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

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

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

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

MANUSCRIPT FORMAT. Manuscripts should be **double-spaced** throughout, including quotations and bibliographies. A **title page** with author's name, affiliation, address, and a short professional biographical sketch should be included. The author's name should not appear on the manuscript pages; however, pages should be numbered. Short quotations, as permitted under "fair use" in the copyright law, must be carefully **documented within the manuscript** and in the bibliography. Longer quotations and complete poems or short stories must be accompanied by **written permission** of the 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:	MAY 15
WINTER ISSUE Deadline:	OCTOBER 15
SUMMER ISSUE Deadline:	FEBRUARY 15

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From the Editors

Just as seasons shift across the nation—sunny, bursts of colorful flowers change to gold-tinged leaves falling from trees, adolescents face nearly continual shifts throughout their teenage years. With this issue of *The ALAN Review*, we focus on the adolescents' journey to define themselves—and young adult literature's assistance along the way—with the theme "Finding My Way."

First, we begin with a tribute to James Cook, someone who helped more than his share of adolescents find their way. Diane Tuccillo, ALAN president-elect, provides a glance at the life of a true leader in the field of young adult literature.

Toby Emert then lets us eavesdrop on a conversation with author Ellen Wittlinger, who has written works such as *Razzle*, *Hard Love*, and *ZigZag* that feature protagonists who find their own ways of making connections in today's world. Wittlinger shares her thoughts about writing, getting young people to read, and her upcoming book, *Sandpiper*. Mary Arnold continues the journey theme with a snapshot of young adult novels designed to encourage teens along their own path, in recognition of Teen Read Week 2005.

Elizabeth Marshall and Theresa Rogers look back at women's memoirs as a way to help teens look forward. In their article, Marshall and Rogers examine some memoirs written by women reflecting on their own coming-of-age experience. Such reflection can give adolescents—and educators, as well—a different perspective regarding growing up. In an attempt to understand those teens dealing with depression along their journey, Nathan Phillips examines A.M. Jenkins's *Damage* and Chris Lynch's *Freewill*. Phillips

explores the use of second-person narratives in these two novels' looks at depression in adolescence.

Gerrit W. Bleeker and Barbara Bleeker provide another route for the journey—this one via multicultural poetry inspired by art. The Bleekers describe a workshop approach that allows such poetry to not only engage adolescents but also provide a model for their own writing and artwork. Jaime Hylton contributes to our myriad of paths by providing a serious look at the elements of the novels of Cynthia Voigt. Known for her ever-popular works of mystery, fantasy, and other genres—and tackling issues such as racial and ethnic stereotypes, divorce, sexual abuse, and physical disabilities, Voigt, Hylton claims, continues to thrive because her stories are weaved with elements of allegory, literary allusion, classical mythology, and traditional folk and fairy tales.

Mary Ann Tighe, in "Reviving Ophelia with Young Adult Literature," focuses on the need for female adolescents to read books by women and about women. Not only do they provide an opportunity for different perspectives, but such works also give teenage girls other possibilities for role models. Sheryl O'Sullivan, in her discussion of evil in Lois Lowry's *Messenger*, emphasizes that the novel not only helps provide a broader definition of evil, but also shows what secrecy and intolerance can develop into within a society.

Ruth Caillouet takes adolescence to the battlefield, with her article on using anti-war literature to help adolescents find a path to a more peaceful world. The power of young adult literature may just be the literary weapon we need.

And, as you continue your journey through this

issue of *The ALAN Review*, don't forget to visit our regular columns, such as The Library Connection by Diane Tuccillo with guest columnist Linda Williams, the Clip and File section featuring reviews of 31 of the latest in young adult literature, and The Publishers' Connection by M. Jerry Weiss.

Young adults—and their journeys to adulthood—vary tremendously. Through this issue, we hope that we provide various routes for adolescents to find their own way—the avenue that is right for them.

Call for Manuscripts

2006 Winter theme: BEARERS OF LIGHT: The Caring Community of Young Adult Literature

This theme is meant to be open to interpretation and support a broad range of subtopics; in addition, articles about any of the authors scheduled to appear at the 2005 ALAN Workshop in Pittsburgh, as well as general articles on any topic dealing with young adult literature and its use, are welcome. October 15 submission deadline

2006 Spring/ Summer theme: In the Midst of Conflict

This theme is intended to solicit articles dealing with young adult literature with conflict of any nature at its center, the use of young adult literature as a means for helping young people deal with conflict or any related topic. The theme is meant to be open to interpretation, but might, for example, deal with young adult literature depicting war, family conflict, or the resolution of neighborhood violence. General submissions are also welcome. February 15 submission deadline

2006 Fall theme: The Many Ways to be Human

This theme is intended to solicit articles about young adult literature and its use in dealing with the great diversity of human beings across the face of our planet. This theme is meant to be open to interpretation and support a broad range of subtopics, but some possibilities include examination and discussion of issues of cultural heritage, gender identity, race, class and sexual orientation as they play out in young adult literature. We welcome and encourage other creative interpretations of this theme. May 15 submission deadline.

2007 Winter theme:

This theme will reflect the theme of the 2006 ALAN Workshop

In Memory of James Cook

Eleven years ago, I met James Cook, the Young Adult Specialist at the Dayton-Montgomery County Library in Ohio since 1976, at the ALA conference in New York City. We sat next to each other at the Scholastic luncheon where the Dear America series was being unveiled. A few months later, we reconnected at the ALAN Workshop, and from that point on became fast friends.

