaacs plaintively, to know that in *Shooting Monarchs*, young three-year-old

Macy was tied to a swing in the rain?

Naturally, Issacs notes, stories of school shootings have recently appeared in young adult novel form. Yet, their language and descriptions have been vivid in detail and likeness, and perhaps, too disturbing. One only need turn to Ron Koertge's *The Brimstone Journals* (Candlewick, 2001), David Klass's *Home of the Braves* (Farrar, 2002), and Alex Flinn's *Breaking Point* (HarperCollins, 2002) as vivid examples of young adult novels capitalizing on the spate of school violence. What Isaacs questions are their excessive detail and appearance as ordinary occurrences that students should justifiably fear. It is a trend in young adult novel writing that she finds disturbing at best.

Similarly, Issacs remarks, fantasy stories have heightened the gore as well. In Steve Niles' *Thirty Days of Night* (IDW, 2003), a rather traditional vampire story is matter-of-factly illustrated with page after page of bloodspots. Is the gore necessary? Does it heighten the reader's sense of intrigue and mystery gratuitously? More to the point, Isaacs continues, a recent adventure story as Melvin Burgess's *Bloodtide* (Tor, 2001), a legend based on Icelandic mythology, places readers right there as the character's legs are amputated. How real do we need to get?

Isaacs' point is that the preponderance of young adult novels with vivid descriptions of violence runs counter to the lives of most teenagers. True violence, she counters, is relatively absent in their daily occurrences. Indeed, she argues, sex is more relevant to their

lives than violence. Teenagers, she writes, take sexual content in stride because sex is something they have been hearing about all their lives and they are eagerly looking forward to growing up and being sexual beings themselves; however, their reaction to violence, she argues, could not be more different.

Violence, Isaacs contends, is pretty much absent from the lives of teenagers. Yes, young adults are aware that some teenagers do live in violent worlds, but the majority, she contends (at least the majority she sees) do not. They have never witnessed corporal punishment in school and many have parents who do not believe in spanking. In fact, Issacs says, when they read books in her middle school class where a parent or teacher slaps, spansks or beats a child, they are surprised and appalled by such behavior. Indeed, such scenes, Isaacs writes, spark spirited classroom discussions. Moreover, Isaacs continues, actual physical fighting is a rare occurrence in her students' sheltered, supervised lives. From birth, she asserts, most of the children Isaacs teaches have lived lives of idyllic splendor. During primary years, they did not walk to school on their own, and many have had relatively little unstructured play experience. They were not free to roam their neighborhoods, whether their neighborhoods were city streets or suburban backyards and woods. In fact, Isaacs contends their understanding of violence comes not from life, but from art. The silver screen and the printed page are their first-hand experience with violence; an event they only know for its possibilities and not its

actual pain and suffering. And hence, Isaacs contends, the vividness of the tortured character portrayals and lengthy descriptions of violent acts is something they deliberately shy away from, preferring, instead, the cartoonish “bounce back from the near death experiences” that they know so well from television and movies.

Indeed, reading about violence in graphic detail in these young adult novels is something, Isaacs writes, that her students prefer to avoid. They would rather, she contends, “fill in the holes” themselves, allowing their imaginations to replace gory, uncomfortable and seemingly gratuitous descriptions and details. For Isaac contends that when young people read about acts of cruelty that are beyond the reach of their imagination and experiences, they are done a disservice because they are forced to deal with issues that they are not prepared to understand or discuss. She mentions that when her fifth-graders read Jean Craighead George’s *Julie of the Wolves* (HarperCollins, 1972), they universally protected themselves by completely missing the rape. Similarly, she finds more advanced novels depicting graphic violence—as those previously mentioned—beyond the scope and comprehension of most teenage readers.

Isaacs’ conclusion is that young people are often presented books depicting violence that they will never experience, cannot comprehend, and are, for the most part, unrealistic in content and style. She does not believe that these gritty books represent reality, but are just representations that authors, editors, and book buyers have

bought into to promote their wares.

To buffet her argument, Isaacs cites how since 1993, serious crime rates in the United States have declined steadily. Violent crime, reports Isaacs using Bureau of Justice Statistics (1973-1993), has decreased resulting in fewer robberies, homicides, and rapes. More importantly, similar statistics reveal that the number of violent crimes committed by juveniles has declined, citing her own Washington, D.C., as an example. There, where she teaches middle school, the total number of juvenile arrests fell from 5,151 in 1998 to 2,102 in 2002. And two-thirds of those arrests were for what are called acts against property or acts against public order, rather than acts against people. Isaacs’ contention is that violent crime is not as prevalent as the media would have us believe and the result is the reporting of a steady diet of unnecessary fear.

She writes that a number of social indicators have been steadily on the decline, and this should give comfort to us all. Namely, child abuse is on the decline. Corporal punishment has been banned in schools. School shootings are on the wane. Student-reported crime is down. And an overwhelming number of young people have not been victims of violent crimes. And yet, the majority of American people believe our schools are riddled with violent crime, unruly students, and unsafe conditions. Nothing, according to Isaacs, could be further from the truth.

Thus, educator Isaacs says that before young people are urged to read graphic and violent teenage problem-driven novels, authors and

educators, editors and publishers, should ask themselves if these books are really necessary or are they just contributing to the sensational hype of the popular media and prevailing culture? Isaacs closes her piece with a survey conducted by Neal Howe and William Strauss of a large number of high school students. In their research, *Millennials Rising*, Howe and Strauss offer a hopeful and positive image of today’s young adults. They write that they are, for the most part, “optimistic, hopeful, high achieving, and very sheltered” young people who do not all resemble the vulgar, violent, sexually charged young people that are too often seen in the popular media. Maybe, stories about everyday reality—normal people doing normal things in a normal way—are what these young people really need. True, she says, violence is a fact of life for some people, but a steady diet may prove equally unrealistic and corrosive.

To be sure, Washington, D.C. middle school teacher Kathleen Isaacs gives us something to think about.

Children’s Choices for 2003

Now, here’s a novel idea.

Each year, 10,000 school children from different regions of the United States read and vote on the newly published children’s and young adult trade books that they like best. After the results are tabulated, the Children’s Choices for 2003 list is published in *The Reading Teacher*, a journal of the International Reading Association (IRA) and is meant to be read and

used by professionals and book lovers alike. Children's Choices is a project of a joint committee supported by IRA and the Children's Book Council (CBC). IRA is, of course, the professional educators' organization devoted to scholarly research and dissemination about the instruction of reading worldwide and CBC is the nonprofit professional association of U.S. publishers and packagers of books for young people. Since 1969, IRA and CBC have worked together to produce this eye-catching list about what is exciting young people in the world of children's and young adult books.

The process of selection of the Children's Choices for 2003 is an involved procedure that involves young people monitored by publishers and professional educators. Initially selected by publishers, close to 700 books printed in 2002 for young people—ranging from beginning (ages 5-6) to advanced readers (10-13)—were sent to five review teams located in different regions of the United States. Each team consisted of a children's literature specialist plus one or more classroom teachers who in turn worked with other classroom teachers, school librarians, and more than 2,000 children. Throughout the school year (2002-03), the books were in classrooms, being read to or by children.

After the books were read, teachers and librarians asked young students to list their favorite books for the academic year. The children's votes were then tabulated in March 2003, and the top 103 titles were announced by the International Reading Association in May. The review teams con-

cluded their work by providing an annotation for each title on the list.

The Children's Choices for 2003 is a smart list of what's good in children's literature and worth exploring for an informative look at what young children find enjoyable in literature aimed at their age level. More importantly, the books for the advanced readers provide young adult teachers and researchers with a bird's eye glimpse of what advanced readers (ages 10-13) enjoy. The advanced readers children's choices include the following young adult novels—Avi's *Crispin: The Cross of Lead* (Hyperion, 2002), a fourteenth-century feudal England adventure story about missing parents; Margaret Peterson Haddix's *Among the Betrayed* (Simon & Schuster, 2002), a science fiction adventure story about kidnapping and mind control; Terence Blacker's *The Angel Factory* (Simon & Schuster, 2002), about a child selected to save the earth from evil; Cynthia Voigt's *Bad Girls in Love* (Atheneum, 2002), a true to life story about teenage rebellion; Marsha Qualey's *One Night* (Dial Books, 2002), the story of a recovering heroin addict; Deborah Ellis' *Parvana's Journey* (Groundwood Books, 2002), about living in war-torn Afghanistan; Jan Cheripko's *Rat* (Boyd's Mills Press, 2003), a moving tale about a handicapped's boy love for basketball; and Phyllis Reynolds Naylor's *Simply Alice* (Atheneum, 2002), a gentle book in a continuing series about a young girl coming into her own as a high school freshman.

Complete with tips for parents and teachers about reading, instruction, and becoming involved in the

yearly selection, this is a good list for all educators and researchers to use to pursue their own scholarly studies about what young people are reading.

Interview with Richie Partington

Finally, a quick nod and heads up must be devoted to a web site that has proven to be one of the best young adult literature resources available. The site is richiespicks.com, a place where you can find comprehensive lists of the best in children's and young adult books published in recent years. There, avid book lover Richie Partington has developed a web site based on his extensive knowledge and experience with books for children and teenagers. It is worth a look and a favorite setting on your computer for its lists and accompanying reviews are a treasure trove for researchers, teachers, and readers who are interested in learning about the latest and greatest in books for kids.

This site came to my attention in our own *ALAN Review* editor's James Blasingame's article "An Interview with Richie Partington" in the October 2003 issue of the *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*. There, Jim conducts a two-page one-on-one interview with this inveterate book lover, discussing how he came to create such a delightful website, his reasons for selecting the works he does, his insatiable love for reading books aloud to young children, and his immediate plans to expand and expound his informative web site for book lovers everywhere. Both the interview and the web site are

definitely worth a look. Until then, happy reading.

Jeffrey S. Kaplan is Associate Professor of Educational Studies in the College of Education, University of Central Florida, Orlando and Daytona Beach campuses. His most recent works include serving as editor of a six-volume series of books entitled *Teen Life Around the World* (Greenwood Publishing, 2003), a non-fiction account of the life of a typical teenager in a foreign country, and *Using Literature to Help Troubled Teenagers Cope with Identity Issues* (Greenwood Publishing, 1999). Write or email Dr. Kaplan in the Department of Educational Studies, College of Education, University of Central Florida, Orlando, Florida 32816, jkaplan@mail.ucf.edu.

References

- Blasingame, James. "An Interview with Richie Partington." *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy* 47.2 (2003): 186-187.
- Bureau of Justice Statistics. www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs.
- Bushman, John. & Bushman, Kay Parks. *Using Young Adult Literature in the English Classroom*. New York: Merrill, 1993.
- Carey-Webb, Allen. *Literature and Lives: A Response-based, Cultural Studies Approach to Teaching English*. Urbana, IL: National Council Teachers of English, 2001.
- Center for the Prevention of School Violence, 2001. www.juvjus.state.nc.us/cpsv.library/statistics.htm
- "Children's Choices." *Reading Teacher* 57.2 (2003): 163-179.
- Donelson, Kenneth. I. & Nilsen, Alleen. P. (1997). *Literature for Today's Young Adults* (5th ed.). New York: Longman, 1997.
- Isaacs, Kathleen T. (2003). Reality check. *School Library Journal*. 49.10 (2003): 50-51.
- National Center for Education Statistics. www.nces.ed.gov
- National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect Information. www.calb.com/nccanch/
- Nussbaum, Martha C. *Cultivating Humanity: A Classical Defense of Reform in Liberal Education*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997.
- Off Balance: Youth, Race, and Crime in the News. www.buildingblocksforyouth.org/media/media.html
- Rosenblatt, Louise M. *Literature as Exploration*. New York: Modern Language Association. New York: Modern Language Association, 1938.
- Yagelski, Robert. *Literacy Matters: Writing and Reading the Social Self*. New York: Teachers College Press, 2000.
- ### Young Adult Books
- Anderson, Laurie Halse. *Speak*. New York: Farrar, Straus, & Giroux, 1999.
- Avi. *Crispin: The Cross of Lead*. New York: Hyperion, 2002.
- Blacker, Terence. *The Angel Factory*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2002.
- Blume, Judy. *Forever*. New York: Bradbury, 1973.
- Brooks, Kevin. *Lucas*. New York: Scholastic, 2003.
- Burgess, Melvin. *Smack*. New York: Avon, 1993.
- Burgess, Melvin. *Bloodtide*. New York: Tor, 2001.
- Chbosky, Stephen. *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*. New York: Pocket Books, 1999.
- Cherpiko, Jan. *Rat*. Honesdale, PA: Boyds Mills Press, 2002.
- Cormier, Robert. *The Chocolate War*. New York: Pantheon, 1974.
- Crutcher, Chris. *Whale Talk*. New York: Greenwillow, 2001.
- Davis, Rebecca Fjelland. *Jake Riley: Irreparably Damaged*. New York: HarperTempest, 2003.
- Ellis, Deborah. *Parvana's Journey*. Ill. Pascal Milleli. Toronto, ON: Groundwood Books, 2002.
- Fleischman, Paul. *Breakout*. Chicago: Cricket Books, 2003.
- Flinn, Alex. *Breathing Underwater*. New York: HarperCollins, 2001.
- Flinn, Alex. *Breaking Point*. New York: HarperCollins, 2001.
- Foon, Dennis. *Skud*. Toronto, ON: Groundwood Books, 2003.
- Frank, E. R. *America*. New York: Atheneum, 2002.
- Gantos, Jack. *Hole in My Life*. New York: Farrar, Straus, & Giroux, 2002.
- George, Jean Craighead. *Julie of the Wolves*. New York: HarperCollins, 1972.
- Haddix, Margaret Peterson. *Among the Betrayed*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2002.
- Halliday, John. *Shooting Monarchs*. New York: Margaret K. McElderry Books, 2003.
- Klass, David. *Home of the Braves*. New York: Farrar, Straus, & Giroux, 2002.
- Koertge, Ron. *The Brimstone Journals*. Cambridge, MA: Candlewick Press, 2001.
- McDonell, Nick. *Twelve: A Novel*. New York: Grove Press, 2000.
- Myers, Walter Dean. *Monster*. New York: HarperCollins, 1999.
- Naylor, Phyllis Reynolds. *Simply Alice*. New York: Atheneum, 2002.
- Newman, Leslea. *Fat Chance*. New York: Paperstar/Putnam and Grosset Group, 1994.
- Niles, Steve. *Thirty Days of Night*. ill. Ben Templesmith. San Diego, CA: Idea and Design Works, 2003.
- Qualey, Marsha. *One Night*. New York: Dial Books, 2002.
- Rapp, Adam. *Snowfish*. Candlewick, 2003.
- Strasser, Todd. *Give a Boy a Gun*. New York: Simon Pulse, 2002.
- Toten, Teresa. *The Game*. Calgary, AB: Red Deer College Press, 2001.
- Voigt, Cynthia. *Bad Girls in Love*. New York: Atheneum, 2002.
- Willis, Jeanne. *The Truth or Something: A Novel*. New York: Holt, 2002.
- Wittlinger, Ellen. *Hard Love*. New York: Aladdin, 1999.



Teens Meeting the Challenge:

Young Adults Gain a Voice Deciding What's Hot to Read

Many teens love to participate, and they love to be asked for their opinions. What better way to focus on these two elements than through books? The Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) of the American Library Association, with *Voice of Youth Advocates (VOYA)* magazine as a co-sponsor, experimented with this idea through a pilot project using teenagers who belonged to library teen book groups throughout the country. The ultimate goal was to develop a permanent program through which teens could vote on their top ten favorites among the most current YA books. Instead of teachers and/or librarians making the award choices, teens themselves would have a voice.

The first phase of the Teens' Top Ten/YA Galley pilot project began in 1999, focusing primarily on the Teens' Top Ten element. Two groups were targeted to participate in the project, our Young Adult Advisory Council (YAAC) at the City of Mesa Public Library in Arizona and a junior high library advisory board in Pennsylvania that met at four different sites: Marshall

Middle School in Wexford, and North Hills Junior High, Carson Middle School, and Northland Public Library in Pittsburgh. Each group read books chosen for that year's Best Books for Young Adults List from YALSA. In time for Teen Read Week 1999, both groups submitted their final votes, which were combined into one "winners" list. The list of titles chosen was published in the December 1999 issue of *VOYA*.

In 2000, the second phase began. This time, it concentrated on the YA Galley part of the project. Participating publishers sent hot-off-the-press copies of books and galley editions to six teen groups throughout the country. Each teen group read the books and completed evaluation forms. The completed teen evaluation forms were returned to the publishers by the librarian advisors, so the publishers could receive feedback on the books from the teens.

Phase three took place during 2001. The segments of the project from the first two years were combined into one Teens' Top Ten/YA Galley Project. Six teen library advisory groups participated and

completed the project. The groups received galley copies or newly published YA books, and group members completed evaluation forms. The forms were once again sent to the publishers to give them teen feedback.

At this point, teens also used the forms for a second purpose—to nominate titles for the 2001 Teens' Top Ten. If a book received at least two nominations, it was added to the contender list. Nominations from all participating groups were tallied and compiled into one master list. Each group kept reading, and from October 14-20, which was Teen Read Week, each group conducted a final vote for the 2001 Teens' Top Ten pilot. This list of winning titles was published in the December 2001 issue of *VOYA*. The six teen library groups that completed the project also developed criteria for teens to evaluate books in the future.

At the conclusion of the 2001 project year, the YALSA Task Force members assigned to develop Teens' Top Ten/YA Galley as a possible permanent YALSA project wrote a final report. At the American Library Association's Midwinter

Conference in 2002, the report was submitted to YALSA, and Teens' Top Ten was officially approved as an ongoing project. So, 2003 would be the first full year of the project with real votes that count.

Five teen school and public library advisory groups nationwide have been and will be serving as the actual 2003-2004 Teens' Top Ten nominating and voting groups. These groups include the MLHS Booktalkers at Medical Lake High School in Medical Lake, Washington; the Teen Advisory Board at Allen County Public Library in Fort Wayne, Indiana; the Teen Advisory Board: Readers R' Us at Wilson Middle School in Plano, Texas; the Teen Advisory Council at B. B. Comer Memorial Library in Sylacauga, Alabama; and the Teen Review Board at East Lansing Public Library in East Lansing, Michigan.

During 2003, the teen members of these groups read, fast and furiously, the galley and new books that the ever-increasing list of participating publishers offered. In addition, for the first time, nominating teens could also select books from publishers *outside* the YA Galley Project. Readers evaluated each title and nominated or seconded the ones they felt were outstanding. The list of nominated titles was posted on a new web page, developed just for this purpose. To view the results, you can do a keyword search under "Teens Top Ten," or use the following URL: http://www.ala.org/Content/NavigationMenu/YALSA/Special_Projects/Teens_Top_Ten.htm

Ten additional teen advisory groups participated as readers and

evaluators without submitting nominations. As our YAAC continued in this capacity, it was interesting to see how members' opinions agreed or conflicted with those of the five nominating groups. Since they read so much, the teens in YAAC and the other participating groups were well prepared to do the

School and public librarians can promote the project among students who use their libraries via bulletin boards, a school or library web page link, special PA and written announcements, by mentioning the program during booktalk presentations, distributing bookmarks or flyers listing nominated titles, sponsoring a voting party, or perhaps by having teen library group or book club members promote Teens' Top Ten in creative ways to their fellow students.

final national online voting at the same time the nominating groups were conducting their paper ballot votes.

For the 2003 Teens' Top Ten list, teens could select any young adult or adult book published in the United States in 2002 or 2003 not previously nominated. Each title had to be nominated and seconded by members of the official Teens' Top Ten nominating groups. Readers made their selections according to criteria that the teens themselves developed; you can find a link to the criteria on the previously mentioned web page.

During Teen Read Week, October 19-25, 2003, any interested teens nationwide, ages 12-18, who had read the books and had access to the Internet could vote online for their favorites from the posted nomination list. More than 1,700 teens did so, a good turnout for the first "official" year of the project. After the five nominating groups voted and a tally was reached, and after the national teen online votes were completed, the results were posted in November on the Teens' Top Ten web site.

School and public libraries had been encouraged to publicize the Teens' Top Ten voting as part of Teen Read Week activities. At our library, we made flyers and put up a bulletin board to promote the voting, and we included Teens' Top Ten in all our Teen Read Week publicity. We also posted information and a link on the "Teens" section of our library's web page, www.mesalibrary.org.

Next year, YALSA hopes more schools and libraries will help promote the Teens' Top Ten project by encouraging teens to read the nominated books and to vote. How can you get your teens involved?

If you are a YALSA member and have a teen library group or a

book club at your school or public library, you can apply by June 2004 to have them considered for one of the 2005-2006 Teens' Top Ten five nominating/voting groups. You can also apply for them to become one of the ten participating YA Galley reading and evaluating groups. If you qualify and are interested, contact the Teens' Top Ten/YA Galley committee chair Diane Monnier at dmonnier@erols.com for an application.

Another way your teens can participate is for you to keep tabs on and share information about the books the nominating groups are selecting as they are posted on the web page. Nominations began in January and close by May 31, so in June 2004, the final title list will be ready for reading and gearing up for the 2004 Teen Read Week voting in October. Teachers might choose participation (reading the books from the nomination list and doing the final voting) as an extra credit or regular class assignment, depending on the class. Another idea might be to use the nominated books for some other kind of class, summer or independent reading assignment or activity.