James had a gentle and wry sense of humor, and he was a devout Christian. He served as a deacon at his Methodist church and frequently preached. As a matter of fact, we often went to interesting new churches together on Sunday mornings in the various cities where professional conferences were held, and enjoyed our spiritually oriented conversations.

He had the most amazing singing voice—deep and rich and clear. Hymns took on a new radiance when he sang them. But he didn't stop there—he was also a great fan of Motown music, and thought Diana Ross was the best! He could be stopped in his tracks mid-conversation with the happiest smile on his face if he heard one of her songs playing.

James loved teens and he loved reading. He enjoyed booktalking and was expert at it. Twice I had the pleasure of doing a booktalking breakout session with him at ALAN Workshops. He was a popular



speaker not only at ALAN Workshops, but also throughout Ohio. He served on the Newbery Award and Margaret Edwards Award committees for ALA, chaired the YALSA Intellectual Freedom Committee, and served on the Virginia Hamilton Conference Advisory Board. He was currently serving on ALA's Michael L. Printz Award Committee and the ALAN Board of Directors, and had recently completed his first semester teaching "Library Materials & Services for Young Adults" at Kent State University, where he also served on the School of Library and Information Science Advisory Board.

His sudden death on August 1, 2005 was a shock to his wide group of friends and colleagues throughout the Young Adult library and literature world. When his mother passed away last spring, James was so surprised at receiving over 100 cards from sympathizers. "I didn't know that many people knew and cared about me," he chuckled. I don't think James ever realized what a truly important and respected person he was in our profession, and what great contributions he made. He will be missed terribly, as an icon in our field and as a true gentleman.

Diane Tuccillo, ALAN President-Elect

For Immediate Release, August 11, 2005

Kent State University School of Library and Information Science
Announces Establishment of the James E. Cook Scholarship Fund

A memorial scholarship/award fund in honor of James E. Cook has been established by Kent State University. As we move forward, we will work closely with friends and colleagues in Dayton and around the state to establish final criteria for this award or scholarship. The graduate student recipient will be selected on the basis of continuing James' good, important work of connecting teens and libraries. The resulting criteria for the award will also require that the recipient has a love for YA literature and a passion for telling others about what he or she has read. This will be a very special scholarship/award just as James was a very special individual.

Contributions to this fund may be made online by visiting <https://www.givetokent.org/secure/form1.asp> and indicating in step 3, fill in the white box that your contribution is "in memory of James E. Cook." Contributions may also be sent by mail to: KSU Development Office, P.O. Box 5190, 1061 Fraternity Circle, Kent OH 44242.

Please remember to indicate on the memo portion of your check that your contribution is "In memory of James E. Cook."



ZigZag to 'Zines:

A Conversation with Ellen Wittlinger

“It took me a while to figure out that what suited me best was writing novels for young adults,” Ellen Wittlinger, author of many critically acclaimed YA books, admits. A graduate of the prestigious creative writing program at the University of Iowa, Wittlinger has been a poet and a playwright, and she credits both genres for their strong influence on her fiction. She currently writes full-time from her home in a small town in Massachusetts, where she lives with her husband, an editor for the *American Heritage Dictionary*. “It’s always helpful to have him around when I need the exact word,” she quips.

Wittlinger possesses a particularly keen sense of character, inventing teenaged personas whose ways of managing in a world that confuses them seem both relevant and realistic. Her novels include, among others, *Razzle*, *The Long Night of Leo and Bree*, *What’s in a Name*, *ZigZag*, *Gracie’s Girl*, *Sandpiper*, and perhaps her best-known book, *Hard Love*, which won the Lambda Literary Award, was selected as a Michael L. Printz Honor Book, and received critical attention from the American Library Association, *Booklist*, and *School Library Journal* (Best Book of the Year).

Reviewers have called Wittlinger’s characters articulate, emotionally in tune, and remarkably true. She does not hesitate to take on controversial, though realistic, subjects in her novels—romantic attractions of various sorts, the awkwardness of teen sex, situa-



Photo by Sonya Sones.

tions in which parents are distant and uninvolved, and even abduction—but she does so with great sensitivity, rendering characters that both challenge and delight readers. In doing so, she offers what some readers have called bittersweet portraits of adolescents struggling fiercely to establish emotional connections in an often unstable world.

“Young adults will love the wit and poignancy of these clever teens striving to discover who they are,” JoAnn Carhart, writes in *School Library*

Journal of Gio and Marisol, the protagonists in *Hard Love*, whose relationship is complicated by Gio’s romantic attraction to Marisol, an out-of-the-closet lesbian. Chris Moning also notes Wittlinger’s ability to write teenagers that are “deftly layered and textured, . . . uncommonly well-drawn” in a review for *Children’s Literature of Razzle*, which was designated a YALSA Best Book for Young Adults and won the Patterson Prize for Books for Young People in 2002. Moning continues, “This novel shines where so many others fall short.”

Realistic complexities are a trademark of Wittlinger’s writing. “Deep-down, each character is filled with anxieties about identity but also with surprising resources,” says Jane Kurtz in a review of *What’s in a Name*, a series of ten dovetailed short stories which won the Massachusetts Book Award in Children’s Literature. With the publication of her most recent novel, *Sandpiper*, Wittlinger has now written

ten young adult novels, garnering more than seventy awards and special recognitions. Her capacity to tackle what are often considered controversial topics while maintaining the integrity of her characters' motivations continues to impress both critics and readers. "With gentle wisdom," Jane Halsall writes in *School Library Journal*, "Wittlinger's writing conveys a fundamental truth: life is a nonlinear journey."

I sat down to talk with Wittlinger at the 2004 ALAN Workshop in Indianapolis, Indiana. She had been invited as a speaker for two of the panel sessions, and after her talks, we found a quiet space in one of the conference breakout rooms to discuss the books she's written and the ones she's working on.

Emert: Though you've written several young adult novels, *Hard Love* is the book that appears to have gotten the most attention. The novel employs such an interesting format and the relationship is so interesting. Where did the idea for the novel come from?

Wittlinger: Well, the two strains in the book are perhaps what make it stand out: the idea of writing 'zines and the lesbian girl/straight guy angle. I'm not sure why I put them together. The 'zine idea developed because my daughter was fifteen at the time I began writing it, and she had a good friend who was making 'zines. I thought, "Oh, that would be a great thing to do in a book." My daughter's friend happily gave me a box of 'zines she'd collected, and I sorted through them and picked the ones I really liked and wrote to those authors, asking how they got started. Not everybody answered, but a lot of kids did and they sent me more 'zines, or they gave me addresses of other 'zine writers. I've got a nice circle of kids whom I've talked to about 'zines. A 'zine is a way for kids to put both their art and their writing out in the world and let other kids see it, but it flies under the radar, so parents aren't necessarily going to see it. When I wrote *Hard Love*, I'd already published two YA novels, and I was thinking I wanted to write a book featuring a gay character. There had been other books with gay characters, but I wanted to write a book that was not about coming out. I wanted my character to be comfortable with being out, but still dealing with some of the effects since

she's only seventeen. And that is where Marisol came in. I don't know exactly where she sprang from, but she sprang full-blown, probably from the first 'zine entry in the novel where she tells us who she is pretty bluntly. Once I had her voice, she was just really right there.

Emert: How did you come up with the names Marisol and Gio?

Wittlinger: My niece used to have a best friend named Marisol, and I never met her but as soon as I heard that name, I knew I had to use it. I loved the name so much, and I looked up what it meant—"bitter sun," which seemed perfect for her. Names are very important to me when I write. I was talking about this idea with Garret Freymann-Weyr recently. We agreed that once we have the right name, we can begin to see the character, and he or she immediately becomes alive. I'm not quite sure how I came up with Gio; I guess I wanted him to be John because it seemed like the most common name. He began as a blank slate though I knew I wanted him to be named after his father. Eventually he renames himself the more exotic "Giovanni." I love the naming process. Naming something is such fun. I should get more animals so I can name them.

Emert: When I was a kid I loved naming animals. I grew up on a farm so we had plenty of animals to name.

Wittlinger: I should live on a farm.

Emert: One of the teachers I talked with about *Hard Love* said that when she discovered it and read it and started suggesting it to her students, the girls in her class immediately started reading it and passing it around. She can't keep it on the shelf. But she's having a difficult time getting the boys to read the book, even though it has a male protagonist. Any response to that?

Wittlinger: Well, you know, I'm not surprised because it is sometimes hard to get boys to read novels, and if they perceive the book is about love, perhaps that's the problem. But I get quite a few

letters from boys who have read *Hard Love* and really responded to it. Some of them are gay, but the majority of them probably aren't. The first publisher I sent the book to rejected it because it had a male protagonist; they said not enough boys read books and girls won't read about boys. Well, of course that was not true. But I don't know how you interest boys in reading. My own son doesn't read that much.

Emert: It's a tough professional issue for us as teachers.

Wittlinger: It is. I was a children's librarian for three years in my local town. I found myself making lists of books for boys even though I didn't like the idea of segregating the books according to gender. You entice some, but it's hard to break their shell. They think there is something "girly" about reading, or they'd rather be doing more active things. I can't pinpoint the problem.

Emert: It is an interesting question for me because your book has a nontraditional relationship, well, in a lot of ways. Alex Sanchez, who wrote *Rainbow Boys* and *Rainbow High*, says that high school girls love his books and all of the main characters are males in nontraditional relationships. They're gay characters, of course.

Wittlinger: I love *Rainbow Boys*.

Emert: I'm wondering if there's something about the fact that there is the gay/lesbian character in the book that makes it problematic for male readers.

Wittlinger: Maybe if it were a sports book, the lesbian character would be okay, but the fact that it's about relationships, about feelings makes it more difficult. I mean I actually think that a lot of boys, if they read it, would like it. It's just that there is a barrier to cross to get them to read it.

Emert: The male college students I have in my education courses have loved *Hard Love* and *Rainbow Boys*. So, maybe that's it . . . getting them started. I have a related question. I've noticed about at least three of your novels, *Razzle*, *Leo* and

Bree, and *Hard Love*, that there is a major male character who seems to be honing or refining his identity through his relationship with a female character. Would you say that's true?

Wittlinger: I think that is absolutely true.

Emert: Is that purposeful?

Wittlinger: I don't know that I set out consciously to do that when I started writing, but I think in almost all my books the main character is involved with a secondary character of the other gender who is almost as weighty as the main character. I do think that has become purposeful. I did it, liked it, and now it's purposeful. For one thing, I want both girls and boys to read the books, and I'm trying to fight the stereotype that relationship books are only for girls. Also, I think that in your teens a lot of what you're learning is how to relate to people: "Do they like me? Do I like them?" In puberty you are really trying to pick up the cues. Perhaps that's the most important thing going on in those years. You're dealing with your own sexuality and with other people's. You're constantly thinking, "How do I relate to them and who they are as a sexual person?" So, I think it is really important to explore those ideas, and I do try to do that. You are not wrong; that's become a thread through my books.