School and public librarians can promote the project among students who use their libraries via bulletin boards, a school or library web page link, special PA and written announcements, by mentioning the program during booktalk presentations, distributing bookmarks or flyers listing nominated titles, sponsoring a voting party, or perhaps by having teen library group or book club members promote Teens' Top Ten in creative ways to their fellow students. You

might also include promotion of Teens' Top Ten as part of your library's teen summer reading program or your school's reading list. Be sure to order the nominated titles and add them to your library collection, so teens have access to them.

For the last four years, teenagers have met the challenge of producing a book award list that is theirs, from nominations to final votes. Now it is up to teachers, school and public librarians who work with teens to make sure that all the rest know about the project and get involved as well.

Teens' Top Ten Books 1999 (in rank order):

1. Rowling, J.K. *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*. New York: Scholastic, 1998.
2. Sachar, Louis. *Holes*. New York: Farrar, 1998.
3. Ferris, Jean. *Love Among the Walnuts*. San Diego, CA: Harcourt, 1998.
4. Werlin, Nancy. *The Killer's Cousin*. New York: Delacorte, 1998.
5. Quarles, Heather. *A Door Near Here*. New York: Delacorte, 1998.
6. Yolen, Jane and Bruce Coville. *Armageddon Summer*. San Diego: Harcourt, 1998.
7. Wilson, Diana Lee. *I Rode a Horse of Milk White Jade*. New York: Orchard, 1998.
8. Mikaelson, Ben. *Petey*. New York: Hyperion, 1998.
9. Paulsen, Gary. *Soldier's Heart*. New York: Delacorte, 1998.
10. Peck, Richard. *A Long Way from Chicago*. New York: Dial, 1998.

Teens' Top Ten Books 2001 (in rank order):

1. Nicholson, William. *The Wind Singer* (Wind on Fire #1). New York: Hyperion, 2000.
2. Ewing, Lynn. *Goddess of the Night* (Daughters of the Moon #1). New York: Hyperion, 2000.
3. Ewing, Lynn. *Into the Cold Fire* (Daughters of the Moon #2). New York: Hyperion, 2000.
4. Colfer, Eoin. *Artemis Fowl*. New York: Talk Miramax/Hyperion, 2001.
5. Korman, Gordon. *No More Dead Dogs*. New York: Hyperion, 2000.
6. Goobie, Beth. *Before Wings*. Victoria, BC: Orca, 2000.
7. Weaver, Will. *Memory Boy*. New York: HarperCollins, 2001.
8. Lester, Julius. *When Dad Killed Mom*. San Diego, CA: Harcourt, 2001.
9. Klass, David. *You Don't Know Me*. New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 2001.
10. Nicholson, William. *Slaves of the Mastery* (Wind on Fire #2). Hyperion, 2001.

Teens' Top Ten Books 2003 (Teens' Top Ten Voting Groups) (in rank order):

1. Brennan, Herbie. *Faerie Wars*. New York: Bloomsbury, 2003.
2. Plum-Ucci, Carol. *What Happened to Lani Garver?* San Diego: Harcourt, 2002.
3. * Nix, Garth. *Abhorsen*. New York: HarperCollins, 2003.
4. Johnson, Angela. *The First Part Last*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2003.
5. * Black, Holly. *Tithe: A Modern Fairy Tale*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2002.

6. * Brashares, Ann. *Second Summer of the Sisterhood*. New York: Delacorte/Random House, 2003.
7. Prose, Francine. *After*. New York: HarperCollins, 2003.
8. Bowler, Tim. *Storm Catchers*. New York: McElderry/Simon & Schuster, 2003.
9. Ferris, Jean. *Once Upon a Mari-gold*. San Diego: Harcourt, 2002.
10. * Funke, Cornelia. *The Thief Lord*. New York: Chicken House/Scholastic, 2002.
5. Fredericks, Mariah. *The True Meaning of Cleavage*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2003.
6. * Nix, Garth. *Abhorsen*. New York: HarperCollins, 2003.
7. Rumstuckle, Cornelius. *The Book of Wizardry: Apprentice's Guide to the Secrets of the Wizard's Guild*. St. Paul, MN: Llewellyn, 2003.
8. Giles, Gail. *Dead Girls Don't Write Letters*. Brookfield, CT: Roaring Brook, 2003.
9. Brooks, Martha. *True Confessions of a Heartless Girl*. New York: Melanie Kroupa Books/Farrar Straus Giroux, 2003.
10. Frank, E.R. *America*. New York: Atheneum/Simon & Schuster, 2002.

**Teens' Top Ten Books 2003
(National Online Teen Vote), 2003**

1. Duane, Diane. *A Wizard Alone* (Young Wizards #6). San Diego: Harcourt, 2002.
2. * Brashares, Ann. *Second Summer of the Sisterhood*. New York: Delacorte/Random House, 2003.
3. * Black, Holly. *Tithe: A Modern Fairy Tale*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2003.
4. * Funke, Cornelia. *The Thief Lord*. New York: Chicken House/Scholastic, 2002.

* Title appears on both 2003 Teens' Top Ten lists.

Further reading:

Macrae, Cathi Dunn. "How Can Librarians and Teachers Involve Teens in Teens' Top Ten Online Voting?" *Voice of Youth Advocates (VOYA)* Oct. 2003: 269+.

Macrae, Cathi Dunn. "Testing . . . The Teens' Top Ten Best Books 1999." *Voice of Youth Advocates (VOYA)* Dec. 1999: 303.

Macrae, Cathi Dunn. "YA Galley and Teens' Top Ten Books: Teen-Selected 'Best' Booklist to Debut for Teen Read Week 2003." *Voice of Youth Advocates (VOYA)* Dec. 2002: 334.

Diane Tuccillo, a former English teacher, has been Young Adult Coordinator at the City of Mesa Library in Arizona since 1980. Diane served on the ALAN Executive Board from 1999-2002, has been a frequent presenter at ALAN Workshops and other professional conferences, and is active in the Arizona Library Association and YALSA. She has written articles for *The ALAN Review*, *VOYA*, *Kliatt* and other publications, serves as a book reviewer for *School Library Journal* and *VOYA*, and is a member of *VOYA's* editorial board. Diane has been elected to the 2005 Printz Award Committee. Her forthcoming book for Scarecrow Press is *Library Teen Advisory Groups: A VOYA Guide*.

Form Follows Function:

The Relationship Between Structure and Content in Three of Karen Hesse's Novels

Louis Sullivan, mentor to Frank Lloyd Wright, once noted that, in architecture, form should follow function; a building should be designed to suit its purpose. When designing a home for a family, for example, it makes sense to create open spaces for gathering and to provide ample storage. These choices encourage family interaction and maintain some semblance of order in the midst and bustle of life. Similarly, a museum that houses large-scale paintings requires a much different setting than one geared toward the display of portraiture; with each, presentation space must be used to meet the demands of the art. Perhaps, more importantly, the resulting ambiance and sense of scale affect the viewer's impressions. Standing in the vast, open corridor of the Louvre and viewing David's larger-than-life portrayal of the coronation of Napoleon feels different from sitting on a warm couch in a small, salon-style room and seeing Rembrandt's intimate self-portrait. To place the one painting in the setting of the other would detract from the power of the piece.

This same premise holds true in literature. Authors make form-related decisions that affect both the structural and thematic integrity of their work. Understanding content may be of the utmost importance in making meaning of a literary text; form, however, should not be ignored. A work without structure is no work at all, as form is driven by content. In fact, an author's choice of form in the creation of a novel may reveal as much or more than the content itself.

Several young adult authors have written works that demonstrate this connection between content and

form. Walter Dean Myers, *Monster*; Ellen Wittlinger, *Hard Love*, and Liz Rosenberg, *17*; for example, have chosen to share, with great success, one of their narratives through a non-narrative form. Karen Hesse, however, has experimented with form in almost every novel she has written; it has helped to define her as an author. She is a risk-taker who recognizes this pattern in her writing, as well as her pleasure in it, as evidenced by her claim, "It seems that the projects I choose demand a different way of telling than the regular prose narrative, but they are very satisfying when you get them right" (Hendershot and Peck 858). Although several of Hesse's novels serve as models of the power that results when form and function collide in literature, three—*Letters from Rifka*, *The Music of Dolphins*, and *Out of the Dust*—represent the unique personal forms in which Hesse has chosen to ground her stories. By employing personal forms—letters, diary, poetry—in these novels, Hesse celebrates introspection and reaches adolescent readers, in particular, who find relevance in such personal exploration given their reflective nature. Hesse recognizes the needs of her audience and selects forms that will best help them find their way—and themselves—in her stories.

Letters from Rifka

The Plot

Believable characterization and well-developed themes make Hesse's novel, *Letters From Rifka* (1992), a welcome contribution to the world of adolescent literature. The critics agree. The novel's acclaim is evidenced by its selection as a *School Library Journal*

Best Book of the Year, *Horn Book* Book of the Year, and recipient of the National Jewish Book Award. As Hesse notes in the novel's foreword, the work is historical and draws largely on the memories of Lucy Avrutin,

By employing personal forms—letters, diary, poetry—in these novels, Hesse celebrates introspection and reaches adolescent readers, in particular, who find relevance in such personal exploration given their reflective nature. Hesse recognizes the needs of her audience and selects forms that will best help them find their way—and themselves—in her stories.

Hesse's great-aunt. In a collection of letters to her Russian cousin, Tovah, Rifka describes her family's migration from Russia to the United States from 1919 to 1920. We follow her on her tumultuous journey, witnessing the inhumane treatment Russian Jews such as Rifka suffer at the hands of their countrymen, the illness that plagues the family members on their trek, the isolation that Rifka experiences when forced by disease to stay behind, and, eventually, the reunion that grants Rifka her dream of freedom. *Letters from Rifka* is a powerful work of historical fiction. It is unique in form without being inaccessible, and emotional without being melodramatic. The characterization is complex, and the themes are cogent and richly realized. Lucy Avrutin lived a life far removed from that of many

readers, but Hesse has succeeded in conveying her story in a way that is comprehensible, although amazing to imagine.

Correspondence (and Hope) through Letters

In *Letters from Rifka*, Hesse adopts the use of letters as the structural means through which to tell her story. Rifka writes these letters to her sixteen-year-old cousin, Tovah, who remains in Berdichev. The epistolary form allows Rifka to reflect on "memories of what she has left behind, including the fierce racist

persecution" she and her family face (Rochman, 1931). Because she leaves Russia with only a few possessions, Rifka records her correspondence in the margins of a collection of poetry by Alexander Pushkin. As a result, the letters are not sent as they are completed; Rifka, instead, hopes to be reunited with her cousin, at which point she plans to share her experiences.

Due to Rifka's resulting isolation, the letter form is completely appropriate. Writing letters helps Rifka maintain a sense of connection with her family. Her written "conversations" with Tovah provide something familiar amidst her new surroundings. When she learns, for example, that she will be detained at Ellis Island, she writes, "Dear Tovah, I don't know how to tell about what has happened. I feel numb and I can't believe. I thought if I could tell you, maybe it would make some sense, maybe it would help" (92). Writing letters also helps her to cope by giving her some sense of power over her condition. Although she is physically unable to leave Ellis Island, for instance, the details she chooses to provide Tovah about her experiences there are determined by her alone. Her notes provide a means through which she can shape her experience. Finally, writing letters gives her hope. As a form of communication, the use of letters implies an intended audience. This, in turn, suggests that the letters will someday be read and responded to. Rifka believes that eventually what she has to say will be seen by her cousin. This dream of success inspires her to persevere.

The Music of Dolphins

The Plot

The Music of Dolphins (1996) revolves around Mila, a young girl who is raised by dolphins from the time she is four years of age when she alone survives a plane crash near the Florida coast. Still a teenager, Mila is found and "rescued" by the Coast Guard and placed in the hands of Doctor Beck, a research scientist interested in language development in "wild" children such as Mila. Although Mila is a willing participant and thrives at first, she yearns for her ocean home and marine family, eventually accepting her inability to live in human society. In the end, she is returned to her home in the sea but is forever changed by her experience on land. A *Publishers Weekly* Best Book of the Year, *School Library Journal*

Best Book of the Year, ALA Best Book for Young Adults, and *Book Links* Best Book of the Year, *The Music of Dolphins* has earned well-deserved respect as a unique and engaging story sure to conjure questions with no easy answers. *The Music of Dolphins* is memorable primarily due to the accuracy of Mila's observations about the human condition and our subsequent wonderings about what it means to be members of this race. The story is unusual in its construction but not so much that we cannot relate to the characters and their dreams and dilemmas.

Reflection (and Change) Through Diary Entries

Hesse innovatively employs the diary form in *The Music of Dolphins*. Although the novel appears "deceptively easy in format," it is "complex and demanding" (McClelland 120). Selecting this form, however, resulted only after a struggle. Hesse tells us,

It was tricky to pull off because I tend to write in the first person, and I had a child who was pre-lingual. It was the toughest challenge because if you're telling the story through a first-person narration, and the person telling the story has no language with which to tell the story, how, in fact, do you tell the story? (Bryant, 39)

Hesse solved her dilemma by first recording Mila's thoughts in italics. She begins the story in Mila's own "perfectly sustained voice: the clear and simple, but profound and poetic language of a 'foreigner' with a keen mind and resonant spirit but limited vocabulary" (McClelland 120).

As Mila begins to acquire human language, however, she is asked by the scientists to keep a diary. This diary form records not only Mila's impressions but her changing developmental level as well. Hesse achieves this through a creative use of font size and language structure. When Mila begins to record her words, the letters run in large font across the page, and her sentences are short and simple. Her early entries appear as such:

The helper is Sandy. Sandy says, I have a present for you, Mila. Sandy says, This present is to eat. This present is good fish. Do you want to eat this good fish, Mila?

I say, No. The fish is not good. The fish is dead.

Sandy is not happy. I like Sandy happy. (9)

As Mila's ability develops, however, the letters themselves begin to shrink in size, while her strings of words lengthen. Her word choice reveals a more advanced vocabulary, and her depth of explanation suggests increasing proficiency with the language. She writes,

Everyone is sleeping. I stand at the window. The light of the moon touches the river. I put my ear to the cold glass and I listen to the music of the water.

I am alone.

I am alone like the baby in the lullaby with the birds and the butterflies around him.

The wind makes the trees to sing. The wind makes the river to sing.

I sing too. I sing a gray song. A little, little Mila song. Not big, not many voices. Only one voice. A song of alone. (67)

With her regression, this process is reversed, so that by the end of the novel, we see once again simple words and large font. Visually, Mila's progress and decline are evident.

What is particularly interesting about the use of the diary here deals with the issue of audience. Typically, the diary is a place wherein we record our deepest, most personal feelings, knowing that only our eyes will read them. In this case, however, Mila's words do not remain hidden from view. Because the doctors treat her as a research subject, a powerless pawn in the quest for scientific knowledge, she loses all privacy. Her very self—physically, emotionally, and mentally—is in the hands of the authorities who control her.

Out of the Dust

The Plot

One of Hesse's best known novels, *Out of the Dust* (1997) has been well received. Winner of the Newbery Medal and Scott O'Dell Award and recognized as an ALA Notable Children's Book, ALA Best Book for Young Adults, *School Library Journal* Best Book of the Year, and *Publishers Weekly* Best Book of the Year, the novel is often touted as her signature work. In it, Hesse tells the story of fourteen-year-old Billie Jo, who lives with her mother and father in the heart of the Oklahoma Dust Bowl during the 1930s. When her mother dies in a tragic accident, Billie Jo is injured and subsequently unable to continue playing the piano, her life's passion. Over the course of the novel, Billie Jo must come to terms with her guilt over her involvement in the accident, her strained relationship

with her father, and her own sense of loss due to her disfigurement, all the while living in a natural world that is destructive and unforgiving. Written in free verse poetry, the novel is unique in form but universal in appeal. Although the novel is particularly situated in terms of plot and setting, Hesse captures and presents a tale that relates to the human condition in general. Not all readers experience death and dust in the world they inhabit, but they can relate to the larger issues of family, freedom, and, ultimately, forgiveness.

Introspection (and Insight) Through Poems

Hesse has received great praise for her unique use of form in *Out of the Dust*. Here, the story is told through the first person, free verse reflections of Billie Jo. Hesse reveals her rationale for this form:

I never attempted to write this book any other way than in free verse. The frugality of the life, the hypnotically hard work of farming, the grimness of conditions during the dust bowl demanded an economy of words. Daddy and Ma and Billie Jo's rawboned life translated into poetry. (Hesse, "Newbery Medal Acceptance" 426)

Despite the unusual form, the "language, imagery, and rhythms are so immediate that after only a few pages it will seem natural to have the story related in verse" (Schadle, 217). Although "she creates no flowery description of this hard-bitten place," Hesse's words are "artistic in their starkness," almost as we would expect in a "painting or photograph" (Blasingame 12-13). Hesse's editor agrees, noting,

A profound and visceral sense of place is one of the qualities that is most memorable about Karen Hesse's writing I do remember reading *Out of the Dust* for the first time. And I know where I was. I may have appeared to be sitting at my desk at Scholastic Press, turning the pages of a typewritten manuscript, tuning out the office noise. But I was in Oklahoma in 1934. I was tasting the grit in my mouth. I was burying the dead. I was hopping a train and running away (to Hollywood, in that first draft!), out of the dust with Billie Jo. (Bowen, 432)

This stark form "enables Hesse to cut quickly to the heart of Billie Jo's life and personality" (Blasingame 3) and allows the reader to feel "the intensity of Billie Jo's life" (Stover 97). When, for example, she feels she can no longer continue to exist amidst the memories of sadness, Billie Jo claims,

I am so filled with bitterness,
it comes from the dust, it comes
from the silence of my father, it comes
from the absence of Ma.

I could've loved her better.
She could've loved me, too.

But she's rock and dust and wind now,
she's carved stone,
she's holding my stone brother. (195)

In these unadorned passages, we see her almost as if she is nude, caught in such stark reality that it is sometimes embarrassing to look. The form distills the experiences "into brief, acutely observed phrases" that reveal a depth of pain that cannot be disguised with meaningless words (Lempke, 330).

Form, Function, and the Adolescent Audience

Adolescents, in their search for understanding, naturally look within. These young readers are struggling to make sense of themselves and their place in the adult world they will soon enter. They are dealing with issues of identity formation, dependence versus independence, and self-acceptance and validation. Hesse's novels, through their inward-looking forms, both reinforce and extend this process. Readers can access the personal feelings and thoughts of characters willing to record their frustrations, fears, heartbreaks, and joys on the written page. Inner selves are revealed, giving us a glimpse into worlds we could access in no other way. Each of these forms—the letter, the diary, and the poem—embodies a sense of intimacy that provides an immediacy of emotion for the reader. Hindered not by excess or unnecessary ornamentation, they provide an honesty of expression that creates a sense of trust between speaker and reader.

Given this unique insider view, adolescent readers can more easily see others like them struggling through conflicts similar to their own and experience a greater sense of normalcy in the recognition that they are not alone. Despite the differing experiences of Rifka, Mila, and Billie Jo, each protagonist is trying to determine where she fits in—am I American or foreigner, am I human or dolphin, am I daughter or outcast? When Rifka writes about her fear of being

alone and Mila records her confusions and frustrations at being human and Billie Jo expresses the heartbreak she feels as a result of her distanced relationship with her father, each girl presents a truth regarding the adolescent condition in the most candid of forms. Witnessing literary characters, especially those similar to themselves in age, successfully (but not without struggle) navigate this coming of age journey can encourage younger readers to persevere in the search for self. Authors, like Karen Hesse, who allow their characters to tell engaging, personal stories that readers find relevant to their own lives can inspire, or in the very least, encourage readers to realize, "It's OK to be me."

As young readers wonder about the kinds of people they are and will become, they can also safely imagine themselves into other worlds, peering into the revealed and revealing lives of the girls they meet on the page. Here they can witness, examine, and, ideally, empathize with characters that can provide alternatives not provided in their everyday lives. Through reading Rifka's portrayal of her experiences, young women in traditional homes may come to value her spunk, audacity, and desire to be an educated, free human being. Mila may inspire young readers to question what they have come to take for granted as members of the human community. Are we indeed as wise and important as we sometimes think? As Billie Jo faces her physical deformity and resulting dashed dreams, those who have never struggled with such seeming limitations may develop a greater respect for those who have. Entering into the minds of each character, as these personal forms allow, enables readers to experience the world in a new way, a way that may encourage alternative thinking and engender compassion and concern.

In the End, the Medium Matters

What impresses me most about Hesse's approach to fiction is her willingness to experiment, to explore innovative forms that yield more powerful content. Hesse's novels would not be as effective if written in other forms. The forms (informal and personal) fit the function (helping readers interact meaningfully with texts). How appropriate to use the letter form when describing the experiences of a young girl who hopes for nothing more than to be successfully reunited with

her family, to maintain some semblance of communication, to rekindle the connection she has lost while traveling on her own. Through what means could one more clearly witness the progression and regression of a character than through a personal diary that allows readers to experience this pattern in a way that telling alone could not provide? What better way to capture the bleak landscape and accompanying emotional desolation of the Dust Bowl era than through barebones poetry in which every word carries weight and significance? Beethoven scored the last movement of his Ninth Symphony, "Ode to Joy," on a massive scale in hopes of most effectively capturing his vision of unadulterated, collective human joy. That same, simple melody played by a single trumpet might be beautiful, but the message conveyed and resulting impact on the audience is not the same. In literature, in art, in music, in life, the medium matters.

Wendy Glenn is in her second year as an assistant professor in the Neag School of Education at the University of Connecticut, where she teaches courses in adolescent literature and methods of teaching English. Her article "Consider the Source: Feminism and Point of View in Karen Hesse's Stowaway and Witness" appeared in The ALAN Review in the Winter 2003 issue.

Works Cited

- Blasingame, James. *Karen Hesse*. Ottawa, KS: The Writing Conference, Inc., 1998.
- Bowen, Brenda. "Karen Hesse." *The Horn Book Magazine* 74 (1998): 428-32.
- Bryant, Ellen Huntington. "Honoring the Complexities of Our Lives: An Interview with Karen Hesse." *Voices from the Middle* 4.2 (1997): 38-49.
- Hendershot, Judy, and Jackie Peck. "Newbery Medal Winner, Karen Hesse, Brings Billie Jo's Voice *Out of the Dust*." *The Reading Teacher* 52 (1999): 856-58.
- Hesse, Karen. *Letters from Rifka*. New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1992.
- . *The Music of Dolphins*. New York: Scholastic, 1996.
- . "Newbery Medal Acceptance." *The Horn Book Magazine* 74 (1998): 422-27.
- . *Out of the Dust*. New York: Scholastic, 1997.
- Lempke, Susan Dove. Rev. of *Out of the Dust*, by Karen Hesse. *Booklist* 94 (1997): 330.
- McClelland, Kate. Rev. of *The Music of Dolphins*, by Karen Hesse. *School Library Diary* 42.11 (1996): 120.
- Myers, Walter Dean. *Monster*. New York: HarperTempest, 1999.
- Rochman, Hazel. Rev. of *Letters from Rifka*, by Karen Hesse. *Booklist* 88 (1992): 1931.
- Rosenberg, Liz. *17*. Chicago: Cricket Books, 2002.

Schadle, Carrie. Rev. of *Out of the Dust*, by Karen Hesse. *School Library Diary* 43.9 (1997): 217.

Stover, Lois T. "Karen Hesse." *Writers for Young Adults*. Ed. Ted Hipple. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 2000. 93-101.
Wittlinger, Ellen. *Hard Love*. New York: Simon Pulse, 1999.

| | |
|--|--|
| <p><i>The Afterlife</i> by Gary Soto Harcourt Children's Books, 2003, 168 pp., \$16.00</p> <p>Chuy is a 17-year-old boy, born in Mexico and raised in Fresno, Calif. Although he is tragically murdered in the bathroom of a night club, his sudden death brings about many revelations about life, falling in love, and relationships.</p> <p>Average in looks and in life, Chuy narrates his short life and newly acquainted afterlife as he details his experiences, feelings, and what he learns as a ghost.</p> <p>The prequel to Soto's popular <i>Buried Onions</i>, which takes a look at events surrounding Chuy's death from the point of view of his cousin.</p> <p>Readers will enjoy Soto's <i>The Afterlife</i>, a creative and original journey of life and death as seen through the eyes of Chuy.</p> <p>Kim Morgan Chandler, AZ</p> | <p><i>At the End of Words</i> by Miriam R. Stone Candlewick Press, 2003, 55 pp., \$14.00</p> <p>In her memoir, Miriam Stone, currently an undergraduate student at Columbia University, tells a powerful story about mothers and daughters and pain and healing. In the form of poetry and diary entries, Stone shares the difficulty of watching her mother die from cancer and her personal struggle to cope with the everyday issues many teenage girls face. In addition to discussing the experiences of being a high school student, such as attending the prom and hanging out with friends, Stone also reveals her feelings on the importance of family in getting through hard times. Although the relationship she had with her mother is the primary focus, her father and brother are also an integral part of her life.</p> <p>Miriam finds serenity in her writing and uses it to express to her mother what she wishes she had said before her mother passed away. Told with passion and honesty, this story reveals the power of words and the heart-wrenching thoughts of a teenage girl. So well written is this memoir, that the reader has a genuine feeling of what it must have been like for Stone, as a high school senior, to lose her mother. Although heartbreaking, the story is refreshing because it takes the reader on a journey through pain and suffering that ends with the author healing and finding peace.</p> <p>This narrative is a must-read for all young women, as Stone beautifully expresses her fears, regrets, pain, and eventual peace and happiness.</p> <p>Amanda C. Hudson Glendale, AZ</p> |
| <p><i>Alia Waking</i> by Laura Williams McCaffrey Clarion Books, 2003, 214 pp., \$15.00</p> <p>Not all girls have the privilege of becoming warriors, and Alia wants nothing more than to be accepted into the woman warrior sisterhood, the keentens, with her best friend, Kay. Her brothers died fighting the war against her society's enemy, the Beechians, and Kate wants to fight to end the war.</p> <p>The keentens are highly selective when choosing girls to join the sisterhood, but when Kay and Alia discover two Beechian children hiding in the forest near their house, the girls are sure that their capture will lead to an invitation to be a keenten. Kay and Alia are assigned to guard the prisoners until their fate is decided. However, Alia is slowly realizing that she has a special gift—trees in the forest speak to her.</p> <p>Through her newly discovered gift, her relationship with the Beechian children, and a conflict with Kay, Alia discovers something terrible has been happening in her own society. She is determined to right the wrongs even if she must give up her dream of being a keenten and her best friend to uncover the truth and bring the justice for which her brothers died fighting.</p> <p>From the first page, young readers will be captured by the excitement and the suspense of the book. Long after the last page is turned, however, the reader will still remember the importance of compassion and self-discovery to help us through life.</p> <p>Brittany Scovel Mesa, AZ</p> | <p><i>Confinement</i> by Carrie Brown Algonquin Books, 2004, 368 pp., \$24.95</p> <p>Confinement is not only the title of this thoughtful and haunting novel; it is also the prevailing theme, the glue that holds the characters together. First we meet Arthur Henning, widower and survivor of Nazi Europe, who flees to America with his young son, Toby. Hired by the Duvall family to be their chauffeur, gardener, and handyman, Arthur finds peace in the cottage on their estate. Here, Arthur and Toby slowly recover from their trauma, surrounded by idyllic countryside and the companionship of the mansion's kitchen servants and the Duvalls' young daughter, Aggie. As Arthur watches Toby and Aggie grow up safe and strong, a new life seems possible.</p> <p>However, the idyllic setting hides an undercurrent of confinement. Each character is trapped in his or her own individual way. As a teen, Aggie finds herself pregnant. The events brought on by the pregnancy tear apart both families. Aggie is dispatched to a home for unwed mothers to cover her parents' shame and to dispose of the child. Toby vanishes, and the Duvalls slowly implode. Shocked by the heartlessness of the Duvalls, yet afraid of losing his comfortable position, Arthur suffers in quiet, powerless misery. Only when faced with the threat of once again losing everything, does Arthur begin to create a future.</p> <p>Brown reveals Arthur's haunted, inner world in layers, switching between flashback, daydreams, and the present. It is a tale of fear and guilt, emotional survival, and the redemptive power of love.</p> <p>Amy Fiske Phoenix, AZ</p> |

| | |
|--|---|
| <p>Dark Waters by Catherine MacPhail Bloomsbury USA Children's Books, 2003, 176 pp., \$15.95 ISBN: 1-58234-846-4</p> <p>Family Loyalty/Honesty</p> <p>Col McCann—known by the entire town because of the vicious actions of his father and older brother—struggles with the decision of being the local town hero or following his family name and becoming a nuisance to the society.</p> <p>Col has just helped his brother, Mungo, escape trouble with the police by providing him an alibi for some unknown crime he committed. While visiting his favorite hangout, the loch, Col risks his own life attempting to save a young boy named Dominique from drowning when the ice cracks underneath him. Now in Dominique's family's good graces, Col must deal with his brother's dislike for the attention it has brought to him and his family.</p> <p>After he learns of Mungo's crimes against his own friends—crimes he was unknowingly an accomplice to—Col struggles with the decision of being loyal to his family or doing the right thing and correcting the wrongs that have been done.</p> <p>Rickey Kishbaugh Phoenix, AZ</p> | <p>Fault Line by Janet Tashjian Henry Holt & Company, 2003, 246 pp., \$16.95 ISBN: 0-8050-7200-4</p> <p>Comedians/Dating/Abused Women</p> <p>At 17, Becky Martin is a high school senior with aspirations of becoming a comedian. With her best friend, Abby, Becky performs stand-up at a local comedy club in San Francisco, striving to connect with her audience, perfect her act, and make it big on the comedy scene.</p> <p>After one of her performances, Becky meets Kip Costello, a fellow amateur comedian, and the two connect through their shared talent. The relationship takes an intense turn, and Becky begins to isolate herself from friends and family. Facing the demands of school, college applications, two jobs, and her future in comedy, Becky attempts to balance her life with her feelings for Kip, becoming dependent upon him in the process. When the relationship turns emotionally and physically abusive, Becky is forced to rely on her own instincts to turn away from Kip.</p> <p>The novel grants readers a glimpse into the thought processes of Kip and Becky, the abuser and the abused, as well as the resounding effects of such relationships upon friends and family. Though Becky's pursuit of a career in comedy frames the subject matter, the topic of abuse in teenage relationships remains serious and important for all young adults.</p> <p>Amanda Humphrey Tempe, AZ</p> |
| <p>The Divide by Elizabeth Kay The Chicken House, 2003, 318 pp., \$15.95 ISBN: 0-439-45696-7</p> <p>Fantasy/Adventure</p> <p>Alone in the world, separated from true friends, and isolated by his parents, Felix struggles with a heart condition that threatens his life. Torn between life and death, Felix and his parents set out to Costa Rica in search of a chance for life. Against his parents' wishes, he escapes briefly to view the Great Divide (where the Atlantic and Pacific oceans split) only to discover himself in a world unlike any he has ever known before.</p> <p>In a mythical world where legends live and humans don't exist, Felix discovers many magical and amazing creatures fascinated by science but living in a world of magic. He is led on an adventure beyond his dreams as he and his new friends search to find him a cure. Lost in the challenge of a mythical world, Felix is faced with the chance to discover something greater than his cure, and he begins to see the hope to a brighter future.</p> <p>Amy Young Mesa, AZ</p> | <p>Finding My Hat by John Son Orchard Books, 2003, 185 pp., \$16.95 ISBN: 0-439-43538-2</p> <p>Coming of Age</p> <p>Have you ever felt like your family is different than everyone else's? Jin-Han Park has. Young Jin-Han is a first-generation Korean American immigrant. Not only do Jin-Han's parents speak a different language at home than he speaks in public, but they look different, act different, and eat different foods than everyone else. In <i>Finding My Hat</i>, we follow Jin-Han through his battles in kindergarten all the way through his years in junior high school where he quite humorously discovers girls.</p> <p>Jin-Han's story is that of a young boy dealing with the many hardships and triumphs life seems to throw at him. <i>Finding My Hat</i> is told with grace and style, while still addressing many difficult issues including the tragic death of his mother.</p> <p>Young adult readers will be quick to engage in Jin-Han's story.</p> <p>Stephanie Rips Tempe, AZ</p> |

| | |
|---|---|
| <p><i>Flight of the Fisherbird</i> by Nora Martin Bloomsbury USA Children's Books, 2003, 146 pp., \$16.25 ISBN: 1-58234-814-6</p> <p>Clementine, better known as Clem, was born to immigrant parents from Scotland. Her father and Uncle Doran invest in a large island—Granger Island—to farm. Clem grows up on the island. When she is 13, she starts to see the world more clearly, after her uncle's partner dies and his daughter, Sarah, ends up living with Clem and her parents.</p> <p>This book explores the struggle of a young girl learning that people, even those one depends on, can have many faces. With Sarah's arrival, Clem's uncle visits more often, and Clem starts to wonder why he is so interested in her. As the book progresses, Clem's perspective of the people around her changes.</p> <p>This is a great book for teenagers interested in adventure and exploration, as well as learning about becoming an adult and noticing that the world is not as perfect as they thought it was.</p> <p>Kim Haugen Tempe, AZ</p> | <p><i>The Green Dog: A Mostly True Story</i> by Suzanne Fisher Staples Frances Foster Books, 2003, 128 pp., \$16.00</p> <p>The summer between fourth and fifth grade promises to be a lonely one for Suzanne. She has no real friends near her home on Chapman Lake, and she needs a dog. In fact, she already knows what the dog looks like and that she will name him "Jeff."</p> <p>Suzanne has a love for all creatures and a lively imagination that takes her to far away places, but her yearning for a canine companion is taking all her thoughts this summer. A dog appears on the porch one day, and, in spite of her parents' misgivings, Suzanne convinces them to let Jeff stay. The girl and the dog become fast friends, and Suzanne is happier than she has ever been until the mischief begins. Jeff is a free-spirited dog who causes more than his share of troubles, and Suzanne's father threatens to send Jeff to live on a farm. How can Suzanne keep Jeff in line, and how many chances will he get?</p> <p>This semi-autobiographical novel will enchant young readers as they come to know Suzanne as a bright, imaginative, and caring girl. Her love for Jeff will strike the hearts of many readers, while the dog's repeated antics foreshadow a decision that will be difficult for Suzanne to understand.</p> <p>Susan Mullarkey Phoenix, AZ</p> |
| <p><i>The Flip Side</i> by Andrew Matthews Random House Children's Books, 2003, 146 pp., \$14.95 ISBN: 0385730969</p> <p>Robert Hunt is a 15-year-old boy who, like many other teenagers, is trying to make sense of not only society's views on sexuality, but also his own role as a teenage male. Through experimenting with the female gender in addition to finding himself in a Shakespearean play, Robert realizes the importance of being comfortable with one's self.</p> <p>Growing up in a small town in England, Robert has had an ordinary life. However, when forced to star as Rosalind in the play, <i>As You Like It</i>, the confused Robert begins to question the role of gender. The inexplicable and extraordinary feeling that arises when he plays Rosalind strangely makes him feel happy within himself. Quick to deny this sense of liberation, Robert seeks a confidant, Milena, who has also switched gender roles in the play. Coincidentally, Robert finds relief and reassurance in Milena, for she, too, has reservations about her own sexuality. Shortly after Milena's confession, Robert receives news that his best friend, Kevin, has been struggling with the same dilemma, for he has been hiding his homosexuality from himself, as well as everyone else. This reoccurring issue of gender in society causes Robert to accept Kevin for who he is.</p> <p>Told with honesty and humor, young readers will enjoy this novel, for it presents issues relative in the lives of many teenagers. Robert's search for himself and dedication to his friendships is admirable and inspiring under the lighthearted approach of showing the importance of knowing yourself.</p> <p>Amanda Fiegel Philadelphia, PA</p> | <p><i>Inkheart</i> by Cornelia Funke The Chicken House, 2003, 554 pp., \$19.95 ISBN: 0-439-53164-0</p> <p>Meggie is a rather mature 12-year-old who lives with her father, Mo. She even calls him Mo and has for as long as she can remember. One thing she does <i>not</i> remember is how one night when she was just 3 years old, while her father was reading aloud to Meggie, her mother vanished from the room, out of the very bed she had been sitting in. Mo has a special gift (which he passes down to Meggie) of reading characters out of books when he reads aloud. As her mother disappears, three men, Capricorn, one of the most dangerous characters; Bastia, his cruel and heartless servant; and Dustfinger, a man who plays with fire, stand across the room from Mo and Meggie. They are characters from <i>Inkheart</i>, the book Mo had been reading aloud. After Mo chases them out of his house, he is left with Meggie; for nine years it is just the two of them, and for nine years Meggie listens intently when Mo tells stories of her mother's mysterious and exciting trips around the world. Meggie, believing her father, hasn't realized her mother is trapped in a book.</p> <p>Filled with twists and turns, ups and downs, this fantasy will leave you moved, especially at the reunion of three people separated for many years. Most likely in the end you will feel as Meggie and her Aunt Elinor did, that books are better left under their covers and not meant to come alive.</p> <p>Evita Wiatr Chicago, IL</p> |

| | |
|---|--|
| <p><i>Keeper of the Night</i> by Kimberly Willis Holt Suicide/Depression/Self-mutilation Henry Holt and Company, 2003, 308 pp., \$16.95 ISBN 0-8050-6361-7</p> <p><i>Keeper of the Night</i> is set in Guam, and the beauty of this setting stands in contrast with its subject matter. The book opens with the suicide of Isabel's mother and traces the paths of Isabel and her family toward recovery. As the oldest daughter, Isabel assumes responsibility for her father, her brother, and her sister, and she watches helplessly as they each descend into their grief. Her father throws himself into his work, ignoring his children. Brother Frank's anger eventually leads to self-mutilation, and her younger sister, Olivia, suffers from nightmares.</p> <p>Kimberly Willis Holt skillfully weaves local legends and folklore into Isabel's story. In a series of very short chapters, we clearly see her frustration with her inability to help herself and her family.</p> <p>Perhaps best suited for middle-grade readers, <i>Keeper of the Night</i> is a gentle and compelling exploration of the effects of depression on one family.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">F. Todd Goodson Manhattan, KS</p> | <p><i>Leaving Protection</i> by Will Hobbs Fiction/Alaska Fishing Adventure HarperCollins Children's Books, 2004, 192 pp., \$15.99 ISBN: 0-688-17475-2</p> <p>Born in a floathouse on the back bay of Port Protection, Alaska, 16-year-old Robbie McDaniel needs to earn money. He hops a ride to the fishing village of Craig in hopes of finding work as a deck hand on a fishing boat. After finding no opportunities, he finds a job with Tor Torngensen on <i>The Storm Petrel</i>. At first, they are highly successful at catching King Salmon, the most lucrative of the fish in season. Then a hull sets in, and Robbie finds out that, in addition to fishing, Tor is also searching for plaques buried by Nikolai Rezanov of the Russian-American Company who intended to claim parts of Alaska for Russia. When not fishing, Tor is an antique dealer, and he has come into possession of Rezanov's journal, which details where the plaques were buried. The plaques are valuable, and by finding and selling them, Tor can secure his retirement. During the fishing lull, Tor becomes obsessed with the search for the plaques, and Robbie worries that Tor may not go back to port. In the end, an intense change in the weather and the accompanying storm push the story in roller-coaster fashion to the exciting conclusion.</p> <p>Stylistically, Hobbs wastes no words, and the intensity created by the tight word choice convinces me that fishing for King Salmon could be the highlight of anyone's life. As usual, Hobbs integrates the results of the meticulous, historical research that he always does and, as a result, enhances the narrative flow. Robbie as a responsible young adult decision-maker is an excellent role model for young adults. This is a fine book in the Hobbs tradition.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Edgar H. Thompson Abingdon, Virginia</p> |
| <p><i>The Last Mall Rat</i> by Erik E. Esckilsen Coming of Age/Courage Houghton Mifflin Company, 2003, 182 pp., \$15.00 ISBN 0-618-23417-9</p> <p>Mitch Grant is 15 years old and looking to make some money. Too young to get a job legally, he accepts money from salespeople at the mall to get revenge on rude customers by harassing them in the parking lot. Mitch's world quickly spins out of control as his services become highly demanded by the salespeople, and Mitch recruits his three closest friends to help him with his business. As exaggerated rumors begin to fly through the small community about the teen's activities, the community becomes terrified to go to the mall and puts pressure on the police to take action against the teenagers. The police place full blame for the teen's real and imagined activities on Mitch's best friend, because of his troubled past. Mitch must find the courage to confess his role in the mall harassment or allow his friend to take the fall alone.</p> <p>The story takes the reader on a journey with Mitch as he makes one faulty decision that leads to an uncontrollable disaster. Mitch, along with the reader, learns that facing the consequences of his actions and doing the right thing are important parts of growing up.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Tracy McHugh Gilbert, AZ</p> | <p><i>Midnight Blue</i> by Pauline Fisk Fantasy Bloomsbury, 2003, 250 pp., \$16.95 ISBN: 1582348294</p> <p>A young girl named Bonnie stows away on a neighbor's mystical hot air balloon in an attempt to escape her wicked grandmother. She comes to ground in the "land beyond the sky," a parallel universe complete with a mirror image of herself as well as alternate versions of everyone she knows.</p> <p>Although this world is similar in many respects to the world she left behind, it is also somehow different. Here Bonnie finds the family she always dreamed of. Her mother has become the mature adult Bonnie needs and the absentee father has been replaced with the caring Michael. It is a magical world and proves to be everything Bonnie has wished for, yet there is also something very wrong. There is an evil that Bonnie must confront. There is a darkness in the "land beyond the sky." Bonnie soon realizes she has brought this darkness to the mystical land.</p> <p>Bonnie does not want to leave, but she knows she must or those she loves will perish. With the help of her friend, "the shadow boy," Bonnie again boards the hot air balloon, but this time she goes home. When she arrives, she realizes her selfless actions in the parallel world have had some effect on her original world, as well.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Simon Baumkatz Custer, S.D.</p> |