Emert: So what influence has winning the Lambda Literary Award for *Hard Love* had on your career?

Wittlinger: It is hard to know. I mean that book certainly has done very well, but it also was an honor book for the Printz Award. So, I don't know what to base it on. I do go into gay bookstores now and then to see if it's there. I would say more often than not it is. When I get letters from kids, the ones I like best are from straight kids, and they sometimes say things like, "I was really scared of homosexuals before I read *Hard Love*" or "I just didn't understand what it meant to be gay until I read your book." One girl wrote that after she "met Marisol," which I loved—the idea of meeting a character from the book, she understood that Marisol was just a person like she was. I loved that letter.

Emert: What a special response to the character and to the story you helped her tell.

Wittlinger: It was great.

Emert: What about the physical formatting of the book, with the ‘zine pages? Did you have some say in that?

Wittlinger: I just asked if pages could be done in ‘zine style and they ran with it. I didn’t have to beg. Simon and Schuster did a great job with the design of the book. They ended up getting somebody who had designed ‘zines to do the cover and, ultimately, that cover won an award.

Emert: I didn’t realize that.

Wittlinger: The art director really took to the idea of the alternative layout. They’ve also been great with the formatting of my new book, *Heart on My Sleeve*, which is composed entirely of emails, I.M.’s, and letters.

Emert: What was the process of getting the book published like?

Wittlinger: It went to a couple of places before Simon and Schuster. Somebody didn’t want it because it had a male protagonist. Another editor liked it, but I think was a little scared of it—not scared to publish it, but scared that it wouldn’t sell very well because of the topic. And at that point I got an agent, and my agent said, “I’m sending this to David Gale.”

Emert: So, he was your editor for it?

Wittlinger: Yeah, and he’s been my editor ever since.

Emert: So, let’s talk a little about the controversial nature of the book. Obviously when you were writing it and sending it out, you had to know that some flags might go up for people.

Wittlinger: I really didn’t think the subject matter of the book would stop it from being published. I thought somebody would want to publish it,

though I knew it might not be the first person who read it. It just seemed like the right time for a book that dealt with gay characters but did not focus on coming out. I felt like we could go in another direction now: we could have a character be gay, but not have that be the whole story. I think half my books have gay characters in them—sometimes just in the background, sometimes as a main character—and I think that reflects the world we live in. It’s time that kids figure this out and learn to deal with it. Reading a book like *Hard Love* offers some kids a very comfortable way to do that. They meet these characters, and the characters don’t seem so frightening. So maybe if somebody in their school comes out to them or the school starts a gay-straight alliance, it’s not such a huge, weird thing. Maybe they’ll be able to deal with it more easily.

Emert: Well, I think that Marisol is a nice character to meet. She’s sort of lovely and non-threatening. People seem to sometimes be threatened by gay and lesbian characters.

Wittlinger: Yeah, I think that’s true.

Emert: And the struggle that Gio is having with his feelings about her probably makes a lot of sense to kids.

Wittlinger: I hope so. A lot of kids do write and ask why he didn’t change her—why it didn’t have a happy ending with her becoming straight. I try to respond to that as clearly as I can.

Emert: What do you say?

Wittlinger: Well, I say that’s kind of wishful thinking—sort of a magic ending—and that’s not what would really happen, unless Marisol really wasn’t a lesbian. But this character really is and she understands that. I like to play with the point in relations between two people where they’re not in love on a sexual basis—they aren’t going to be life-long partners—and yet there is love between them, though we don’t usually call it love. It often happens between gay men and straight women. You don’t too often see the opposite, and that’s

why I wanted to do the opposite thing with these two characters. I wanted to keep that: the close relationship they had that was based on something other than sexuality.

Emert: I think that's part of the brilliance of the book—that relationship—because it does turn upside down what we think of as a stereotypical relationship between a gay man and a straight woman. This book flips that dynamic. I used the word non-threatening because in our culture I think men, in particular, tend to be threatened by the notion of lesbians.

Wittlinger: I think that is true, and maybe that's why some boys are sort of put off by the book.

Emert: Maybe if they knew what it is about and if they read the first page, they would get into it.

Wittlinger: Yeah, and some boys have. I am so thrilled when I get letters from boys; right away they tell me if they are gay or straight. Then they go into whatever the problem with their relationship is: "I have this girlfriend or boyfriend, and this happened or that happened." It's great. I love that they're telling me their whole love story.

Emert: Do you go into schools much?

Wittlinger: I go some. They don't want me to talk about *Hard Love* though; I'm usually invited to middle schools. High schools don't tend to invite authors. There are one or two of my books that middle schools are willing to talk about, and the rest they won't. *Hard Love* is off limits. It's too bad. That's the one that's the most fun to talk about; any of the edgy ones are more fun to talk about. I would love to go somewhere and discuss *Leo and Bree*, but nobody would let me do that.

Emert: So if you could go into a class of 11th and 12th graders, for example, and talk with students, what would you want to say about *Hard Love*?

Wittlinger: What would I say to them? Maybe I'd ask them if they know or have any gay friends. I'd ask if this portrayal of gay characters rings true. I guess

I'd like to just shake them up a little, maybe shock them a little bit. Get them to look around and not be quite as narrow. Kids often just see what they want to see, what's in their own little rooms and their own line of vision. I like to knock those walls down if I can and get them to look around, to be open-minded and open-hearted. I feel like you have to start on the inside of a character and figure out who he or she is as a person first and then see him or her as gay or Black or male or whatever. People have layers; if you think of the inner layer first, everybody has things in common. I try to start there and build out. I'd want to talk with them about that idea.