| | |
|--|---|
| <p>Milkweed by Jerry Spinelli Alfred A. Knopf, 2003, 224 pp., \$15.95</p> <p>Historical Fiction/Holocaust ISBN 0-375-81374-8</p> <p>Little Misha is known by many names throughout his life, names both given him by his adopted people and his cruel oppressors. Naturally searching for identity and acceptance, he gets swept up in humanity's greatest atrocity. Misha is an uneducated orphan in Warsaw, Poland. Adopted by smugglers and Jews, he learns to use his speed, wits, and small size to survive. He and his friends steal from the fortunate to keep alive, and through this, they create hope for themselves by embracing adventure, challenge, and charity.</p> <p>The story is told from Misha's naive point of view, making the story a perfect introduction to the events of the Holocaust for young adults. When the Jews begin to be subjected to terrible things, Misha doesn't understand. He sees the world with a child's eyes and has no way to process what is happening to him.</p> <p><i>Milkweed</i> is heartbreaking, not only for its honest look at an abhorrent series of events, but also for its realistic portrayal of the toll these events take on a boy, his adopted family, and his misfit friends. The book successfully captures these people in all their frail humanity, their joy and follies, their triumphs and tragedies.</p> <p>Steve Rasmussen Tempe, AZ</p> | <p>Mystery in Mt. Mole by Richard W. Jennings Houghton Mifflin, 2003. \$15.00</p> <p>Thirteen-year-old Andy Forrest sets out to solve the mystery of missing middle school assistant principal Jacob Farley, who turns out to be the missing person that nobody misses at all. Andy's list of suspects almost immediately grows to include nearly everyone he interviews. The story takes place in the unremarkable small town of Mt. Mole, whose sole interesting feature is the geographical oddity that gave the town its name. Mt. Mole is populated by a variety of eccentric characters, including police Chief Eagle Talon (who isn't a policeman at all, but everyone was already used to calling him Chief). While Mt. Mole seems relentlessly ordinary, the affable Andy loves it and appreciates the charm of its odd inhabitants. Soon Andy is joined by his romantic interest, blond cheerleader Georgia Wayne; and yet another mystery crops up: What are the strange rumbling noises coming from Mt. Mole? There are numerous plays on words, and some of them are real groaners, but that just adds to the fun. Although the plot is somewhat predictable, this is a thoroughly enjoyable book because it doesn't take itself too seriously—just like its offbeat protagonist.</p> <p>Wendy Street Pella, IA</p> |
| <p>Mind Games by Jeanne Marie Grunwell Houghton Mifflin Company, 2003, 133 pp., \$15.00</p> <p>ESP/Clubs/Individuality ISBN: 0-618-17672-1</p> <p>Do you believe in extra-sensory perception? The six members of the Mad Science Club in Jeanne Marie Grunwell's <i>Mind Games</i> are not quite sure if they do, so they develop an experiment to test the existence of ESP as their required group entry in the school science fair.</p> <p>The members of the club are brought together, not by choice, but by unique circumstances that the reader learns of throughout the novel, which is written in the form of the completed science fair project the group collectively turns in. The group is comprised of an eclectic mix of students—ranging from a star basketball player still hurting from the sudden death of his mother to a young girl who recently moved to America from Russia. Each of the characters narrates different sections of the project that explain how they win the lottery and “prove,” to a certain extent, that they each possess an “extra” sense. Through their inquiry of ESP, the characters also learn the importance of understanding others and discover more about themselves in the process.</p> <p>The characters in the novel are seventh-graders, but the personal challenges they encounter and the realizations they make will also appeal to an older audience of readers. Although the organization of the novel may frustrate some less patient readers, <i>Mind Games</i> is both subtly humorous and perceptive of human nature, making it a novel I “sense” many adolescents will enjoy.</p> <p>Emily Pauly St. George, KS</p> | <p>Naming Maya by Uma Krishnaswami Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2004, 192 pp., \$16.00</p> <p>Coming-of-Age/ India ISBN 0-374-35485-5</p> <p>Maya is an adventurous young girl, who by unusual circumstances leaves New Jersey for India.</p> <p>Her parents have just undergone a divorce. Her father has left for Texas, and her mother decides to go to India, where her closest relatives are. When Maya first arrives in India, she feels out of place and awkward. She realizes some things are going to change, including the way she dresses and acts around people. Maya and her mom are living with Mami, Maya's grandma. Mami is about 80 years old and is a very wise and intelligent woman. Maya is faced with many challenges throughout the book, and each challenge she overcomes with ease. She is always the heroine who comes up with solutions.</p> <p><i>Naming Maya</i> will be enjoyed by many young adults. It is a great opportunity for a young adult to get a greater perspective on the world and its different customs. Since it is set in India, many Tamil words are used throughout the story, which can encourage young adults to want to learn a different language. The book also encourages independence with responsibility.</p> <p>Jennifer Greenband Park City, UT</p> |

| | |
|--|---|
| <p><i>The Night Spies</i> by Kathy Kacer. Edited by Sarah Silberstein Swartz Second Story Press, 2003, 197 pp., \$5.95</p> <p>Holocaust</p> <p>How would you like to live in a space the size of your closet? For Max, Gabi, and her mother, this is a reality. Germany's horrible dictator, Adolph Hitler, forces them into hiding in a dark, damp, cold barn where they live among animals.</p> <p>Gabi and Max are two determined adolescents caught in the middle of World War II. During this time being Jewish meant living in concentration camps, hard labor, unbearable conditions, and, in most cases, death. This family finds a way to stay alive in hiding through the good graces of others—a priest, a family friend, and a gracious farmer. As any teens would, Gabi, Max, and their new/old friend Eva become curious about the war; they want to help. Sneaking out in the night, they dive head first into a new kind of danger they never knew before—the Nazi soldiers.</p> <p>When they find an anti-Nazi group hiding in the forest, they realize just because they are young does not mean they cannot make a difference. But will the Nazi's catch them? Will they be found in their hiding place? Will they starve to death? Or will they see the possibility of a brighter future once the war is over?</p> <p>Like most adventures, this thrilling story is written with suspense; it has its ups and downs. The reader is left guessing what will happen each time Max, Gabi, and Eva go out for another dangerous journey. This wonderful story is based on real events and real characters.</p> <p>Tiffany Thornton Dallas, TX</p> | <p><i>The She</i> by Carol Plum-Ucci Harcourt Books, 2003, 280 pp., \$17.00</p> <p>Mystery</p> <p>After his parents were killed at sea, 9-year-old Evan Barrett and his older brother move away from their seaside home in West Hook to live with their Aunt Mel in the city and escape painful memories. Now 17, Evan is a popular prankster at his private Catholic high school, but he is forced to revisit the past when he is asked to help a classmate confront memories of her own boating accident. In helping his classmate, Evan is drawn back to West Hook where his theory, that his parents were swallowed by a mythical sea witch known as The She, is challenged by his brother's research and a Drug Enforcement Agency investigation. When everything he thought he knew about his parents is threatened and nobody but an emotionally unstable girl and a mysterious Vietnam veteran believe him, Evan is forced to decide once and for all if he will be able to confront The She and accept the truth about his parents.</p> <p>This story touches on the alienation many teens feel from their parents and peers, and readers will be captivated by the vibrant characters, realistic relationships, and mystery throughout the novel.</p> <p>Ashley Marrinan-Levy Tempe, AZ</p> |
| <p><i>The Ravenmaster's Secret</i> by Elvira Woodruff Scholastic Press, 2003, 240 pp., \$15.95</p> <p>Bullying/Adventure ISBN 0-439-28133-4</p> <p>"Chores, chores and more chores," Forrest complained (p.1), a very typical phrase we hear from young and not-so-young people. <i>The Ravenmaster's Secret</i> is one truly interesting story that will keep your eyes glued on each page to find out what happens to 11-year old Forrest Harper. He is the son to one of the Tower's guards (Yeoman Warders), who lives in a small cottage tucked in the outer walls of the Tower of London.</p> <p>In the beginning of the story, Forrest complains about nearly everything. He wants to go outside the Tower to prove his courage—where no bullies will make fun of him and he can explore different worlds. His daily chores include taking care of ravens kept in the Tower to prevent them from leaving; it is believed that when the ravens leave the Tower, the Tower will fall into the enemy's hands. The position requires a responsible, patient, steadfastness, and keen-eyed person who can gain their trust and understand their ways.</p> <p>Forrest seems to be the perfect candidate for the job. But the curiosity for exploring the world with his best friend, Rat, just seems to be getting further and further away. His great adventures in London's most feared prison do not satisfy his hunger for adventure until he meets Maddy, a Scottish 11-year-old rebel imprisoned in the tower. After learning about the unfairness of his king, Forrest is confused about his destiny. Should he commit treason by helping Maddy escape? Or should he obey the law and allow his innocent friend to be executed?</p> <p>Patricia Villanueva Phoenix, AZ</p> | <p><i>Shipwreck</i> by Gordon Korman Scholastic, 2001, 129 pp., \$4.99</p> <p>Adventure ISBN: 0439164567</p> <p>Forced to live and work together, six children fight through daily chores, arguments, disappointments and frustrations as they try to survive on this long, strange, terrifying adventure. Luke, J.J, Will, Lyssa, Charla, and Ian earned this trip by being mischievous or unruly; their parents had enough and did not know what else to do. This trip's purpose is to give them a second chance. The boat trip is guided by two men, the captain, James Cascadden, and the first mate, Mr. Radford. The children live in close conditions and become the crew of the ship. The captain teaches them lessons, and the mate guides them throughout their daily chores and activities. Each of the characters has his or her own unique problems and abilities, but they all agree on one thing: They do not want to be on this ship headed out to sea.</p> <p>Throughout the story, the children face life or death decisions. Both their captain and the first mate abandon them on a sinking ship with no food and no hope. The lessons they learn are numerous; they are forced to swallow their grudges and work together.</p> <p>This novel is an enjoyable look into what can happen to six children who need direction and are sent on a journey to reshape their lives. Little did they know they would end up shipwrecked on an island with nothing but a glimmer of hope.</p> <p>Nicole August Tempe, AZ</p> |

Clip & File YA Book Reviews

| | |
|--|---|
| <p><i>Sister Slam and the Poetic Motormouth Road Trip</i> Coming of Age/Death/Escape by Linda Oatman High ISBN: 1582349487 Bloomsbury Children's Books, 2004, 200 pp., \$16.95</p> <p>With her sorrow over the death of her mother, her anguish over her oversized chest, and her scars from the mocking words of high schoolers, Laura Crapper is less than stable. She is downright frustrated with life and ready to escape into the big, uncharted world, away from all the suffering of her small-town life. So taking on the name "Sister Slam," Laura and her best friend, Twig, pack up the Firebird, say goodbye to their cruel childhood world, and head off—for the first road trip of their lives—to participate in the Tin-Can Poetry Slam.</p> <p>But, on the way, the rhyming sisters learn that real life is just as hard as high school and that adults can be just as cruel as kids. The girls take on the world, rapping their way through a speeding ticket, a smashed pig, and a few car crashes. Then, like a glittery dream, Sister Slam and Twig find themselves living the high life as the stars of slam poetry shows all over New York. And, best of all, a sweet, hot, guitar-strumming guy shows interest in Laura. But when a call comes from home that tragedy has struck, the girls rush back to their hometown, leaving their new, exciting life behind.</p> <p><i>Sister Slam and the Poetic Motormouth Road Trip</i> is an exhilarating, angst-ridden voyage through the world of slam poetry and the trials and thrills of growing up.</p> <p>Lindsay Heyen Tempe, AZ</p> | <p><i>Tomorrow, Maybe</i> by Brian James PUSH, Scholastic Inc., 2003, 248 pp., \$6.99</p> <p>Gretchen, 15, most commonly known by her fellow street kids as Chen, is growing up homeless on the streets of New York. She faces the reality of having to beg for money, stealing to eat, and having an uncertainty of where she will sleep each night.</p> <p>Not everything is depressing in Chen's world. She keeps her head held high and looks for the best in every drab situation. Although she sometimes misses the everyday luxuries of having a family and a home, she finds her place in the freedom of the streets.</p> <p>Chen's life takes a significant turn on a typically cold winter night in New York City when young Elizabeth, 11, enters the picture. Chen vows she will always take care of Elizabeth and never leave her side. The two are like sisters. They beg together, they share the money made, and they watch out for one another. After teaching themselves for years that they cannot trust anyone, not even their own fathers, they find the trust and strength in one another to help get through another night.</p> <p>Invoking many emotions, this novel will take young readers through turns and twists that are rather scary and sometimes very sad situations. But perhaps it will make those young people, uncertain of this time in their lives, more aware of their surroundings each day and hopefully provide a little light on the sometimes dark circumstances of their lives.</p> <p>Erin Murphy Minneapolis, MN</p> |
| <p><i>Theodore Roosevelt: Champion of the American Spirit</i> by Betsy Harvey Kraft Clarion Books, 2003, 163 pp., \$19.00</p> <p>Theodore Roosevelt was born into a wealthy New York family. As a child, he spent much time outside keeping detailed notes on nature. He also was an avid reader. As an adult, he was successful in establishing national parks to protect America's natural resources.</p> <p>An honest man who loved a good fight, Roosevelt put together a volunteer "Rough Riders" unit to fight the Spanish in Cuba. He also worked hard to eliminate corruption in government and break up corporate monopolies in U.S. business.</p> <p>Roosevelt was a problem-solver; he backed Panama in gaining independence from Columbia, to enable the building of the Panama Canal. His charismatic personality helped negotiate peace between warring nations, industry, and their labor force and strengthen the U.S. Navy.</p> <p>Readers will appreciate the author's storytelling approach. Kraft has written a book that will keep readers turning the pages to follow Roosevelt's adventures. This would be a good choice for an overview of Roosevelt's life, but it lacks the depth to use for research papers.</p> <p>Ruth Prescott Manhattan, KS</p> | <p><i>Torn Away</i> by James Heneghan Orca Book Publishers, 2003, 256 pp., \$6.95</p> <p>In Ireland, where this book starts, the Irish are fighting against the British and the Protestants. Declan Doyle has lived with the fighting for as long as he can remember. When both his parents and sister die because of the battle, Declan joins a gang against the British and Protestants. He is a natural rebel, making bombs, threatening people, and blowing up cars. But soon his is yanked away by his Uncle Matthew to live with him in Canada. Declan has no desire to stay in Canada, he would do anything to get back to Ireland and resume his battles. He then makes an agreement with his uncle that if he stays for three months and goes to school, then his uncle will pay Declan's way back to Ireland.</p> <p>This novel kept me entertained the entire time; I honestly could not wait to find out if he was going to decide to stay or go or if he was actually going to make it the three months. This is a great novel about a teenager who was moving in a downward spiral and, when he is given a chance to see the whole picture, he really grows up a lot and realizes what is important. There comes a time for every teenager when he or she finally starts to see a bigger picture of the world.</p> <p>Jessica Doehrman Phoenix, AZ</p> |

| | |
|---|---|
| <p><i>Walk Softly, Rachel</i> by Kate Banks Realistic/Death/Family/Coming of Age Frances Foster Books, 2003, 160 pp., \$16.00 ISBN 0-374-38230-1</p> <p>Do you ever think about death? Rachel does.</p> <p>The 14-year-old was 7 when her brother, Jake, died. She never really knew him, but she gets the chance when she finds his journal. For three weeks, the time it takes her to read the journal, she grows alongside her brother.</p> <p>She learns about losses and loneliness, failure and frustration, pain and pressure, shame and sadness. She learns all the things that matter. But what is more, Rachel learns what is behind a smile and how to not just look backward, but forward, as well.</p> <p>Rachel has lost a brother and a best friend; she is about to lose another best friend and a home. She has suffered, but she will heal. She has a grandmother full of advice and a mother and father who are just as capable of making mistakes as she. So life is not about running away, it is about breathing, changing, and starting over. Rachel will let go and say goodbye, but she will also continue to wish for the impossible.</p> <p>With her novel, Kate Banks reminds readers that they are not alone. She gives them reassurance when others may not. You are normal, she tells them, and you do not have to walk softly.</p> <p>Kristian Winston Phoenix, AZ</p> | <p><i>The Whale Rider</i> by Witi Ihimaera Coming of Age Harcourt, Inc., 2003, 152 pp., \$17.00 ISBN:0-15-205016-7</p> <p>From the day she was born, little Kahurangi was overlooked by most because she was a girl. Her grandfather, the chief of the village, was too blinded by tradition to see the power his little granddaughter possessed.</p> <p>The author takes us to a little village in New Zealand where history and tradition work together in keeping the tribe's strength. The story is told from the perspective of Kahurangi's teenage uncle, who watches her unfold into the role that destiny has reserved for her. Kahurangi is a vibrant, young girl destined to be the chief of her people. However, due to the fact that she was born a girl, she is challenged to prove herself and regain the strength of her land. She is gifted with the ability to speak to whales, allies to her people for many generations.</p> <p>In addition to the description of this New Zealand village, the somewhat mythical stories of ancestry, as well as Kahurangi's ability to speak to sea dwellers, will capture young readers right away. Her innocence and determination carry the reader all the way to the very end. First published in 1987 in New Zealand.</p> <p>Shannon Lederer Phoenix, AZ</p> |
| <p><i>Warriors of Camlann</i> by N.M. Browne Friendship/King Arthur Bloomsbury Children's Books, 2003, 399 pp., \$16.95 ISBN: 1-58234-817-0</p> <p>N.M. Browne's sequel to <i>Warriors of Alanna</i> is a wonderfully inventive twist to the classic story of King Arthur.</p> <p>Hoping to get home after a thrilling trip into A.D. 75 Britain, the two lead characters, 16-year-old Dan and Ursula, find themselves now only a little bit further in time; the people they had fought beside are ancient history, and their previous exploits in battle are all cultural legend. The two slowly begin to make connections between those around them and the characters of the well-known Arthurian legend. Between the confusion and the brewing battle, the characters are also struggling with changes within themselves. Once a great battle hero, Dan is now unable to fight, and Ursula has become the war hero. On top of conflicting envy and jealousy within each character, the two suddenly realize their affection for one another runs deeper than a simple friendship, but neither is prepared to face those feelings.</p> <p>Even picking this story up without having read the prequel, it is instantly engrossing. The language is mature without being overwhelming. Browne doesn't shy away from great detail and military terms with her battle scenes, and there isn't a single moment in the novel that seems she is simplifying the story for a young adult audience. This is a great read for anyone familiar with the legends of King Arthur, but it is also a good start to spark interest in the legend for others.</p> <p>Megan Kearney Mesa, AZ</p> | <p><i>Publishers who wish to submit a book for possible review, send a copy of the book to:</i></p> <p>Lori Goodson 409 Cherry Circle Manhattan, KS 66503</p> <p><i>To submit a review for possible publication or to become a reviewer, contact Lori Goodson at lagoodson@cox.net</i></p> |



The Professional Resource Connection

with Richard F. Abrahamson, Terry C. Ley,
Alleen Pace Nilsen, Ken Donelson, Ben F. Nelms

Assembly on Literature for Adolescents Loses a Pioneer

This column is a tribute to a person whose life and career have been foundational professional resources in the field of Adolescent Literature and English Education, Dr. G. Robert Carlsen. Because I enrolled in the University of Iowa in 1968 and graduated for a third time in 1996, and am now a column editor for this journal, I was, so to speak, in the right places at the right times to help organize this memorial column. I took an M.A. seminar from Dr. Carlsen in 1975. The editors of The ALAN Review asked Richard F. Abrahamson to write the anchor piece and invited several of Dr. Carlsen's other doctoral students to contribute additional comments. My thanks to my fellow Iowa alums who contribute below.

Bill Broz
University of Northern Iowa
Ph.D. University of Iowa, 1996



Dr. G. Robert Carlsen

An Educator Who Changed Lives

by Richard F. Abrahamson
University of Houston
Ph.D. University of Iowa, 1977

Dr. G. Robert Carlsen died on December 13, 2003. Born in Bozeman, Montana, in 1917, Bob received his B.A., M.A., and Ph.D. from the University of Minnesota where he did his doctoral work with legendary English educator Dora V. Smith. In 1982 Carlsen retired after twenty-five years as professor of English and education at the University of Iowa.

Bob's scholarly work in the reading interests of young adults and adolescent literature form the underpinnings for much of today's thinking on reading stages, reading interests, individual response to literature, and the important role books for young adults can play in the creation of lifetime readers.

Books and the Teen-age Reader (Harper, 1967) melded Carlsen's theories with his real-world experiences teaching young adults. The result was a very popular book read by parents, teachers, and librarians. *Books and the Teen-age Reader* went into three editions and cemented Carlsen's stature in the field of English education.

In his role as English department chair at the University of Iowa high school, Carlsen pioneered one of the first English elective programs. His successful implementation of free reading classes at the school caused such individualized reading programs to pop up throughout Iowa and across the United States.

Carlsen served as president of the National Council of Teachers of English from 1961 to 1962 and was an early supporter in the creation of

the Assembly on Literature for Adolescents. For his work in the profession, Bob won the NCTE Distinguished Service Award and the ALAN Award for outstanding contributions to the field of adolescent literature. But Bob Carlsen did so much more. He changed lives.

I made the trek from the woods of Maine to Iowa City and the University of Iowa because of Bob Carlsen's *Books and the Teen-age*

One weekend I stopped at the University of Maine bookstore and happened to pick up a copy of *Books and the Teen-age Reader*. I read it with the excitement of a desperate English teacher who feared he had chosen the wrong profession. In that book someone spoke to me for the first time about adolescents as real people with specific reading interests.

Reader. A native New Englander, I started teaching high school in the northern woods of Maine armed with an M.A. in English, a thesis on Steinbeck, and the certain knowledge that high school seniors would sign up in droves for my senior seminar on Chaucer. The first book

I was told to teach to sophomores was Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. Imagine my sense of panic when I went to the local pharmacy (there was no bookstore) to try to buy a copy of the Monarch or Cliff's Notes for Conrad's book and found out they didn't sell them. For several weeks I stumbled through teaching that book. The students didn't like it, and neither did I. I was too new a teacher to know that this was the wrong book for the wrong students at the wrong time. I muddled through with more confidence than my students because left for me in the file drawer of my desk was the one-hundred-item multiple-choice test on Conrad's novel published by a company in Iowa. Those first few weeks of teaching I bluffed my students, and they bluffed me.

One weekend I stopped at the University of Maine bookstore and happened to pick up a copy of *Books and the Teen-age Reader*. I read it with the excitement of a desperate English teacher who feared he had chosen the wrong profession. In that book someone spoke to me for the first time about adolescents as real people with specific reading interests. These students weren't just empty vessels to be filled. Here was information for me about Havighurst and developmental tasks, subliterate, and adolescent literature. I ordered some young adult novels from one of the teen book clubs, put Conrad and his friends on the shelf, and started teaching with books the class agreed on. It was exciting. Students perked up, read more, and discussed more; I knew I had chosen the right profession.

My B.A. in English from the

College of William and Mary and my M.A. in English from the University of Maine hadn't taught me anything about teaching English to adolescents. I just needed to know more. After a couple of telephone calls to Iowa, I was enrolled in Bob Carlsen's correspondence course on adolescent literature. I was hooked from the first assignment of writing my reading autobiography to submitting the fifty book cards. Toward the end of the course Bob wrote something on one of my papers asking if I'd ever thought about a doctorate. Three months later my wife and I rolled into Iowa City in our Volkswagen Beetle packed with everything we owned. It is fair to say, I went to Iowa because of Bob, *Books and the Teen-age Reader*, and adolescent literature. Bob Carlsen did for me what Dora V. Smith did for him: He was my mentor and my inspiration. He changed my life.

In the end, it seems only right that I should give Bob the last word. In the final professional article he wrote, Bob summed up his fifty years of teaching this way.

I have been fairly consistent in my point of view throughout my fifty years in teaching. I always favored the teenage book over the literary canon, speech over writing, expression over grammar, intensive exploration over close reading, process over product, and what literature does over how it is constructed. One summer, it must have been about 1950, while I was teaching a course at the University of Colorado, a New England teacher in my class said, 'You just can't be right or we would have heard about it in Massachusetts.' Still, I have held the faith in my beliefs about teaching English although sometimes, just sometimes, I speculate whether New Englanders have yet heard the message.

("Conclusions from Fifty Years of Teaching English," in *Literature Is: Collected Essays* by G. Robert Carlsen, edited by Anne Sherrill and Terry C. Ley, Sabre Printers, Johnson City, TN, 1994, p. 272)

The Teaching Goes On

by Terry C. Ley
Auburn University, Emeritus
Ph.D. University of Iowa, 1974

I recently bought a copy of Mitch Albom's *Tuesdays with Morrie* to give to Josh, a college-aged friend, for Christmas. At home, I reread portions of the book before wrapping it. Reflecting on how Morrie Schwartz, Mitch's college philosophy professor twenty years earlier, affected Mitch's adult perspective on life through the series of meetings that they had just before Morrie's death, I thought about my own mentors. Those who have shaped my life by detecting my potential as a teacher and challenging me to become the best teacher I could become are a group very dear to me! Prominent among those mentors is Bob Carlsen.

Dr. Carlsen was my advisor and major professor for my master's and doctoral work in English Education at the University of Iowa. While working under his guidance to redesign English language arts curricula for Cedar Rapids (Iowa) secondary schools, where I taught, I admired his leadership style, how he led diverse and sometimes recalcitrant teachers through negotiations that resulted in innovative curricula of which we could be proud. Watching him operate successfully on my home turf, with teachers I knew, kindled

my desire to become a teacher educator, specifically, an English teacher educator. On campus, watching Carlsen function as a professor, researcher, advisor, and national leader in our field helped me to shape my perception of what I might do as a professor of English education.

When I began my graduate work with him, Dr. Carlsen helped me to assess my academic and professional strengths and to fill gaps of knowledge and practice that I wanted to fill. The relationship between doctoral student and major professor generally becomes a very close one, especially throughout the dissertation process. Doctoral students pray that their major professors will be helpful and benevolent. Surely I did, and Dr. Carlsen was the ideal person to help me deal with my initial reservations about myself as researcher. We explored research topics together, settling on one that intrigued both of us; after I gathered my data, we solved problems about data analysis together; he read and responded kindly to several drafts of each chapter. With his help, I gained confidence in myself as a researcher, a professional role that I knew I must play if I wished to pursue a career in teacher education. Products of Dr. Carlsen's scholarship were both abundant and influential. Concepts that he taught me, especially about integrative language arts curricula, young adult literature, and directed individualized reading (a precursor to Sustained Silent Reading and Nancie Atwell's reading workshops) became keystones of my own teaching and scholarship, ideas upon which I built my own career.

At the end of his account, Albom wrote, "Have you ever really had a teacher? One who saw you as a raw but precious thing, a jewel that, with wisdom, could be polished to a proud shine? If you are lucky enough to find your way to such teachers, you will always find your way back. The teaching goes on." Effective mentors also inspire their protégées to move beyond their mentors' circles and, in doing so, to affect the future in profound ways.

Through his students and, now, their students as well, Bob Carlsen's teaching will continue.

The Extra Mile

by Alleen Pace Nilsen
Arizona State University
Ph.D. University of Iowa, 1973

Lucky stars were shining on me in 1971 when I applied for graduate admission to the University of Iowa. My husband had finished his Ph.D. at the University of Michigan and had taken his first "real" job at UNI in Cedar Falls. We always said it would be "my turn," when Don finished, but now we were going to a school located more than ninety miles from the nearest doctoral program, plus we had three young children (one a diabetic) to worry about. The whole thing looked impossible, but I decided to apply anyway. I knew nothing about Bob, nor about adolescent literature, although I had been teaching children's literature as a faculty associate at Eastern Michigan in Ypsilanti. When I was deciding whether or not to apply, I remember thinking that if I were one of

Richard Nixon's "White House" daughters, someone would figure out how I could do this. That someone turned out to be Bob Carlsen. He let me work as a grad assistant while still living in Cedar Falls, and before I ever took a "live" class at the University of Iowa, I took adolescent literature from Bob via correspondence. This was when I learned how hard people in Iowa work and that I, too, could write more than a page a day. But no matter how fast or how much I wrote, Bob would get it back to me within a couple of days. Sometimes he wrote more than I did, and for years I cherished the lesson on which he had casually noted, "Someday I think you will write a book on adolescent literature." Whenever I find myself frustrated by the expectations of my own doctoral students or the need for more work on their dissertations, I think back to Bob and Ruth and remember how they picked me up at the airport and let me stay at their house when I flew in from Arizona to defend my dissertation. This kindness was only one more indication of their unselfishness and their willingness to go the extra mile for those of us fortunate enough to have been his students.

Opening Career Doors

by Ken Donelson
Arizona State University, Emeritus
Ph.D. University of Iowa, 1963

My first encounter with Bob Carlsen was hardly auspicious. He had been invited by someone important—so I gathered—to talk

to us English teachers at Thomas Jefferson High School in Cedar Rapids and to help us improve our teaching. Since the English faculty was deservedly proud of our reputation, locally and otherwise, and since Thoreau had taught me to doubt anyone who deliberately came to do me good, Bob faced a cynical and slightly hostile audience of me—and several of my friends.

My second encounter took place a few months later. My school required that all its teachers pile up a set number of university hours after we had taught five years, and it was my turn. Since Bob was teaching an adolescent literature course, I bet my closest friend on our faculty that I could get an "A" in his course. I got the grades, but I got much more. He challenged me, I learned, and I became a better teacher, all to my amazement.

By the end of the second week that summer, I had become a Carlsen convert. Equally surprising, we planned when I was taking time off for my doctoral work, we decided what courses I would take, we worked out what my dissertation was going to be, and we deviated little from all these grand plans in the years that followed. How Bob managed all this still puzzles me, but he brought me into a life that, for 37 years, has given me professional satisfaction and personal joy, and for that I am eternally grateful to Bob Carlsen.

Memories of G. Robert Carlsen

by Ben F. Nelms

University of Florida
Ph.D. University of Iowa, 1966

When I first presented myself to Bob Carlsen, I had taught Algebra II and English IV. As a college instructor, I had taught freshman composition and the British Literature survey, creative writing, and remedial writing (a la Ken Macrorie). I thought I was an experienced and competent teacher. I didn't know from nothin'. Four years at University High in Iowa City remade me as a teacher and changed me as a person.

Bob took me under his professional guardianship early on, before he had any clear idea who I was. I had been accepted into a doctoral program at Iowa as well as four or five other universities. But Iowa was the only one where I had received no financial award (because, I was later to learn, they had misfiled my GRE scores under Helms instead of Nelms.)

So I had accepted an appointment elsewhere. But somehow it just didn't seem right. I couldn't get Iowa and G. Robert Carlsen out of my mind. The *English Journal* in February of 1963 led off with his presidential address, "The Way of the Spirit and the Way of the Mind." It had spoken to my spirit, to my mind, and to my heart. I could not forget it. Finally, early one Saturday morning, while I was driving somewhere in Abilene, Texas, I decided I just couldn't give up that easily. It was pouring down rain, but I stopped the car and jumped into a telephone booth, getting Carlsen's home phone number from information in Iowa City. He answered and was gracious, to someone he had never

heard of, even early on a Saturday morning. I can't imagine that I had such chutzpa, and I still am in wonder that he responded with such grace. I explained my situation and told him a little bit about myself. "Well, yes," he said, "I think we will be able to find you a place as a part-time teacher in the University School." He made the offer on the phone; I accepted on the phone. What a risk he was taking. I hung up, and the rain stopped.

How well I remember the first day in his adolescent literature class. We met in the library of University High. We checked out books all summer from that library, from the Curriculum Library in East Hall, and from the Iowa City public library. I began my collection of adolescent novels, mostly Bantam books to share with my students, as I remember.

Bob's first "lecture," if you could ever call one of his talks a lecture, began with one of those apt analogies that characterized his professional thinking. He was NCTE president, a university professor, and a frequent contributor to *EJ*, but he began by saying,

When my daughter was about fifteen, she came home one evening and precipitated a family crisis. She had been asked to her first formal dance. After the excitement of the invitation had worn off, we got to the crux of the matter: "I haven't got a thing to wear."

Her little-girlish Sunday school dresses, of course, would not do. Neither would one of her mother's formals. He told the story with gusto, humor, and detail. Finally, they had given in and bought her "yards and yards of pink nylon net gathered at the waist," a frock that

would have looked ludicrous on her mother or her little sister. He concluded, "For everything there is a season, and a time for everything under heaven." The same is true, he concluded, of teenagers' reading: neither children's books nor sophisticated adult fare would suit them.

The analogy eventually made its way into a speech to the American Library Association, later published as a widely read and cited article in *Top of the News* ("For Everything There Is a Season," Jan. 1965, 41.2: 103-110).

Bob's first assignment in that adolescent literature class was for us to write our own reading autobiography. Regrettably, I did not keep a copy of my response. When he and Anne Sherrill published their scholarly analysis of years and years worth of those autobiographies in *Voices of Readers* (NCTE, 1988), I kept scanning the book to see if I might recognize anything I had said. I found quotations in every chapter, on almost every page, that could have been me. He knew me before he knew me, before I knew myself, which was the point, of course. The growth of readers through adolescence tends to follow a pattern.

What a guide and mentor Bob Carlsen became for me. Within two or three years, he had me teaching that same adolescent literature class one summer in that same University High library. He had me making speeches at NCTE and writing my first *EJ* article about my eighth-grade readers. Shy as I was, at my first NCTE convention he made sure I talked with Dora V. Smith, Wilbur Hatfield, and Lou LaBrant, his professional Big Three.

He fostered and encouraged my interest in poetry for adolescents, which has never waned. He let me review books for him and help with booklists for the first edition of *Books and the Teen-age Reader*. For the next twenty years or so, he kept springing new books and authors on me every time we talked. I still have the letter he wrote me on March 4, 1995, comparing his experience upon leaving the presidency of NCTE with my lethargy upon giving up the *EJ* editorship: "You are everything, and then nothing. No longer do you have mail arriving in batches every day. It is almost like having the catalogues quitting the week after Christmas." Once again Bob was there with an apt analogy. After all, for everything there is a season, and a time for everything. Christmas has come and gone again.

How much I will miss him.

G. Robert Carlsen, 1917-2003

Bill Broz is Assistant Professor of English in the Department of English Language and Literature at the University of Northern Iowa. His recent publications include *Teaching Writing Teachers of High School and First-Year Composition*, edited with Robert Tremmel, Heinemann, 2002, and articles on grammar and censorship in *Voices from the Middle and the Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*. He was the 2002 recipient of NCTE's Edwin M. Hopkins Award for his 2001 English Journal article, "Hope and Irony: Annie on My Mind." He can be reached most at bill.broz@uni.edu or 102 Baker Hall, University of Northern Iowa, Cedar Falls IA, 50614-0502.

What a Wonderful World:

Notes on the Evolution of GLBTQ Literature for Young Adults

In his *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture*, T. S. Eliot offered three “permanent” reasons for reading: (1) the acquisition of wisdom, (2) the enjoyment of art, and (3) the pleasure of entertainment.

When the reading in question is that of young adult literature—the quintessential literature of the outsider—I would suggest there is a fourth reason: the lifesaving necessity of seeing one’s own face reflected in the pages of a good book and the corollary comfort that derives from the knowledge that one is not alone.

And yet one group of teenage outsiders—GLBTQ youth (gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and questioning)—continues to be too nearly invisible. Since the 1969 publication of John Donovan’s *I’ll Get There. It Better Be Worth the Trip* (Harper & Row), the first young adult novel to deal with the issue of homosexuality, no more than 150 other titles¹ have followed, a woefully inadequate average of four to five per year to give faces to millions of teens (the precise number of GLBTQ teens at any given time is, of course, unknown).

As we will see, this situation is gradually beginning to change for the better, but to look first at the context of literary history, the homosexual as a character in American fiction (for both young adults AND adults) has been a largely absent figure.

Why? In part, because homosexuality was traditionally regarded, in Lord Alfred Douglas’s words, as “the Love that dare not speak its name.” And so, as cultural historian Charles Kaiser has noted, homosexuality did not become a public issue in American life until 1948 when the Kinsey Report on human sexuality was published. Earlier in that decade, however,

World War II had brought together “the largest concentration of gay men ever found inside a single American institution. Volunteer women who joined the WAC and the WAVES experienced an even more prevalent lesbian culture” (78).

It did not take long for art to catch up to what Martin Duberman calls this “critical mass of consciousness” (76). Only three years after the end of the war, two important adult novels with gay themes appeared: *Other Voices, Other Rooms* by Truman Capote and *The City and the Pillar* by Gore Vidal. They are significant for two reasons. First, they were works of serious fiction by writers who would become vital forces in American literature. Second, they were issued by mainstream publishers—Random House and E. P. Dutton, respectively. Previously, as Joseph Cady argues, while there was “frank and affirmative gay male American writing from the century’s start” (most of it now forgotten except by literary historians), it was either published abroad or issued in this country by marginal publishers” (30). The same can arguably be said of lesbian literature; indeed, such writers as H. D. (Hilda Doolittle), Gertrude Stein, Djuna Barnes, and Natalie Barney were not only published abroad, but they also lived abroad as expatriates.

The new homosexual consciousness that appeared during and after World War II coincided with the first stirrings of what has come to be called young adult (YA) literature. Two of its best-known early practitioners, Maureen Daly and Madeleine L’Engle, published their first novels in the 1940s. Daly’s *Seventeenth Summer* appeared in 1942, while L’Engle’s *The Small Rain* was published in 1945. Both titles were pub-

lished as adult novels, and as Christine Jenkins notes in her illuminating article “From Queer to Gay and Back Again” (Library Quarterly 68 [July 1998] 298-334), both also featured incidental treatments of homosexuality.

In *The Small Rain* a gay bar is used as a setting, while in *Seventeenth Summer*, the protagonist, Angie, and her boyfriend, Jack, go to a club to hear a musician who is portrayed as stereotypically gay: “With his eyes still closed, the colored man leaned back on the bench, way back, one hand limp at his side . . . ‘Look, Jack,’ I remember saying, ‘He has red nail polish on! Isn’t that funny—for a man?’” (193-195)

Jenkins further notes that in J. D. Salinger’s 1951 novel *Catcher in the Rye*, another brief homosexual encounter is reported. Like *Seventeenth Summer* and *The Small Rain*, this book was also published for adults but was claimed by succeeding generations of young adults as their own. In this title the protagonist, Holden Caulfield, has a—to him—disturbing encounter with a favorite teacher when he stays overnight at the man’s apartment:

What he (the teacher) was doing was, he was sitting on the floor right next to the couch, in the dark and all, and he was sort of petting me or patting me on the goddam head. Boy, I’ll bet I jumped about a thousand feet. “What the helly *doing?*” I said. “Nothing! I’m simply sitting here admiring”—“What’re ya *doing*, anyway?” I said over again. I didn’t know *what* the hell to say—I mean I was embarrassed as hell. “How ‘bout keeping your voice down? I’m simply sitting here—”

“I have to go, anyway,” I said—boy, was I nervous! I know more damn perverts at schools and all, than anybody you ever met, and they’re always being pervery when I’m around.” (192)

These are small moments having little lasting impact on the evolution of gay and lesbian literature published specifically for young adults; nevertheless, for their many YA readers the incidents/settings of these three novels may well have been their first exposure to homosexuality in literature.

A more important treatment of this theme, in the context of a coming-of-age novel, was James Baldwin’s *Go Tell It on the Mountain*. Published in 1953, it dealt authentically with its fourteen-year-old protagonist’s attraction to a seventeen-year-old boy. Then, in 1960, John Knowles’s *A Separate Peace* was published. Like the Daly, L’Engle, Salinger, and

Baldwin titles, this novel was aimed at an adult readership but quickly become a YA classic. Though the book did not overtly deal with homosexuality, to sophisticated readers it clearly had a gay subtext. And in a 1972 interview Knowles acknowledged that his main characters, Finny and Gene, “were in love” (Cady 37)

It would be another nine years, however, before the first young adult novel to deal with homosexuality would be published: as previously noted, it would be *I’ll Get There, It Better Be Worth the Trip* by John Donovan. There is no cause-and-effect relationship between the publication of this book and the historic Stonewall Riots happening in the same watershed year, but it is possible that both were products of the same social/cultural climate. The 1960s, after all, were years of turbulent change, of political unrest, and of sexual revolution.

The media—always the first to observe changes in popular culture—took note, and according to Martin Duberman, “the years 1962 to 1965 saw a sharp increase in the amount of public discussion and representation of homosexuality” (97).

There was a similar increase in the publication, for adult readers, of gay and lesbian novels, including James Baldwin’s *Another Country* (1962), Mary McCarthy’s *The Group* (1963), John Rechy’s *City of Night* (1963) and *Numbers* (1967), Christopher Isherwood’s *A Single Man* (1964) Sanford Friedman’s *Totempole* (1965), and Gore Vidal’s *Myra Breckenridge* (1968).

Meanwhile, in the field of young adult literature the decade of the ’60s saw the emergence of heterosexual sex as a theme for the first time (with the anomalous exception of Henry Gregor Felsen’s *Two and the Town*, which, published in 1952, had dealt with an unmarried teen’s pregnancy). In 1966, for example, Jeannette Eyerly’s *A Girl Like Me* was published; in it an unwed teenage friend of the protagonist becomes pregnant; in 1967 it is the protagonist herself, the eponymous heroine of Zoa Sherburne’s *Too Bad about the Haines Girl*, who becomes pregnant. The same year saw the publication of Ann Head’s adult novel, *Mr. and Mrs. Bo Jo Jones*, in which two teenagers, July and Bo Jo, are swept away by passion; July becomes pregnant, and they elope. This novel appeared in paperback the following year and became a best-seller through teenage book clubs.

Despite the increasing treatment of teenage sexuality in fiction and the increasingly open discussion of homosexuality in American culture, Harper & Row viewed the impending publication of *I'll Get There* with considerable trepidation. The late William C. Morris, a Harper vice president, recalled, "Everyone was very frightened. In fact, we went to such great

Another continuing area of deficiency in the GLBTQ novel is its nearly universal absence of art. Perhaps this is because homosexuality has been treated, in young adult literature, as a problem that needs resolution and, as a result, the novels that have been written have taken on the form of the "problem novel," the ripped-from-the-headlines work of fiction.

lengths to make it 'acceptable' to the general public that the book got more attention for the fuss we made than for anything that was in it" (Ford 24).

One of the "lengths" was the solicitation of a statement for the dust jacket from the acclaimed Dr. Frances Ilg, director of the Gesell Institute of Child Development.

In a letter dated August 8, 1968, Ursula Nordstrom, director of Harper's Department of Books for Boys and Girls, wrote, "If you like the book as a whole, we would be so glad if you could give us a quote we could use. It seems strange that a curtain has been drawn over this entire subject in fiction for young readers" (Marcus, 261-262).

Dr. Ilg complied with words of praise, the book

was published, and despite Harper's pre-publication anxiety, it received almost universal praise. Indeed, both the *New York Times* and *School Library Journal* named it to their respective annual best books lists.

If that is the proverbial good news, the bad news is that, in this book, Donovan established a less than salutary model for the homosexual novel that would be faithfully replicated for the next dozen years: homosexuality is presented as both a rite of passage experience with no long-term consequences and as a matter of choice. Worse, though, is the equation Donovan makes between homosexuality and death:

his protagonist Davy's beloved dog is killed by a car, an act the boy views as a kind of cosmic punishment for his having kissed and "fooled around with" another boy.

Donovan was not alone in conveying these attitudes, however. For what Joseph Cady writes of the emerging literature of homosexuality published for adults between the end of World War II and 1969 can be equally well applied to the literature for young adults that appeared through the decade of the 1970s: "In their association of homosexuality with violence, suicide, murder or other kinds of pathetic death or at best with lives of freakishness or isolation, many works in the post-World War II outpouring of published gay male writing seem to confirm Mart Crowley's famous line in *The Boys in the Band*, 'Show me a happy homosexual and I'll show you a gay corpse'" (38-39).