Emert: How did you come up with the title, *Hard Love*?

Wittlinger: Well, I just stole it from the song "Hard Love." I didn't have a title for the book until I was well into writing it. The working title was *Escape Velocity*, but I wasn't crazy about that. I was looking for a song for Diana, the Cape Cod girl who's the singer. I wanted her to be singing a song at the group get-together that would somehow resonate for Gio. I'm kind of a folk music fan, so I went through all of my folk stuff and then all of my daughter's folk stuff. Nothing was really working until I pulled out this old Bob Franke album that I had and put it on. I was listening to the words to "Hard Love," and it started keying into all these places in the book. The song seemed to be written for the book—it was amazing. So, I actually called him and got the rights so that I could put the whole song in the book and then use the title for the title of the book. That was serendipity—it just happened.

Emert: Do you ever think about the possibility of writing sequels to your books? Would you consider doing a sequel to this one?

Wittlinger: I don't know. The question I get asked most often is about writing sequels. I have been reluctant. I feel like the chances of the sequel not being as good as the original are high. The characters and the idea are so focused in that first book. I'm always afraid if I try to extend it, it's just not going to work. I guess if I did do a sequel to *Hard*

Love, it would be Marisol's story. Maybe take it a little further, but the problem with doing that is that she's already out of high school. Publishers don't really want to publish a YA novel about people who are already out of high school. So, I'm not sure and I've kind of already told her story. I don't know that I want to go back and tell it again. I wouldn't mind having her show up in a book again though.

Emert: What kind of adults do you think Gio and Marisol grow up to be?

Wittlinger: Well, she is obviously going places. I think she's going to end up being a playwright. She really can get into people, she's good, deep. She's going to go to New York, and she's going to find love. She can touch people. She'll be great. I think Gio has a tougher road ahead of him. He's got to deal with his dad. He's done some dealing. He's gotten his mother to open up a bit. I think that's going to be a great thing for him. I think his father's never going to get it; it's not going to work. His father's going to be a source of pain for him, but I think the writing's going to help. I don't know that he'll be a writer when he grows up, but I think he's going to find somebody to love down the line and he's going to be okay. I think it's going to be a tough road for him. He's got work to do.

Emert: It's kind of fun to speculate about them.

Wittlinger: It really is.

Emert: What's coming up for you? What controversial books are you working on?

Wittlinger: The book that is coming out next is called *Sandpiper*. It's about a girl who is a sophomore in high school. She has been giving oral sex to boys since she was in the 8th grade, and this has kind of become who she is. She has lost her closest girlfriends and has had a series of very quick relationships with guys that don't go anywhere. The guys have gone from being pretty nice guys to being real jerks. So, I have a feeling this book is probably not going to make everybody's list.

Emert: Have you written it already?

Wittlinger: Yes, it's coming out in Summer 2005. The one following it is about death and God and belief. The one that I'm chomping at the bit now to get going on is about a transgendered, female to male, character. I've got this great twenty-four year old guy who is helping me with it—answering every possible question I could ask. I can't wait to get started on it. I think it's going to be funny. It's not going to be heavy, deep, and tragic. I'm really psyched to get into it.

Emert: I don't remember any YA stories with transgendered characters with the exception of Francesca Lia Block's, perhaps.

Wittlinger: Well, *Luna* by Julie Ann Peters, has a main character who is male to female transgendered. Again, that book deals with the process of acceptance. I think that's got to be done too, but that's not what I want to write. I think it's easier to show who the person is rather than what the problem is. I come at it from a different angle: not here's this big problem that's inundating this person, but rather here's this person and he or she is dealing with this situation.

Emert: Normalizing it somehow.

Wittlinger: Yeah, that's right normalizing. I really think the issue of transexuality is going to travel a similar route to the one homosexuality has. People are going to become more aware of it and twenty years from now they'll be saying, "Oh, yeah, my cousin or my niece is transgendered." It won't be such a big deal anymore. It's going to become normalized, and I want to be part of that process.

Emert: This may not be a fair question. I'm wondering in light of the moral values rhetoric we hear around us, the kinds of topics you're writing about, the kinds of issues you're bringing to the fore are the kinds of issues that some people will continue to take exception to. Any response to that?

Wittlinger: I don't think you can let that get in your way. There will always be people who believe that having moral values means never talking about anything controversial. But you have to write what

interests you, what you can get behind and feel good about. There's always going to be a market for it even if it's not in every school and every library. There are still plenty of people who want to have conversations about the truth. There has to be the first book, so there can be the second book, and so on down the line.

Emert: Well, thanks for writing some of the first ones.

Wittlinger: Thanks for asking me to talk about them. This has been really fun.

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**Review of *Sandpiper* by Ellen Wittlinger, Simon & Schuster,
ISBN: 0689868022, 240 pages. \$16.95**

By Toby Emert

Sandpiper Hollow Ragsdale isn't particularly fond of the name her parents have given her or of the name she has made for herself as the local high school "blowjob" queen. At fifteen, she has already been out with a long list of guys, none of whom really interested her, but all of whom made her feel desired and excited—at first. Things always ended up the same way though, with Sandpiper feeling anonymous—"not even there anymore"—and with her abruptly ending the relationship. It's during a heated argument about the break-up with Andrew, her latest "boyfriend," that she encounters a mysterious character she calls the "Walker." A young man who appears to spend all of his time wandering about town, the "Walker" passes by as Andrew threatens Sandpiper, stops, and ushers her out of the situation. She develops an immediate fascination and a bit of a crush—yet another complication in her already complicated life.