Indeed, in the eight young adult novels that would appear in the next decade, death figures in three (*The Man Without a Face*, *Trying Hard To Hear You*, and *Sticks and Stones*) and a violent rape, in a fourth (*Happy Endings Are All Alike*). In the others homosexuality is presented as a passing phase, and the affected characters are vastly relieved to realize, at book's end, that they are "normal" and just like everyone else. Only one novel—*I'll Love You When You're More Like Me* (Harper & Row, 1977)—by the pioneering M. E. Kerr dared to feature a happy, well-adjusted gay character, Charlie Gilhooley. Though he is not the protagonist (that would be his best friend, the heterosexual Wally), Charlie is the more memorable character. Even more importantly, the tone of Kerr's novel is also innovative. It was the first to invest homosexuality with humor. All of the novels before it—and too many after—were unrelievedly turgid and lugubrious.

Two other important "firsts" of the 1970s need to be mentioned: in 1976 Rosa Guy's *Ruby* (Viking) became the first novel to include both an arguably lesbian character (she would choose to be heterosexual by the novel's end) and also the first to feature black characters. Incredibly, fifteen years would pass before other African Americans would appear—in Jacqueline Woodson's *The Dear One* (Delacorte 1991). And not until 1995 would a Latino character appear, in R. J. Hamilton's *Who Framed Lorenzo Garcia?* (Alyson). In fact, the continuing lack of diversity

remains one of the most significant deficiencies in GLBTQ fiction.

Another continuing area of deficiency in the GLBTQ novel is its nearly universal absence of art. Perhaps this is because homosexuality has been treated, in young adult literature, as a problem that needs resolution and, as a result, the novels that have been written have taken on the form of the “problem novel,” the ripped-from-the-headlines work of fiction—first appearing in the 1970s—in which the central problem becomes the tail that wags the dog of the novel. More literary considerations, such as form, structure, and setting, receive scant attention, and characters remain one-dimensional because they are defined solely by their sexuality.

In this context the British writer Aidan Chambers’s novel *Dance on My Grave*, published in this country in 1982, becomes enormously important as the first literary novel to explore the lives of multidimensional gay characters who are presented subtly and in the framework of a structurally experimental work of fiction.

Chambers was the first English writer, who dealt with homosexuality, to be published in the United States. But another English writer, David Rees, had dealt with the subject in his 1979 novel *In the Tent* (Dobson); however, this book did not appear in an American edition until 1985 (Alyson).

A third English writer to deal with homosexuality, Jean Ure, made her first American appearance in her novel *You Win Some. You Lose Some* (Dell 1984).

The value of these books from abroad resides, in part, in their dramatic demonstration that the challenges confronting homosexual teenagers is startlingly similar the world over, a point that has since been reinforced in books from Australia (Kate Walker, Sue Hines) New Zealand (Paula Boock, William Taylor), and Canada (Diana Wieler).

Interestingly, though, only one book—*Damned Strong Love* by Lutz Van Dijk (Holt 1995)—has appeared in the United States in translation. The book was first published in Germany in 1991 and is the true story of a Dutch boy who fell in love with a German soldier during World War II.

In that same watershed year of 1982 another tremendously important novel appeared: Nancy Garden’s *Annie on My Mind* (Farrar Straus & Giroux), a novel that has assumed the stature of a classic

because it was the first to recognize that homosexuality embraces not only sex but also love. Even more significantly, the teenage lovers, Liza and Annie, remain together at the novel’s end, despite the myriad difficulties society places in the way of their relationship.

Two other “firsts” that would become conventions of the GLBTQ novel also appeared in the 1980s. In the first year of the decade, Norma Klein’s *Breaking Up* (Random House 1980) became the first title to feature a gay parent, and a year later, Gary Bargar’s novel *What Happened to Mr. Forster?* (Clarion 1981) became the first to feature a gay (and typically self-sacrificing) teacher.

In 1986 M. E. Kerr’s *Night Kites* (Harper & Row) became the first young adult novel to tackle the troubling issue of AIDS—five years after the plague made its first appearance. Though this disease would spark a major subgenre in adult publishing, only a handful of YA titles dealing with the subject would appear and only two of these—Ron Koertge’s droll *The Arizona Kid* (Joy Street/Little, Brown 1988) and Theresa Nelson’s heartfelt *Earthshine* (Orchard Books, 1994)—were of lasting literary significance. Since the mid-’90s the subject has all but vanished from young adult literature though the disease, sadly, continues to have a major impact on adolescent lives.

The decade of the ’80s concluded with the publication of two other novels of enduring significance. A. M. Homes’ *Jack* (Macmillan 1989) remains one of the best treatments of a teenager’s confronting and dealing with a parent’s homosexuality, while Francesca Lia Block’s *Weetzie Bat* (HarperCollins) is not only a classic of gay fiction but also one of the most memorable of all young adult novels. In its large-hearted embrace of every aspect of the workings of the human heart, it demonstrates, with art and innovation, that love is love, regardless of what society chooses to label it. Block has also dealt with homosexuality in a number of her later novels, perhaps most memorably in *Baby Bebob*, the 1995 prequel to *Weetzie Bat* (HarperCollins).

The pace of GLBTQ publishing quickened in the 1980s when a total of forty-one titles were published (compared with eight in the 1970s). In terms of annual production, the numbers ranged from a low of one in 1985 to a high of six in 1981, 1986, and 1989.

The decade of the ’90s was even more productive

in terms of titles published (sixty-eight), peaking in 1997 when a total of twelve titles appeared. It should be remembered, however, that many of these novels dealt with homosexuality only tangentially (e.g., homosexuals are minor characters as in Francesca Lia Block's *Missing Angel Juan* [HarperCollins 1993], Gary Paulsen's *The Car* [Harcourt Brace 1994], Chris Crutcher's *Ironman* [Greenwillow 1995], Adele Griffin's *Split Just Right* [Hyperion, 1997], etc.) or failed to break new ground in terms of theme, offering, instead, endless variations on questioning one's sexual identity and the agonies of coming out.

Several titles stand out, however: in 1994 the first collection of original short stories dealing with GLBTQ issues, *Am I Blue?: Coming Out from the Silence* (HarperCollins), edited by Marion Dane Bauer, appeared. Three years earlier Chris Crutcher created a classic character in one of the stories in his collection *Athletic Shorts* (Greenwillow 1991). The eponymous Angus Bethune in "A Brief Moment in the Life of Angus Bethune" is not only a brilliantly memorable character but also is the first teen in GLBTQ literature to have not one but two gay parents! Other collections featuring GLBTQ stories included Francesca Lia Block's *Girl Goddess #9* (HarperCollins 1996) and, in the next decade, my own anthologies *Love and Sex* (Simon & Schuster 2001) and *Necessary Noise* (Cotler/HarperCollins 2003).

Other significant titles from the '90s are M. E. Kerr's *Deliver Us from Evie* (HarperCollins 1994), a lesbian love story that addresses gay stereotypes with wit and insight; Jacqueline Woodson's *From the Notebooks of Melanin Sun* (Scholastic 1995), the affecting story of an African American boy's attempts to come to terms with his mother's homosexuality and her love affair with a white woman; Emma Donoghue's *Kissing the Witch* (Cotler/HarperCollins 1997), a collection of brilliantly reimagined fairy tales told in a lesbian context; and Nancy Garden's *The Year They Burned the Books* (Farrar Straus & Giroux 1999), which not only examines censorship issues but also explores the issue of community and friendship between gay and lesbian characters, something that has been too absent from GLBTQ fiction.

Earlier, in 1997, M. E. Kerr once again introduced a new topic into the field when, in "Hello," *I Lied*

(HarperCollins), she became the first to deal with the complex issue of bisexuality.

Two years later, in 1999, Catherine Atkins's *When Jeff Comes Home* (Harcourt) became arguably the first GLBTQ novel to address the issue of sexual abuse, a subject that would be revisited in Kathleen Jeffrie Johnson's *Target* (Roaring Brook 2003). Unfortunately—and surely, inadvertently—both of these books, in their too muddled treatment of the subject, seem to reinforce the allegations of homophobes that adult gays are, by definition, sexual predators.

On a more salutary note, the decade of the '90s concluded with the publication of two of the most significant titles in all the GLBTQ canon: Stephen Chbosky's *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* (MTV/Pocket 1999) and Ellen Wittlinger's *Hard Love* (Simon & Schuster 1999).

The latter received a Printz Honor Award as one of the most distinguished young adult novels of the year ("distinguished" being evaluated solely in literary terms). Like Aidan Chambers's *Dance on My Grave*, this title is distinguished by its experimental form (it is told using a variety of different narrative devices, including poetry, letters, articles, and excerpts from zines) and by its emotionally sensitive story of an alienated straight teenage boy named John who falls in love with Marisol, a self-proclaimed "Puerto Rican Cuban Yankee Lesbian."

Perks might also have been honored by the Printz committee were it not for the fact that it was technically published as an adult novel, even though it is a quintessential YA title, a kind of *Catcher in the Rye* for contemporary teenagers. An epistolary novel, it is the haunting story of an emotionally damaged ninth-grade boy named Charlie who discovers that his best friend, Patrick, is gay and is no more bothered by that discovery than was Weetzie Bat when she learned the affectional truth about her friend, Dirk. This casual air of acceptance remains all too rare in GLBTQ fiction, where considerations of sexual identity still seem to trigger convulsions of weeping, wailing, and noisy gnashing of teeth. And, even in the first decade of the twenty-first century, the terrors and heartbreaks of coming out remain major subjects in GLBTQ fiction.

Another, related point might be made here: publishers, in an effort to expand the market for young adult titles, began in the late 1990s to issue and

market as adult books an increasingly large number of what are clearly YA titles. Aside from *Perks*, other examples include Brian Malloy's *The Year of Ice* (St. Martin's Press, 2002) and Bart Yates's *Leave Myself Behind* (Kensington 2003).

It is still too early to say what other trends will enrich and inform—or challenge—the field of GLBTQ fiction in the new century, though the sheer number of books that are being published is slightly greater than in the past. Following a slow start—only five titles appeared in 2000—the pace quickened, with eight titles appearing in 2001 and twelve in 2003 (on the other hand, 2002 was a slow year with only four titles).

More significantly 2003 has seen the first novel to feature a transgender character: *Luna* by Julie Anne Peters (Little, Brown), though some might argue that the titular character Lani Garver in Carol Plum-Ucci's melodramatic *What Happened to Lani Garver* (Harcourt 2002) might be perceived as transgender. The point should be made here—as Peters does in *Luna*—that transgendered persons are not necessarily homosexual, but given the enormous confusion surrounding their sexuality, they have arbitrarily been placed in the same category as gay, lesbians, bisexuals, and questioning teens.

Of greatest significance, however, is the increasing literary quality of GLBTQ fiction as evidenced by the fact that in 2003 a Printz Honor Award went to Garret Freymann-Weyr's novel of love and sexual identity, *My Heartbeat* (Houghton Mifflin 2002), and the Printz Award itself went to Aidan Chambers's *Postcards from No Man's Land* (Dutton 2002), which features the bisexuality of its protagonist as a major subplot.

And further evidencing the increasing acceptance of GLBTQ literature is Nancy Garden's having received the 2003 Margaret A. Edwards Award, presented annually by ALA's Young Adult Library Services Association for lifetime achievement in young adult literature.

As young Americans have become increasingly sophisticated in their knowledge of the world around them in this still new century, a few courageous authors have begun writing books about GLBTQ issues for readers in upper elementary school. Two examples are Nancy Garden's *Holly's Secret* (Farrar Straus & Giroux 2000) and James Howe's *The Misfits* (Atheneum 2001).

Meanwhile, a gratifyingly large number of brilliantly gifted young writers have begun to publish, writers like Garret Freymann-Weyr (mentioned above), Sara Ryan (*Empress of the World*, Viking, 2001), Alex Sanchez (*Rainbow Boys*, Simon & Schuster, 2001, and *Rainbow High*, Simon & Schuster, 2003), Brent Hartinger (*Geography Club*, HarperCollins, 2003), Julie Anne Peters (*Keeping You a Secret*, Little Brown, 2003), Lauren Myracle (*Kissing Kate*, Dutton, 2003), and Tea Benduhn (*Gravel Queen*, Simon & Schuster, 2003), among others.

One of the most gifted of the new generation of writers is David Levithan, whose novel *Boy Meets Boy* (Knopf, 2003) is—as I noted in my starred *Booklist* review—“arguably the most important gay novel since *Annie on My Mind*.” (Cart, 2003, 1980). It is the first “feel good” gay novel for young adults (in the same way that Stephen McCauley's adult novels might be called “feel good” fiction). By that I do not mean to diminish the emotional integrity—or the literary quality—of these novels. But what is revolutionary about them—especially Levithan's—is their blithe acceptance of the condition of being gay. By turns wacky and charming, *Boy Meets Boy* is always original and its characters are fresh, authentic, and deeply engaging—all right, *lovable*. Aspects of the novel are purposely fantastic—Paul, the protagonist has known he was gay since kindergarten; the prom queen at his high school is the cross-dressing quarterback of the football team; two boys walk through town holding hands “and if anybody notices, nobody cares”—but the world it posits is a near revolution in social attitudes, and the book is an amazing step forward in the publishing of GLBTQ fiction. It is the only novel since the genre began in 1969 that has no hint of self-hatred and can believably conclude with a gay protagonist's looking about himself and thinking, “What a wonderful world” (185).

Those who believe that young adult fiction should give faces to all teens of all sexual identities and persuasions can find hope in the thread of acceptance that runs through GLBTQ novels from *Annie on My Mind* through *Weetzie Bat* and *Hard Love* to *Boy Meets Boy* and in the recent expansion of the GLBTQ field to embrace new forms. For example, Levithan, who is an editor as well as an author, recently published a gay memoir in verse: Billy Merrell's *Talking in the Dark: A*

Poetry Memoir (Push/Scholastic 2003) and for the last several years, homosexuality as a theme has begun to appear in the creative form now known as “the graphic novel.” Examples include Judd Winick’s *Pedro and Me* (Holt 2000), Howard Cruse’s *Stuck Rubber Baby* (Paradox Press 1995), and Ron Zimmerman’s *Rawhide Kid* (Marvel 2003).

These increasing numbers and varieties of opportunities, now being given to teens of every sexual identity, to see their faces in the pages of good fiction and, in the process, to find the comfort and reassurance of knowing they are not alone suggests that the day may be coming when the words “what a wonderful world” will no longer carry any hint of irony.

What a wonderful thought.

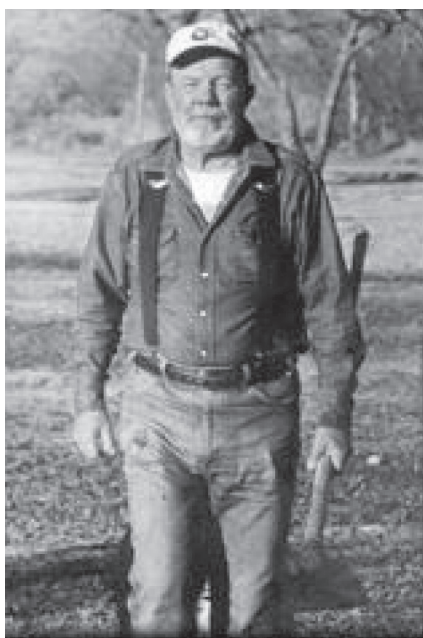
¹ This number comes from annual lists maintained by Prof. Christine Jenkins, author Nancy Garden, and myself.

Works Cited

- Cady, Joseph. “American Literature: Gay Male, 1900-1969.” *The Gay and Lesbian Literary Heritage*. Ed. Claude J. Summers. New York: Holt, 1995. 30-39.
- Cart, Michael. Rev. of *Boy Meets Boy* by David Levithan. *Booklist* 99 (2003): 1980.
- Daly, Maureen. *Seventeenth Summer*. New York: Pocket Books, 1968.
- Duberman, Martin. *Stonewall*. New York: Dutton, 1993.
- Ford, Michael Thomas. “Gay Books for Young Readers.” *Publishers Weekl.* 21 February 1994: 24
- Kaiser, Charles. “Life Before Stonewall.” *Newsweek* 4 July 1994: 78.
- Marcus, Leonard S., ed. *Dear Genius. The Letters of Ursula Nordstrom*. New York: HarperCollins, 1998.
- Salinger, J. D. *The Catcher in the Rye*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1951.

Singlehanding: An Interview with Gary Paulsen

Popular young adult author Gary Paulsen, on hand as a keynote speaker for the 2003 ALAN Workshop in San Francisco, spent an extended period of time with the co-editors of *The ALAN Review* to visit about his dogs, his boat, his writing, and his own many adventures—not necessarily in that order. A master storyteller who lures every reader into his web, from the reluctant to the sophisticated, Paulsen conducts an interview in much the same way as he writes his books. We were spell-bound as we listened to a true giant in young adult literature share his tales of wonder.



TAR: How *Angel Peterson Got His Name* really brought back a lot of memories. What is this fascination that teenage boys have with army surplus stores?

GP: I don't know. At that time, it was the only place we could find half the gear that we needed to kill ourselves. And a lot of it was left over from the second World War, so you could buy, like, an airplane for three dollars or whatever. I mean, it was just crazy. I literally had a canteen cup that had bullet holes through it. Some poor guy got whacked. I had lots of stuff like that. You could get it for a dime.

TAR: You have said, "If I can get to the woods, I'm OK. I can make it." And by that, I think you mean you can survive on your skills as a woodsman. But I think you mean more than that, too. Do the woods mean something more to you than just a place where you can find food and shelter?

GP: It's away from the complications of humans. Humans are the big thing that cause damage in life—in war, or whatever—and if I can get away from that and into a wilderness situation, I'm OK. You can more or less live on your own merit.

TAR: In your keynote address, right after you described the demise of your wife's cat, you had an image in there—you talked about the thin ice and when you went down, and when you talked about that, I was thinking about my students, but a lot of them—they're on thin ice, too, in terms of wanting to turn to any kind of literature whatsoever.

GP: Well, the concept of survival—they love *Hatchet* and books like it because so many of them are trying to survive in almost impossible situations—the inner city, for example. It's very difficult to get through those kinds of things. And as readers they

relate to the concept of Brian surviving, or a dog saving you suddenly from drowning.

TAR: A lot of my kids—especially reluctant readers—become very snobbish and they say, “I only read Gary Paulsen books.” Then they say, “I want some more Gary Paulsen books, or I’m not reading.” So in writing about the survival issue, you’ve helped a lot of kids hang on and find some stories out there.

GP: Well, I was in the same position. My folks were drunks, and I had a rough childhood—really rough—in fact, rougher than I thought about. At one time, I was under the kitchen table, and my mother was trying to kill me with a butcher knife. And there was no machinery then to help—no foster home, no welfare, there was no attempt to help kids in troubled homes. I would go to the woods, and I would hide. And I would trap or fish. Or I would go to uncles’ farms. All over northern Minnesota were people I was related to, and they were glad to have me. It was free labor, and I would live on their farms. And a lot of that I write about now, too, of course, involves working on a farm as a teen. But I am lucky I survived.

TAR: Along those lines, *Clabbered Dirt* may be the best book out there expressing the relationship between people who work the land and the beauty and spirit of the land. Is that relationship between people and the earth important? And why?

GP: It’s all we have. Man is a mess—I mean the species. As a species, we’re not succeeding; we’re failing. Two examples: If you have dandelions in your yard and you mow your yard one time, they never come up over the mower blade again. They’ll be this high, but you cut them, and they go, “Whoa.” We haven’t learned that yet. Humans get in that mower blade over and over and over again. The other thing is we think we’re very successful, and in a one-acre area of suburbia, there are about 150 people living there. There are sixty thousand spiders in the same acre, and we think we’re the one, you know. Why? They’re raising families, having children, they’re feeding them, they’re retiring or whatever—they’re doing fine, the spiders that are there. We’re struggling just to

get the house payments done, and they’re just doing their thing. I think nature is elegant in that sense—it shows you how things can be right, and the human species shows you how to do it wrong.

TAR: Jack London went to the north woods and to the sea to find the edge of life. You’ve run the Iditarod twice and seen Fiji from the sea. How do those two extreme opposites—sailing and the Iditarod—compare for you?

GP: The maximum expression of running dogs is the Iditarod. You enter a state of primitive exaltation, and you never return. You’re never normal again. In fact, I just bought twenty-three dogs last week, and I’m going to go run it again. I’ve just picked up a new team. You become a cave man. You go back thirty thousand years. You can get some of that by having pets, dogs or whatever, but it’s not the same as when that dance comes, when they’re out in front of you.

London didn’t know anything about dogs—not a clue. He never ran dogs. He was drunk all the time. He talked to a lot of dog mushers on the Yukon. I stayed in his cabin once when I took a Harley to Alaska and back. I stayed in his cabin and wrote a forward—a new forward for his book, *Call of the Wild*. But, anyway, he was very tough and very into it and did go to Alaska but was not part of that dance. He was just a prospector, a drunk, a very rich writer—he made a lot of money writing. And when he sailed, he was drunk the whole time. He sailed to the South Pacific, or really, he got as far as Hawaii.

In sailing, I *single-hand*, and I want to do the Horn. The Horn is the maximum expression of sailing, the way the Iditarod is the maximum expression of running dogs. It’s not to write about it; it’s to experience the maximum thing. It’s like when I write. I don’t just write; I *write!* Jeez, it’s too hard—five books in one year I mean, I’m insane. I write the same way I run Iditarods—eighteen hours a day, I just work all the time and do research all the time. And when I’m sailing, I write. I wrote eight pages of *Hatchet* during the second Iditarod—during the race. I sat and wrote longhand at night while the dogs were sleeping. I

couldn't really read it. I was exhausted, but I did write. I write that way. I try to do the maximum expression of writing, the way I do the Iditarod or try to sail the Horn. I haven't sailed the Horn yet, but I'm working on it. The boat is in Hawaii now. I just took it to Hawaii in April, so it'll be ready to go.

TAR: Boys out in the country, they'll still pee on that electric wire?

GP: Yeah, I get letters: "You know, when I peed on it," they say. God love 'em. Why do they do it? I don't know! Maybe they think it's funny! I had a boy once tell me about the time he lit his hair on fire just to see what the hell it was like. And he wasn't a troubled child; he didn't have any emotional difficulty. He was just curious; he took the lighter fluid and went poof! And he said it hurt.

I have a scar here [pointing at his leg]. When I was a kid, I had a hunting knife, and somebody gave me a walnut. I put the walnut here [on his leg], I swear to God, and I went like that [stabbing at his leg]. It went through and stuck in the bone. And this kid sitting next to me said, "You've got a knife stuck in your leg." I'm standing there, it hurt like hell; it was in the bone! I said, "Yeah," he said, "Why did you do that?" I said, "I had to open the walnut."

But boys do that. Boys still pee on fences. They're always going to. God love 'em.

TAR: You place people in challenging situations, often in nature, and then you let them struggle. Why choose nature? Is nature fair or kind or heartless?

GP: All of those things. Man proposes; nature disposes. Sharks never got the memo about how we're superior. They just don't know. And if we're there, they eat us. The bear's the same way. Most bears will kill you, I mean, if they get a chance, they'll kill you. Actually, they don't kill you; they eat you alive. Only snakes and cats kill before they eat, and bears and wolves eat alive. ... it's a horrible death, but nature doesn't see the horror of it; that's just the way nature is. Sharks are the same thing—they just hit, you know. They're not trying to be humane; they're trying to fill their guts. I don't like

the horror of that, but I like the concept of man proposes, nature disposes. We all die to a predator, whether it's a virus or [something else]. Very few people just literally die because their body wears out. They die because their immune system goes down, and a predator gets them. Boom. You slow down a little going to the water hole, and boom, you're gone. You limp a little, boom. You eat too much lard (I have heart disease), boom. There's always a predator waiting.

TAR: In your book *The Rifle* you establish a different tone than in many of your other books. Can you talk a little bit about that?

GP: It's interesting, the mail I get on that. The gun nuts who read it like it at first, and then don't like it because of what happens at the end. And the people who are anti-gun read it and don't like the first part, but then kind of like it because I show what happens. It's kind of true. The early part of it is a true story about the rifle, and I had a friend whose son was killed by an accidental shooting—not with the same rifle.

I wanted to show that at one time rifles and weapons were extremely important to what we are—to the country, and that has become warped—insanely warped, and now they're like a disease. Weapons are just an epidemic—kids shooting people. I have weapons, and I'm sitting here because I've been able to use a weapon to protect myself, killing moose and bear when they attack me. But I never had to shoot a person. I was in the army, but I didn't get into a war situation. I've never had to actually use a weapon to defend myself against a person, but I have with bear and moose, and I'm really glad I had a weapon. But they're horrible. People do not understand that firearms are not toys; they're weapons—they are for killing.

Also, hunting is a very powerful experience for young boys. I always say that no man should hunt after he's about sixteen, seventeen, eighteen—somewhere in there it should become boring. The men who still hunt when they're older stopped their education about fourteen, and they never grew out of that. They still think like a fourteen-year-old, and they like hunting. I'll kill a deer if

I'm hungry, but it's not an achievement. [Expletive], you take a high-powered rifle that will stop a Volkswagen, and you knock forty pounds of meat off its feet, that's not manhood; that's a thing that kids do—boys, especially—mostly boys, but you should grow out of it.

TAR: A student teacher we observed in a tough, inner-city school in the Kansas City area started class every day reading just a little bit of *Soldier's Heart*. And some of these kids—who were members of gangs—wouldn't miss the start of the class because they wanted to get the next installment. But this is the Civil War. A north woodsman from Minnesota writes a Civil War story, and gang members in a tough urban school won't miss this class. Why is that?

GP: I think because it's true. It's a true story. Charley Goddard. That was really his name. He was really fifteen. In fact, yesterday [during the ALAN workshop last fall] a woman came to the booth where I was signing and said she'd found his grave. He died of stress disorders when he was only twenty or twenty-two. And all of those things in *Soldier's Heart* actually happened to him. And I think that, again, that crosses to where young people understand, *especially* if they're in a place where they're in a firefight themselves. Some of these kids today are literally in combat zones, and they have to deal with the potential of being shot by gang-bangers. They relate to that aspect of it. Charley's mother wrote every month and told him to desert—leave the army. She was terrified.

TAR: In *Dog Team*, this beautifully simple picture book, you run the dogs at night, and the sounds and the sights and the feel are hard to describe. You obviously love it. Most people would be digging deep under the quilts on a night like that. But not you.

GP: Well, it's not about accomplishing something against the weather; it's about doing this beautiful thing. If the weather gets in your way, you try to work around it, but it isn't about braving the elements. It's about that damn dance. That's why I'm going back. I'm going up to Idaho day after

tomorrow to see the twenty-three dogs I bought last week. I'm going to start training them for the Iditarod. I can't not run dogs, the [same] way I can't not write. It's just so elegant and beautiful.

Sailing can be the same, except during some storms when it can get pretty scary. I'm not out there to die, you know, and I'm not running dogs to prove anything except to see that dance again. Last January, I went up to Spokane—this is how it all started again—I got knocked off because of my heart, and my heart kind of came back around with diet stuff. But last January I went up to Spokane, and the Shriners' Hospital there has a thing called the *Ikidarod*; mushers from the whole country bring their dogs and give rides to the kids in the hospital. I was like a celebrity, and I would help each kid into the sled and sometimes tie them down—a lot of them were quadriplegics. Then they would go three or four miles through the woods with volunteers every fifty feet to help. It's just a wonderful thing, and I'm going again this year.

But, anyway, when it was all over, after three days, we all cried and cried—you know how you do, and this guy who had Alaskan dogs came up to me and said, "Do you want to take a run?" So I took his team and I just left. I was gone. I went thirty or forty miles.

A couple of months ago I started to put a sled team together. When the word got out it was me, all the dogs that should have been \$400 were suddenly \$3,000. I just couldn't afford it. I offered to lease a team from a guy, and he started out at \$18,000, and when he heard it was me, it went to \$50,000 for one year. And I said, oh, come on! So I quit trying. What happened next was that a friend of mine began buying dogs as if they were for her. She knew all these dog mushers who tried to help her because she's young—but they're really mine; I'm buying all these dogs.

TAR: That's that survival mentality.

GP: That's it. I went under the radar. I got twenty-three dogs, though.

TAR: Seeing the dogs become one as they move through the countryside must be incredible.

GP: They're amazing. They're absolutely amazing.

TAR: You were telling some good stories yesterday, including favorite dog stories, such as the one about a lead dog named Cookie, who kept you from drowning?

GP: Cookie—she was a dear friend and saved my life literally. I talked about it yesterday, I think, about going through the ice. That happened twice. I've got her photo in my wallet. She could read ice, and I trusted my life to her. If her tail went up in a question mark, it meant she wasn't sure, and she was trying to get light, and she would look for a crack. As soon as her tail went down, she was positive and she'd go. You'd just watch that tail. You can see ice move; sea ice, especially, is flexy. It can be three or four feet thick, but it'll crack and move and there's just [open] sea water. The dogs are across, and all of a sudden you've got five foot of water wide, and you've got to slide over it. She knew how to find her way around those leads [cracks].

TAR: And in the Iditarod, you've got to cut across quite a bit of water, don't you?

GP: Seventy five miles of open ice—sea ice; everything in you puckers up. You suddenly wish you weighed eight pounds. The dogs are spread out, and you've got eighty feet of dogs out there, and you're watching the front end to see if it moves with them. If it gets really bad, you lay down in the back of the sled and get your weight distributed.

TAR: A lot of people with your start in life would be broken down, in prison, or dead by now. But you seem to be just finding your stride and accelerating. What saved your life and sent you down the road you took?

GP: I had enormous luck. A big, dumb red-necked cop took me in for two years. I couldn't stay in his house, and every night at eight o'clock he'd run watch. I'd move in the back of the patrol car, and I'd sleep from eight to four in the morning while he drove around, and then we'd go hunting. We'd shine spotlights—jackrabbits and fox—and he'd let

me have half the money. We'd use ammo from the police department to shoot them.

His name was Nuts Meyers, and he lived up to it. For two years, he kept me out of trouble. He beat the hell out of me a few times. I tried to break into a garage once and steal some skis, and he caught me and just nailed me. We became friends. Later, another kid shot him and killed him. I did a book about it—*Winterkill*.

Then in the army a drill sergeant kind of took me in. I mean, he really, physically, straightened me out. It took him three or four days, something like that.

TAR: Sounds like you were a hard case to straighten out.

GP: Yeah, I was hard, but he was harder. You get those old infantry sergeants and they operate almost like doctors. It's not about proving macho stuff. It's just clinically I'm going to beat the tar out of you, and when you get up, you're going to be a new man. And then we're going to have a beer or talk and have coffee, and we're not going to be angry. And if you try it again, OK, kawhoomp! Down you go again. That's what they do.

These guys are just tough. He clinically brought me down. He said, "Are you done?" And I'd say, "Nope." He'd help me up and, boom, down I'd go again. [Many recruits were] worried about the kick of a rifle. At that time it was an M1, which has a lot of kick. He would hold a rifle up to his mouth and fire eight rounds like this and use his mouth as a recoil, and not a mark on him. I mean, number one, the rifle is ten pounds, and he's holding it like a pistol.

TAR: Has Thief River Falls in northern Minnesota changed much over the years, and do you have any hopes or fears for northern Minnesota?

GP: It hasn't changed much—a lot more farms. A lot of the woods have been cleared. I don't have any more fear for them than I do for species in general. We're just making mistakes as a species. For example, I've been sailing the Pacific for nine years. China is building five hundred fleet-sized factory boats; they're going to sweep the Pacific. It'll be a

dead sea in five years. They're killing everything—dolphins, whales, the whole works. They're taking it all. Nobody can stop that, unless you want a war, and that's just not going to happen. So they will wipe it out. And that's wrong—not just morally wrong, but it's stupid, because then it's gone, and it'll take centuries to come back, if it comes back. And the food, meantime, is gone, so it's just dumb. We're doing dumb stuff like that, too.

TAR: “Meeting the Challenge” is the theme for our upcoming issue, and this workshop’s theme has been “Striking It Rich.” These seem to fit you so obviously. What do you see as the greatest challenge that you’ve met?

GP: There are two ways to be rich—one is to make more, and the other is to desire less. And I lost everything to crooked publishers early on and wound up flat broke and with judgments against me and had no way to make it, [but I] was richer than I am now in the sense that I went back to the woods. I set up a trap line, I had four gardens, I made my own ketchup—everything. I had goats. And I had more quality in my life than I have now. Literally.

I’m very successful now, as far as selling books goes, but I don’t think of myself as wealthy at all. I mean, there are people around me that are spending a lot of money [that I have made]. I don’t see that as success. If a book’s done, it’s done. What’s the next book? What’s the next idea that I’m working on? Right now, I’m working on one called *The Amazing Life of Birds: Or the Puberty Journal of Howard Leach*. It’s humor, as you’ve probably guessed, and dirty, so we’ll have to see what happens.

TAR: One middle-school student wanted to know your technique for describing everything so well.

GP: I study really hard—writing. I still study writing. Hemingway was writing *A Movable Feast*, which was about his early days—about writing, actually. He’s talking about F. Scott Fitzgerald, and he says that when Fitzgerald lost it, his talent had been like the dust on a butterfly’s wings. And when the dust was gone, he kept beating his wings, and he

couldn’t understand why he couldn’t fly. I thought, God! Hemingway said that! Man, he could write! Describing Fitzgerald’s talent like that is just beautiful.

I learned a lot from studying things like that—just the way people have written. I mean, at one point, I was reading three books a day for about six years—and some books, many times. Patrick O’Brien, for example, I read all of his stuff at least four times. I study those books again and again—the nuances and the use of the language—the mastery of the language. He’s incredible—an incredible writer.

TAR: *Dog Team* is one that a lot of teachers read out loud just for the fluency of it—they’ll read it even at the high school level.

GP: Well, if it works, it works. If an idea will make a good sentence, it will also make a good paragraph, a good short story, a good novel, a good film, whatever. The same idea will work for all those things. It doesn’t have to be a big, sweeping Lawrence of Arabia type of thing. It can be just a simple, clean thing. Probably the best writing ever done was by Hemingway and several other writers—I think it was in North Africa. During a drunken discussion, somebody said that they should write the best and shortest story they could write. They all had stories.

Hemingway came up with six words: “For sale: Baby shoes. Never used.” Jesus. I mean, come on. Isn’t that great? That’s all there is. Six words. There’s a book, there’s a movie, there’s a short story, there’s a poem—anything you want to do with those six words, you can do it. It’s just amazing what you can do with your words. And if it doesn’t work, you can beat it to death with a club, and it won’t work. I mean, I’ve written books that I just hated—books on home repair.

TAR: Teachers often use your novels in the classroom. From the author’s point of view, how would you like to see them used?

GP: The only thing that kind of [bothers] me is the way they’re used as mandatory for study. A lot of schools are using *Hatchet* that way now. They have

a mandatory reading of *Hatchet* and mandatory discussion groups and they grade the readers of the book. And I think that's probably a mistake sometimes because it takes away the joy the child might have just discovering the book itself.

And I'm not talking about just my books. I mean, all books are like that. The worst I've ever seen was in Winnipeg, Canada. Years ago, I went up there to talk at a school. And, before I got up, the principal of the school came up to me. He said, "We teach the children that committees write the book." And I said, "Well, they don't." He said, "Yeah, but we teach them that, and we want you to teach them that, too. We want you to tell them that the committees sit around a table, four or five editors and you write the books together." And I said, "Well, I don't." And he said, "Well, you tell them that." I said, "Okay." And I got up and fired the mike up, and I said, "These people want me to lie to you and tell you that committees write books. That's all BS." I said, "I write my own books, and sometimes they're published and sometimes they're not." And the guy came around and pulled the plug, as I kept saying, "They're lying to you! They're lying to you!" They never paid me. But it's true, and it's wrong to do that.

An update from the desk of Gary Paulsen's agent, Jennifer Flannery:

Gary has just relocated his kennel of two dozen dogs from Idaho to Minnesota, his old stomping ground where he knows the sled trails and where to get fresh beef hearts for the dogs. Not only is he preparing to run the 2005 Iditarod, but he's currently working on six new books:

1. *The Amazing Life of Birds* (or) *The Puberty Journal of Duane Homer Leech*

A boy discovers life, love, joy, sadness, and sex—all at once—as his loving but bumbling father tries to help him through puberty.

2. *The Sky Child*

A Native boy living in an abusive, molested situation in a Northern village moves his spirit out of the village into the sky when he learns that the Northern Lights, which he calls SKYFIRE, are really the souls/spirits of abused and troubled and/or stillborn children.

3. *Jojo the Dog-faced Girl*

Lonely girl who thinks she's ugly is befriended by a stray dog that starts by following her and then later begins to lead her into a new way of seeing beauty in the world and herself.

4. *The Kennel*

Come with me, now, this last time, this final time, back into the world of sled dogs. I have learned...have learned that there is so much I do not know yet and wish to know now, a book, a dance of discovery with Elmira and Tippy and Ghost and Buckshot and Norman and thirty other, new, close, dear friends...once more into the diamond.

5. *The Day They Hang the Children*

A classic mystery about a street boy in Victorian/Dickensian London who must solve a mystery about who stole a silk handkerchief—which was a hanging offense—before he is executed for the crime. (Title comes from the fact that they had to hang children on a special day because of the need to readjust the gallows for the smaller bodies...)

6. *The Business* (or) *How I Started Mowing Lawns And Earned A Million Dollars*

Boy starts a lawn care business that gets wonderfully out of hand to the point where he has two hundred adult employees, offices with an accountant and tax problems.

Then he runs into the Mob.

On the Trail with Jack London:

My Journey to Jason's Gold and Down the Yukon

I was delighted to return to the ALAN workshop in the fall of '03. It was in my favorite city, San Francisco, a gold rush town as alluded to in the workshop's theme: "Striking it Rich with Young Adult Lit."

What better time to chronicle the writing of my gold rush books?

Jason's Gold and *Down the Yukon* grew out of an extended trip that my wife, Jean, and I made to Canada's Yukon Territory. We had just gotten off the Takhini River, a tributary of the Yukon River near Whitehorse, and headed north to Dawson City, where we were about to start up a 500-mile gravel road that would take us to within 40 miles of the Arctic Ocean.

I was aware that Dawson City, where the Yukon is met by the clear-running Klondike, was the destination of the Klondike gold rush of the late 1890s. Having no idea what a gift this day would turn out to be, I wandered into Dawson's town museum. I was intranced by the photographs; the Klondike gold rush, I discovered, was extremely well photographed.

One image above all others caught my attention: a photograph of an unbroken line of gold seekers, single file and ant-like—hundreds upon hundreds of them—



climbing straight up the icy Chilkoot Pass on the Alaska/Canada border. The Chilkoot was unbelievably steep, and the stampedeers were staggering under huge burdens. I eyeballed the clothes they were wearing. "Hey, wait a minute," I thought. "That's not Gor-tex."

Nearby, I visited the cabin of a world famous author who'd spent a year of his life, at the age of 21, trying to strike it rich in the Klondike. A former teenage oyster pirate from Oakland, California by the name of . . . Jack London.

I was struck by how little I'd ever known about the Klondike gold rush. Almost

nothing. Even though, as a kid, I'd read *The Call of the Wild*, *White Fang*, and "To Build a Fire," I had never figured out from reading them what the gold rush was all about. Those stories don't give you the "big picture" of the rush.

What if, I began to think, right there, right then. . . What if I were to go home and learn as much as I could about the Klondike . . . Maybe I could write a story that *would* give young readers the big picture of the rush. Maybe I could learn all about what Jack London did in the rush, and include him as one of the

characters. *I could have a fictional kid meet Jack London.*

That's how *Jason's Gold* got started. Back home, I mined a mountain of research. Real-life incidents suggested possibilities left and right. As I started writing, exactly one hundred years after the events I was describing, I was flooded with memories from my childhood in Alaska: larger than life mountains and rivers and bears, glaciers and salmon runs and moose, the winter darkness and the northern lights and rusting gold dredges. It all came together, the landscape and the history and me and Jason: I felt like I was there.

Here's the opening line of *Jason's Gold*: "When the story broke on the streets of New York, it took off like a wildfire on a windy day."

I wanted this story to imitate the momentum of the gold rush, which was a sort of human wildfire. It began on July 17, 1897, when a ship named the *Portland* docked in Seattle. Dozens of prospectors disembarked, their suitcases and satchels bulging with gold—all together, two tons of gold.

In an instant, the telegraph wires were humming what the prospectors were shouting: "The Klondike is the richest goldfield in the world!"

In the 1890s, the country was in the throes of a terrible depression. This was an era of robber barons and child labor, hobos riding the rods. At the news of a new gold rush, tens of thousands of people across the continent started making immediate plans.

The geography of the North was poorly understood. At first, most people didn't even know where they were going—Canada, not Alaska. Some were planning, believe it or not, to go by balloon, some by bicycle. A newspaper in Memphis, Tennessee, reported that the Klondike goldfields were "not far northwest of Chicago." That turned out to be . . . incorrect.

The protagonist of *Jason's Gold* is named Jason Hawthorn. A kid from Seattle, he's on the streets of New York City selling newspapers when the news of the rush breaks. Instantly, he comes down with a bad case of Klondike fever, also called klondic-itis. With ten dollars to his name, Jason hobbos his way back to Seattle, then stows away on a steamer bound for the North.

It's going to be rough, just as it was for a hundred thousand people who tried it back in 1897 and '98. Of those 100,000 who set out, around 40,000 actually

made it all the way to Dawson City. Jason is going to leave Seattle three days after his brothers, and it's going to take him almost a year to meet up with them in Dawson City. A year was what it took most people to get there.

Jason is going to meet lots of actual, historical figures in their actual, historical context. One of these is Soapy Smith, the infamous con-man from Colorado mining camps who became the "boss of Skagway." Another, of course, is Jack London. Here's some more of what I learned about Jack London's experiences in the North. All of this and much more found its way into *Jason's Gold*:

Jack London was in the first wave. He left San Francisco only one week after the prospectors from the North arrived on the West Coast. Jack's partner was his 60-year-old brother-in-law. Enroute, they joined up with three other men. Like most people, Jack and his partners chose the Chilkoot Pass as their route to the lakes at the headwaters of the Yukon River.

The Chilkoot was straight up at the last, too steep for horses. At the top of the pass, it was Canada, and the Mounties were weighing supplies. They required that each person bring in 1500 pounds, a year's outfit—they didn't want anyone starving to death.

It was 23 miles to Lake Lindeman, where Jack London and his partners would take down trees and whipsaw lumber and build a skiff capable of withstanding 500 miles of the Yukon River, including the notorious Miles Canyon and the White Horse Rapids.

Jack London knew that most of the stampeders weren't going to beat winter. He did the math. London carried 150 pounds at a time on his back. He weighed 165. Every day, four times, he moved 150 pounds three miles forward.

Jack London and his partners were among only hundreds who made it through that October of 1897, and at the last, they beat the ice by running Miles Canyon and the White Horse Rapids instead of portaging.

Guess what? The former oyster pirate from San Francisco Bay was the man at the stern with the crucial sweep oar.