Ellen Wittlinger's protagonist in her latest novel, titled simply *Sandpiper*, is no ordinary heroine, but she is the kind of fifteen-year-old many young adult readers will find interesting and want to understand. Piper, as she is ultimately dubbed by the "Walker," has more to be concerned about than just her reputation. One of the boys she hooked up with has become a menace, her mother is remarrying in a matter of three weeks, her too-perfect stepsister, whom she has never met, is arriving from the West Coast, and her father does not know how to talk to her now that she has become a teenager. To cope, Piper hooks up with boys and writes poems. In fact, each chapter of the novel includes one of Piper's poems as its last page—a technique that is both clever, revealing, and perfectly adolescent: "Her perfect shell covers / a

churning heart, a hollow hell," Piper writes in "Duckfoot."

The novel is fast-paced, with a series of escalating conflicts that tend to touch each character in some way. This is perhaps one of the novel's great strengths: it delivers a family of characters who, each in his or her own way, is struggling with the idea of redemption and, ultimately, acceptance, and who must ultimately find ways to depend on each other to work out that redemption. Piper's secret sexual activity is no more transgressive than the "Walker's" mysterious background or her father's penchant for flirtatious dalliances with younger women. Though the story of the novel belongs clearly to Piper, Wittlinger does a fine job of incorporating a rather full cast of believable flawed characters, whose motivations seem realistic and very human.

As in her other novels, Wittlinger chooses to write about adolescents who are searching for a place in the world and who make difficult choices in their efforts to find it. Sandpiper Hollow Ragsdale discovers not only a name that is more her own, but begins to forge an identity that, in effect, saves her. Wittlinger deftly makes us want to follow along as she attempts to figure out how to do that. In Piper, she gives us a character easy to root for, precisely because of Piper's transparency: we are allowed to witness her internal struggles and we are both interested and hopeful. "In a dark time I begin to see," Piper writes in one of the last poems in the novel. What she sees is not uncomplicated. Wittlinger is too smart a writer to wrap things up too neatly. Piper knows the world is dangerous, but she also comes to understand that she—and others—can make choices that will allow for some safe passage.

Get Real! @ Your Library—Teen Read Week 2005

What is more quintessentially the young adult journey than the search for self—who am I, where am I headed, what are the possibilities for discovering the individual potential in myself, and creating a meaningful life? And what better map and guide than the right reading experience to make the initial steps on these crucial travels? The month of October each year is prime time for teen reading, as the Young Adult Library Services Association, a division of the American Library Association, celebrates Teen Read Week (October 16-22, 2005). This year's theme, "Get Real", with a focus on narrative non-fiction and realistic fiction for young adults, is a natural fit for the voyage of self-discovery. "Teens deserve a wide horizon of books," says author Naomi Shihab Nye. "They read, and the world opens up."

A bit of background on Teen Read Week: begun in 1998 and celebrated the third week in October, this national adolescent literacy initiative is aimed at teens, parents, librarians, educators, booksellers—any and all who care about teenagers and know how essential reading is to healthy, positive development. Teen Read Week encourages young people to "Read for the Fun of It," to make time for leisure reading in their increasingly busy lives. A changing annual subtheme serves as a basis for developing programs in schools, libraries and bookstores to give teen readers the freedom to read something great. Teen Read Week is one of the few active literacy campaigns that focus efforts on teens—giving them time to read just for fun, to select their own leisure reading, and make reading

regularly and often a lifetime habit. And one of the most important ways teens acquire a reading habit is by seeing adults they respect read—a lot!

So let's pull together and counteract the statistics from The Nation's Report Card (<http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard>) which indicate that in homes across America the number of different types of reading materials has decreased, and a smaller percentage of seventeen year olds saw adults reading in their homes! To learn more, log on to www.ala.org/teenread, and join Teen Read Week supporters NCTE, the International Reading Association, NEA, the American Booksellers Association, and others to get the message out to teens to "Read for the Fun of It!"

For teen readers whose lives are becoming more real as they find their way into the wider world, suggest journey themes, where an actual trip echoes a metaphorical journey of self-discovery. The journey motif has engaged a variety of writers' imaginations, and crosses a multitude of genres.

In Angela Johnson's *Bird*, a 13 year old reflects "I thought it was enough that I had to lose two fathers before I'm even a teenager." Determined to hold on to the errant stepfather she loves, Bird follows him south from Ohio to Alabama. Told in the alternating voices of three young people struggling for a way out of loneliness and heartbreaking circumstances, Johnson illuminates their search for simple human connection, and the family ties that make them who they are.

In Paul Fleischman's powerful story of a journey of guilt and restitution, *Whirligig*, 18 year old Brent seizes the chance to travel far from his old life and

self, building toys that celebrate the spirit of the young woman whose life he cut short in a drunken driving accident. Along the way, he discovers his own path to reconciliation and growth in the spiral of emotional connections the responses to his whirligigs provoke.