Jack London suffered a bad case of scurvy that winter, lost some teeth. When break-up came at the end of May, he floated out the 1500 miles to the Pacific on a scow, and worked his way home stoking coal on a steamship.

Did he return with Klondike gold? Yes, he did—four dollars and fifty cents' worth. And plenty of grist for fiction.

Back to Jason. Instead of the Chilkoot, Jason tries the White Pass, theoretically negotiable by horses. He's there as it turns into a quagmire. Three thousand horses died there that fall of '97; it became known as the Dead Horse Trail. Jason rescues a husky from a madman who is drowning his dogs in the creek—an incident from real life, as I explain in the Author's Note.

Jason repairs with the husky to Skagway in order to try the Chilkoot. He gets deathly sick there. Jason wakes up feverish in a strange room where a girl named Jamie and her father, Homer, are taking care of him. They're Canadians planning to canoe the Yukon, which sounds risky in the extreme to Jason. They know what they're doing, Jamie says, and indeed they do. "My father," Jamie says proudly, "is a bush poet. I grew up in the North, in the bush."

Jamie is inspired by a 14-year-old Canadian girl I met who was captaining a canoe on the Nahanni River in Canada's subarctic, the setting of my story, *Far North*. Like Jack London, Jamie and her father will reappear throughout the story.

Who is Jamie's father inspired by? You guessed it—Robert W. Service, the author of "The Cremation of Sam McGee," a narrative poem of the rush that I've been performing around wilderness campfires since I was fourteen years old.

Jack London and his party are going to beat winter, and so are Jamie and her father. Jason, though, is not going to beat winter. Winter is where the heart of this story lies, so . . . of course . . . I'm not going to tell you about it, other than to say that he and his husky, King, are going to be stuck in a precarious and dangerous situation out in the Great Alone, about halfway down the Yukon to Dawson City. I hope this part of the story gives your readers a good case of virtual frostbite.

When the ice breaks, and Jason makes it to Dawson City, he's going to find that Jamie has become famous performing her father's poetry on the stage of the Palace Grand theater. But she's *leaving*. It feels like a mortal blow to Jason, who was smitten the day he met her.

With *Jason's Gold*, I set out to write a story worthy of the rush itself, and I hope I've accomplished

that. I hope your readers will be astounded to find out what ordinary people not so different from themselves did a century ago. I hope readers come away with a sense that history can be incredibly exciting, and that life in any era is filled with adventure, heroism, courage, and love.

Well, here I was, all done with *Jason's Gold*. At that point, I had to face the perennial question, What's next?

I had other projects simmering, but my heart wasn't in them. I was so identified with Jason, I was in limbo wondering if Jamie really was going to come back, as she promised she would.

There was only one way to find out. Write the sequel, you fool, and do it right away! It would be a chance to make hay with the amazing events that came after the summer of '98, when *Jason's Gold* ends. I could include the Great Fire of April, 1899, in which Dawson's business district burned to the ground at 40 degrees below zero. I could portray the exodus from Dawson City down the Yukon when breakup came at the end of May. Most exciting of all, I could dramatize the fact that thousands of disappointed Klondikers did not head home immediately. Amazingly, another rush was on. On their way home, thousands were going to have one last fling at Lady Luck.

During the winter, news had reached Dawson of a new strike 1700 miles away on the beaches of the Bering Sea. At a place called Nome, 200 miles across the Norton Sound from the old Russian port of St. Michael, gold had been discovered in the beach sand!

As you've noticed, I love a story with amazing geography. The rush from Dawson to Nome, down the Yukon and all the way across Alaska, then 200 more miles across the Norton Sound, was too wonderful to pass up.

Jamie would indeed return to Dawson, as she promised she would. She and Jason could join the new rush to Nome. This one would be a summer story, and to further differentiate it from *Jason's Gold*, I would make it a first-person story, with Jason being the narrator. It would have to stand alone, in case the reader hadn't read the previous book.

Jamie and Jason will enter a 1700-mile race, with a \$20,000 prize, from the warehouse of the Alaska Commercial Company in Dawson to its warehouse in Nome—a fictional device, as I explain in the Author's

Note. They're going to face everything the river and a pair of bad guys can throw at them, and it will be quite a ride. I don't mind telling you that Jason and Jamie are going to paddle into the sunset together. If you like a story with a happy ending, this is the one for you.

Both novels include an Author's Note in which I sort fact from fiction. For more about these books, visit my website, www.WillHobbsAuthor.com. The website contains an interview and photos from my novels, plus many other features.

In between sessions of the 2003 ALAN Workshop Will and Jean Hobbs were gracious enough to share some insights from adventures around the planet and the stories that come out of those experiences.

TAR: In your face-to-face encounters with the wilderness you have rowed your raft through some of the most extreme whitewater in North America, camped and explored in grizzly country in the North, faced squalls at sea and the possibility of a humpback whale breaching from under your kayak. Have you ever thought, "Well, maybe I've written my last book!" Any close calls?

WH: For a moment once, on a backpacking hike in our San Juan Mountains of southwestern Colorado, I thought a mountain was crashing down on me. Three of us had threaded the needle between two peaks and descended the rockslides in order to fish a lake perched under the summit of Mount Oso. Before we'd even assembled our fishing rods, we witnessed the event that orphaned the grizzly bear cubs in *Beardance*, written a few years later. By fool's luck, we weren't standing where the mother grizzly in my story was when it happened. That was a rare exception to my general feeling that I'm a lot safer in wild places than on the highway. We're pretty cautious in our approach to running rivers, or when we're in bear country.

TAR: Many authors research their topics in libraries, on the Internet, or even by visiting the actual setting of their novels and talking with people. Your novels seem to come out of your own personal experience. You and Jean are true adventurers—ten times through the Grand Canyon in your own raft! When you sea kayak the Alaskan coast, or crew on

an Alaskan salmon boat, I gather that it's for the experience itself, but then is it afterward that you begin to wonder if there might be a story there?

WH: Yes, that's the way it's always been. I would be doing these same things even if I weren't a writer. This past summer I took an eleven-day trip down a remote river on the north slope of Canada's Yukon Territory. The last night, under the midnight sun, I pitched my tent thirty feet from the Arctic Ocean. I was wishing I could find a way one day to take my readers there, but I don't know if I ever will. More often than not, a story doesn't follow. After our sea kayaking trips, two or three years went by before I thought of the idea for *Wild Man Island*.

TAR: At ALAN in San Francisco, you said you like to write novels that are "adventure plus." We see you adding a tremendous amount of research to your personal experience in order to write books like *Far North*, *Ghost Canoe*, *Jason's Gold*, *Down the Yukon*, *Wild Man Island*, and now *Leaving Protection*. These are exciting books, yet kids learn a whole lot turning the pages.

WH: I like to write a multi-layered story, to get a number of balls up in the air—it makes it interesting for me and the reader both. I've always thought that novels are a great way for kids to learn content. Novels engage the emotions, and the brain remembers what the heart cares about.

TAR: "Meeting the Challenge" seems to fit you and your work perfectly. What challenges, faced by young people, are you trying to illustrate in your books?

WH: That's a tough one . . . a novelist writes subconsciously, through characters in situations. But looking back, I would say that personal integrity is big in my stories, family and friendship, adapting to change, sorting out what's of value from what is not. I think kids' biggest challenge today is finding a way to believe in hope and possibility, to stay positive and idealistic.

TAR: The 2003 ALAN workshop was entitled, "Striking It Rich with Young Adult Literature." That phrase,

“striking it rich,” can mean many different things. How do you feel that you have struck it rich in your life?

WH: First of all, I struck it rich with my parents, my three brothers, and my sister. Then my wife, Jean, then all our nieces and nephews: so many shared memories, so many great adventures over the years. Seventeen years of teaching, that was another adventure. The young adult literature in my classroom was my best ally and also my motivation to try it myself. I’ve been writing full-time for thirteen years now, and it continues to be a dream come true. To hear from kids that your stories have touched them is extremely gratifying. ALAN in San Francisco was a real high point. We treasure our friends who care so much about YA lit, and have done so much to bring it to young readers.

TAR: In the Author’s Note at the end of your new novel, *Leaving Protection*, you talk about your first visit to Prince of Wales Island in southeast Alaska, how the teacher at the middle school in Craig invited you to work on the family salmon troller and to write a novel about commercial fishing in Alaska, a challenge you ended up meeting. How far back does your fascination with those boats and salmon fishing go?

WH: All the way back to my childhood in Alaska, and more recently, to a number of trips through the Inside Passage in southeast Alaska. Those trollers are so picturesque, and I’d always wanted to step aboard one. To have the chance to live on a troller and to do the work of those fishermen was a lifelong dream.

TAR: During a week of king salmon season, no less! If Robbie Daniels’ experience as a deck hand in your novel is any indication, this was incredibly hard work.

WH: Oh man, fifteen hours a day’s worth. It turned out to be the best king salmon season in many years; sometimes we worked four or five hours before breakfast. A salmon troller, unlike a seiner or a gillnetter, doesn’t use nets. The salmon are all caught individually, on lures. Julie and her dad

would gaff them and bring them aboard; I did the cleaning and icing. I’ve done a lot of physical labor in my life, but I hadn’t worked that hard since I picked fruit for six weeks with migrants from Mexico when I first got out of college.

TAR: I take it your skipper wasn’t anything like the menacing Tor Torsen in the novel.

WH: Not at all, but I did borrow my skipper’s know-how and some of his quirks. For example, when he lay down to sleep, George would be snoring within a minute. He would wake precisely at 4:00 A.M. without an alarm clock.

TAR: Your book explains how it’s possible to be a highliner—one of the very best fishermen—and to still be a vanishing breed, due to the effects of dams, logging, and especially salmon farming. For the uninformed, what does the fine print mean when we’re looking at a restaurant menu or at the grocery store labels for salmon?

WH: “Wild” is the key word, as opposed to farmed. If it says Alaskan salmon, you know it’s wild salmon, since salmon farming is illegal in Alaska. Troll-caught is the highest quality wild salmon; it’s cleaned and iced soon after being caught.

If the menu says Atlantic salmon, in all likelihood it is farmed. The health and environmental hazards of farmed salmon are getting quite a bit of publicity lately. The huge numbers of lower-priced farmed salmon flooding the market have forced many fishermen out of their livelihood. To give you an idea, George sold his king salmon for half of what he had been able to get, per pound, the previous year. One other note: don’t be concerned that by buying wild salmon you are depleting the ocean of wild fish. The catch is monitored so closely to prevent overfishing that some seasons last only a matter of days.

TAR: Did you take notes, with a story in mind, during the seven days you worked on the boat?

WH: Tons of notes, after George was snoring. Everything I was learning was new, and I knew I had to write it down or I would forget it. I was able to

follow it up later with telephone interviews with George and Julie and other fishermen I had met, as well as quite a bit of book research. I brought home a bunch of non-fiction books about the trolling life, and they made for good grist to add to the knowledge I had gained first hand. What fueled the book emotionally was the wealth of impressions I came home with that will stick with me forever: the whales and the birds, the light, the beauty of those outermost islands we were looking at, the roll of the swells out there on the open ocean. It was glorious.

TAR: Did your story idea—interweaving the Russian history with the fishing adventure—come as you were cleaning fish or doing that stoop work in the hold?

WH: No, it came by trial and error, as usual, back in my study. Something vital was lacking in my first few approaches to the opening chapters: dramatic tension. Then I got to remembering a metal plate I had seen at the National Historical Park in Sitka,

the old Russian capital of Alaska. It was a facsimile of the only possession plaque ever found, one of twenty that the Russians are known to have buried up and down the coast to lay claim to Alaska. It came to me in a flash. What if Tor Torsen, the embittered fisherman, knows where the other nineteen are, and is something of a pirate? Robbie would be in grave danger if he accidentally came across one on Tor's boat. The plaques were the key to dramatic tension across the entire length of the novel. They would also be a way for me to further my longtime interest in the Russians in Alaska, and to pass some of that amazing, little-known history along to my readers.

TAR: One more question. Do you still like eating salmon?

WH: Can't get enough, as long as it's wild. I'm going on two trips to Alaska next summer, one with Jean and the other with one of my brothers. I hope to return to Colorado each time with a box of fillets for our freezer. You're invited to dinner!

An Invitation to the Writing Game

Monica Hughes (1925-2003)

The *Keeper of the Isis Light* and sequels, *The Guardian of Isis* and *The Isis Pedlar*, as well as *Invitation to the Game* and *The Crystal Drop* are just a few of the stellar works written by Monica Hughes. One of Canada's premiere authors for young people, she died suddenly of a stroke at the age of 77. Fans of science fiction will miss her gentle voice, clear, straight-forward style, and exploration of themes of import today presented in futuristic settings.

Monica Hughes was born in 1925 in Liverpool, England, but became a naturalized Canadian citizen in 1957, with stops in Cairo, Egypt, and Edinburgh, Scotland, along the way. She also spent time in London, first for schooling at a girls' school and then later for a stint in the Women's Royal Naval Service during World War II, after which came a two-year stay in Zimbabwe.

As a child she learned to read before she started school, told stories to her younger sister, and dreamed of becoming a writer. A flood of rejection slips greeted her initial submissions of adult stories and essays. Adding novels to her output made no difference, until she discovered works written specifically for young people. After devouring a number of these in the

'50s and '60s, she knew that was what she wanted to become—a writer for young people.

What came next? With the youngest of her four children in school, she could get serious about her writing, so she set a schedule for herself – four hours a day for an entire year at the kitchen table, first with a black BIC pen and a stack of loose-leaf paper, then a

typewriter and, finally, a word processor. Fortunately for young science fiction fans, the third book she tried, set under the ocean, was accepted by an international publisher and appeared as *Crisis on Conshelf Ten* in 1975. Like so many other authors, perseverance paid off for her. After this breakthrough, she published over thirty works for young people and received numerous awards, including the Vicky Metcalf Award of the Canadian Authors Association for her body of work.

Monica Hughes wrote novels in various genres, but she was best known for her science fiction. Her *Isis Trilogy* in particular is a superb example of this genre, with its strong characters, fascinating other world setting, and scientific background that is accessible and understandable. She was deeply concerned about environmental issues and wrote about the

In these and other works, the gentleness and kindness of the author shone through as she invited her readers to explore the future she depicted for them. Above all, it was important to her to write the truth for her young readers, no matter how difficult it might be to accept, but at the same time to include an element of hope.

importance of living in harmony with the earth, no matter how dystopian the future she depicted. *Isis*, with its theme of survival, the integration of cultures, and what it truly means to be human, is one of her most acclaimed works.

Other works developed important themes, as well. *Invitation to the Game* was written in response to the reality of severe unemployment in Britain. *The Crystal Drop* explored the reaction of two young children left alone and struggling to survive in a world that has suffered years of drought. In these and other works, the gentleness and kindness of the author shone through as she invited her readers to explore the future she depicted for them. Above all, it was important to her to write the truth for her young readers, no matter how difficult it might be to accept, but at the same time to include an element of hope.

We will miss her wonderful worlds and the marvelous characters she created to inhabit them. To explore her contribution to literature for young people, visit her website at <http://www.ecn.ab.ca/mhughes/> and find out more about her life and her literary output, as well as where she got her ideas. Various teachers' guides are also available at this site.

Bonnie Kunzel is the Youth Services Consultant for the New Jersey State Library. She is well known for her work with teens and is a former president of the national Young Adult Library Services Association. Among her published works are *Strictly Science Fiction: A Guide to Reading Interests* (with Diana Tixier Herald) and *First Contact: A Reader's Selection of Science Fiction and Fantasy* (with Suzanne Manczuk).



The High School Connection

No More Just Making Do with What We Have Done

Welcome to “The High School Connection”! It is very exciting to once again offer a column for those who teach older adolescents. Many of us have occasionally experienced frustration as we design the right lessons for high school students. We often search high and low for tips, helps, and strategies that are not designed for the very young or for those in the middle. With the topics covered in this column, we can say goodbye to making do with strategies and philosophies that only partially fit the needs of older students. This column will be uniquely ours and will put us back in our own spotlight. Most importantly, it will empower us to “meet the challenge” (this issue’s theme) of teaching thoughtful lessons while preparing students for state and national assessments, for college, and for life. With your feedback and suggestions, we can collectively create . . . a high school connection!

Speaking of assessments and challenges, I was recently reminded of the educational needs of older teens while I supervised several student teachers. The student teachers, all in their twenties and

eager to do good jobs, were working well with their cooperating teachers. They had reviewed the classroom teachers’ policies and unit plans. They had also looked through numerous files to find teaching helps and possible lesson designs. In some cases, but never often enough for a diehard supervisor like me, the students had even revisited the state core to determine what objectives needed to be taught.

Although it is now passé and I’m a structuralist at heart, I often yearn to see more explicit lessons in writing, vocabulary development, editing, and critical thinking skills. But despite these preferences, I was very pleased with the students’ teaching. However, as the days passed and I more frequently observed the students in action, I began to see a practice that concerned me. What I observed in each class were well-crafted explorations of literature, and to varying degrees, the high school students were engaged. Thoughtful lessons and quasi-engaged students could be good enough by some standards, but I was saddened by the regrettable practice that had disinterested so many adolescents. Each of the

three student teachers were teaching from a canon of literature that has been around, and often boring adolescents, for forty years.

I was interested in the selected texts, and after asking the usual “who, what, where, when, and why” questions, I received these answers: The class novels were taken from the terrific but tedious titles we all know and love: *Hamlet*, *Julius Caesar*, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *A Tale of Two Cities*, *The Scarlet Letter*, *All Quiet on the Western Front*, *The Great Gatsby*, *The Crucible*, *Ethan Frome*, *The Grapes of Wrath*, *The Old Man and the Sea*, and *The Red Badge of Courage*. Please understand that I mean no disrespect when I call these novels tedious. It’s just that these novels have been around since I was in high school, and if you’ll permit me to exaggerate the tedium, let’s just say my high school reading took place in the decade when students and Mick Jagger were yearning for satisfaction.

As a current devotee and professor of young adult literature, I wondered why a few contemporary and non-tedious titles had not been even a small part of any teacher’s

literature program. My student teachers gave me the answer to that question, too—an answer that I thought we had long ago reasoned against. Classic novels, the student teachers had been told, were timeless, whatever that means. As an added bonus, their literary merit best prepared young students for national assessments, college, and life. Studying the classics, the premise continued, would greatly reinforce reading skills. These skills would build an aptitude that would help create a “proficient” school—even a “No Child Left Behind” proficient school.

After twenty years of watching the wheels of public education go round and round, I thought I had heard everything, but this response stopped me in my tracks. Aligning our practice with national concerns and current student aptitudes is inherent in our job descriptions. High school English teachers know we can only monitor student progress and make adjustments in instruction when we know the educational goal before us. The discussion surrounding the goal, and particularly the pedagogy we use to accomplish it, becomes the crucial discussion.

With national interest in student progress, it smacks of ingratitude that many of us are troubled by the sweeping federal legislation that was signed into law in 2001. After all, dedicated English educators are encouraged by all efforts that help meet the challenge of improving reading and writing. Preparing students to be thinkers, readers, and writers is hard work, and we welcome all help. Importantly, our commitment would never allow us to casually ignore an

ossified educational system that does not promise strong learning outcomes.

But before we become too confident with our professional commitment and the classes we teach today, please consider this sad announcement. On a national level, NAEP recently reported that American children (at least in their representative sample) have not shown any significant improvement in reading skills compared to grade level in the last eleven years of school. If, for example, we currently teach eleventh grade English, this may mean that our students have made no significant gains towards or beyond grade level at comprehension or synthesizing texts since the first grade. Obviously, this critical information must reform our philosophy and practice. If we continue teaching what and how we taught ten, twenty, thirty, and even forty years ago, it is time to illuminate our pedagogy. Because it appears our adolescents have not made great strides in their reading abilities and because we continue to compete with their fast-paced culture, we face the never-ending challenge to entertain. It is plausible that many young adult novels and other contemporary “classics” would provide entertainment and authentic interest to greater numbers of young readers. If the corollary holds true, that interest and literary appeal ensure greater student engagement and that engagement leads to comprehension, then it seems reasonable to assume sound deconstructions of text will occur. Logic, and not instinct, suggests that reading *All Quiet on the Western Front* is not a selection that best guarantees all

adolescents will become “proficient” readers, no matter what tradition might dictate and regardless of what national assessments may seemingly call for.

Creating a new high school literacy must begin simply. It must begin with new teacher behaviors: thinking outside the box, swimming against the current, and coloring outside the lines. Action begins with the initial conviction that selections other than the time-honored classics offer philosophical and rhetorical challenges. Furthermore, a new literacy begins with the recognition that students welcome diverse representations of literature, and that any number of texts can engender authentic and instructive literary conversations. By capitalizing on the interests and skill levels of their students, teachers must trust themselves to choose literature that can bring maximum and “proficient” results. It is a tough challenge, but a challenge that we are cut out for. After all, we’re English teachers; we can do anything!

After earning an English and music education degree from Utah State University in Logan, Utah, (Dr.) Kay Smith enjoyed seven years of teaching high school English. In 1993 and 2000 respectively, she earned an M.Ed. and Ed.D. in Educational Leadership from Brigham Young University. After working ten action-packed years as a secondary principal, she left what she loved and decided to do what she really loved: teach English education on the college level. She currently teaches Young Adult Literature and Methods of Literacy at Utah Valley State College. She is married to Michael D. Smith, and they are the proud parents of seven children and proud grandparents of six. She can be reached at smithky@uvsc.edu.



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.

M. Jerry Weiss is Professor Emeritus at Jersey City State College in Jersey City, New Jersey, and recipient of the 2003 Tedd Hipple Service Award.