Zack Lane is a biracial teenager frustrated at how little he understands about his own family background (**Zack, William Bell**) Happily connected to his white father's Jewish relatives, Zack still resents his black mother's refusal to share her family's story. Zack travels from Canada to Mississippi in search of his grandfather, a path that takes him deep into the heart of bigotry, feeling "the full weight of my black skin." Along the way, he learns important truths about his mom's struggles with a father whose hatred of anyone white drove her away from her home, and begins to create for himself a place in two worlds.

Meredith Ann Pierce's marvelous fantasies are steeped in the atmosphere of legend. In **Treasure at the Heart of the Tanglewood**, we follow Brown Hannah, whose unusual healing powers are valued by a mysterious wizard, for whom she must brew a special potion, and by whom she is forbidden to venture from the heart of the forest. But when love arrives in the form of a handsome young knight, Hannah and her forest companions begin an arduous journey to free her love from evil enchantment, and discover the true nature of her own powers and role of earth mother.

Fans of Lois Lowry's powerful, award-winning **The Giver** will flock to **The Messenger**, a novel that brings together characters from that book and **Gathering Blue**. Young Matty, anxiously awaiting his coming-of-age in a naming ceremony, realizes that sinister forces are changing his community from the welcoming, nurturing place it has been. Before the borders of Village are closed for good, Matty undertakes a perilous quest through the dark Forest, hoping to return with Seer's daughter, Kira, whose gift for weaving, along with Matty's own secret powers, may be the only hope to save Village.

Michael Cadnum's **Starfall** takes the myth of Phaeton and his dangerous journey to the gates of dawn, as the basis for a confrontation between father and son over identity, inherited power and family connection. With the structure of an ancient drama, readers follow young Phaeton from his safe, but too dull home life through his quest to pit his strengths

against the dangers of seeking his true father, the mighty sun god Apollo, to the final, devastating choices made by father and son.

Mark Twain's inimicable Huck would find a modern-day soulmate in Chloe Wilder, the heroine of Michael Olshan's **Finn**. The only way to escape from the violent nightmare of her home life is to stage her own death and flee with her grandparents' maid, Silvia, an illegal immigrant from Mexico. The arduous adventures of their trip to California echo Huck and Jim's voyage of discovery, and reveal that progress and freedom still have a long way to go.

Another young woman fleeing from a violent coming-of-age ritual in an unnamed tropical island world is the heroine of Pat Lowery Collins' **The Fattening Hut**. Helen instinctively refuses the food that will make her bigger and more beautiful, preparing her for the cutting ceremony and marriage. With the example of her Aunt Margaret to follow, Helen is willing to risk shunning by her village and a dangerous journey through the island's wild forests to give her life other choices.

War and violence are no strangers to 12-year-old Santiago and his sister, Angelina. When soldiers destroy his village and kill his family, Santiago and his sister must flee in a kayak across the Gulf of Mexico to Florida, where their American reception ("stinking boat people") is just another obstacle they must overcome to survive in Ben Mikaelson's **Red Midnight**.

A trip to South Africa is not high on Berry Morgan's list of summer plans, but when she accompanies her divorced father to the unveiling of a memorial to her sister, Laura, a church volunteer who was murdered in the struggles following apartheid, there is a chance for healing, forgiveness and hope in Carolyn Coman's Printz honor book **Many Stones**.

Coming to a new land, a land of hope and dreams of freedom, is the basis of the First Person Fiction series. Edwidge Danticat's **Behind the Mountains** is the story of 13-year-old Celiane's journey from her beloved home in the mountains of Haiti to join her Papa in the strange world of Brooklyn. Told in lyrical diary entries, Celiane's journey reveals the importance of place in making us who we are.

Difficulties with parents provoke two young men to flee their familiar lives and find a way to envision a future on their own. In Thelma Hatch Wyss' **Ten Miles from Winnemucca**, Martin's mom's honeymoon trip

with “Mr. Joe Wonderful” frees him for a journey of his own. Martin and his trusty Jeep travel as far as Red Rock, Idaho, where his money runs out and his burgeoning ingenuity helps him establish himself in a fresh, new way that ultimately gives him a reason to return. Walter Dean Myers gives his young protagonist, Jimmy Little, a painful challenge in **Somewhere in the Darkness**. From a New York City tenement, Jimmy makes a trip from inner city to his father’s rural Southern childhood home with a father he’s never known, an escaped convict determined to clear his name and win the love of his son before he dies. The terrible trip mirrors the pain and anger of a desperate father-son quest for connection and understanding, of lessons sought and learned, of dreams won and lost.

Teens can find many wonderful stories that mirror their own adolescent journey to the adults they are becoming. Make Teen Read Week a reading destination for them every October, as we encourage everyone to read for fun, read for the journey.

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Writing Back:

Rereading Adolescent Girlhoods through Women's Memoir

Mental illness, sexual abuse, genocide, and war provide the backdrop for several contemporary coming-of-age memoirs written by women and marketed to or read by adolescents. These charged topics will come as no surprise to seasoned readers of young adult literature. However, memoir provides a unique mode for telling and invites readers to approach these difficult issues from another vantage point. In the memoirs we introduce below, women politicize their girlhoods in ways that bring our attention to often under-represented and complex experiences of feminine coming-of-age.

Women's coming-of-age memoirs offer representations of young women that disrupt common assumptions about gender, genre, and narrative. Memoirs, a sub-genre of autobiography, are hybrid texts in which history, personal narrative, and cultural critique converge. While autobiographies tend to be chronological and focus on the author's entire life, memoirs often center on certain periods in time, or themes from the author's experiences. Women's retrospective reconstructions of adolescent girlhood provide alternative scripts about gender.

Below we analyze four recent memoirs written by adult women.¹ In each, the author crafts a story of the self against a specific social, political, and historical backdrop that provides a context for and a commentary about feminine coming-of-age. These accounts by a diverse sample of women differ significantly from

American popular cultural storylines in which adolescent girls are often constructed as wounded. Specifically, these memoirists suggest that race, ethnicity, and sexuality disrupt the idea of a singular coming-of-age experience for *all* girls. Women define the move from little girlhood to womanhood in ways that overshadow the physical markers of feminine coming-of-age. For instance, traumatic experiences such as war or rape often disrupt childhood, requiring young girls to take on adult responsibilities, and to confront hard truths in ways that reorganize any recognizable period called adolescence. However, even as women memoirists tell these disturbing stories of sexual abuse, confinement, and/or war, they refuse to be labeled as victims.

The subjects of women's memoirs included here are often controversial and thus rely on unconventional narrative strategies. Leigh Gilmore writes that, "Texts perform a complex kind of cultural work—never more so than when they seek to represent the 'self'" (22-23). This cultural work involves reconciling a mass of competing materials. Writing a memoir offers an occasion to confront and organize these materials, to provide a social context for them from the author's perspective. Memoirs are self-reflective and highly constructed representations of the self that engage with and draw on conventions of fiction and often incorporate other cultural materials. The texts below rely on a variety of strategies, including allusions to familiar literary or cultural narratives, the use of poetry or illustration, and the inclusion of cultural documents such as clinical files or photographs. In this way, women highlight how individual stories

¹ Adolescent girls have written their own memoirs including, Hunter's *The Diary of Latoya Hunter* and Trope's *Please Don't Kill the Freshman*.

about feminine coming-of-age are also tied to the social.

Girlhood Memoirs

Girl, Interrupted

In 2000 a reporter from the *Boston Globe* suggested that Susanna Kaysen's *Girl, Interrupted* threatened to replace Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar* as the "must-read for young women in high school and college" (Bass 7). Like other memoirs written by adults, the audience for these texts blurs the distinction between adult and adolescent literature. As Bass points out, "Many teenagers read the book long before they encounter it in class, just as a previous generation of young women were drawn to *The Bell Jar*" (7).

Kaysen's memoir chronicles her stay in a mental hospital at the age of eighteen. Her retrospective account of her confinement at McLean mental hospital provides a personal and a social commentary about young women and madness. Throughout her memoir, Kaysen resists the psychiatric diagnosis that defined her as a pathological teenager.

One of Kaysen's strategies includes the insertion of official documents from her stay at McLean. For instance, she begins her memoir with a facsimile of the first page of her case record. It reads, "Established diagnosis, mental disorder: Borderline personality" (3). She devotes one chapter to the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual's* (*DSM III*) definition of "Borderline Personality of Mental Disorders," which she quotes verbatim. She then juxtaposes the *DSM III's* definitions with her own explanations. She writes:

My self-image was not unstable. I saw myself, quite correctly, as unfit for the educational and social systems.

But my parents and teachers did not share my self-image. Their image of me was unstable, since it was out of kilter with reality and based on their needs and wishes. They did not put much value on my capacities, which were admittedly few, but genuine. I read everything, I wrote constantly, and I had boyfriends by the barrelful. (155)

More specifically, Kaysen places pressure on the gendered terms of the label "Personality Disorder." The *DSM III* defines borderline personality disorder that is "more commonly diagnosed in women." Kaysen argues,

"Note the construction of that sentence. They did not write, 'the disorder is more common in women.' It would still be

suspect, but they didn't even bother trying to cover their tracks. Many disorders, judging by the hospital population, were more commonly diagnosed in women" (157).

Kaysen notes that,

"In the list of six 'potentially self-damaging' activities favored by the borderline personality, three are commonly associated with women (shopping sprees, shoplifting, and eating binges) and one with men (reckless driving). One is not 'gender-specific,' as they say these days (psychoactive substance abuse). And the definition of the other (casual sex) is in the eye of the beholder" (158). Kaysen points out how the gendered terms of her diagnosis link to the ways in which adolescent girls are often defined in terms of their sexuality.

Kaysen underscores the socially constructed link between a girl's sexual practices and her mental health. She asks:

How many girls do you think a seventeen-year-old boy would have to screw to earn the label 'compulsively promiscuous'? Three? No, not enough. Six? Doubtful. Ten? That sounds more likely. Probably in the fifteen-to-twenty range, would be my guess—if they ever put that label on boys, which I don't recall their doing.

And for seventeen-year-old-girls, how many boys? (158)

Kaysen highlights and critiques the ways in which the terms used to institutionalize her are not neutral but gendered. Kaysen's personal testimony challenges the "social truth" that young women are naturally susceptible to mental illness in adolescence.

Learning to Swim

Like Kaysen, Ann Turner's is a tale of interrupted girlhood. Ann Turner writes her memoir of sexual abuse as a young child in poetic verse, capturing her recurring memories because "it keeps coming back/ like a skunk dog/ on the porch/whining to get in/and I'm afraid/if I don't let it in/it will never/go away" (1). By choosing a poetic form to tell this story she lightens the pain of the memories. Turner suggests that, "By taking something so painful and transforming it into words, rhythm, and images, the experience changed inside. Memories took on a cadence, almost a loveliness, so that it became a gift instead of a tragedy" ("About").

When she was just six years old and engaging in all of the usual summer activities of a child, such as learning to swim, playing with dolls, and picking berries with her brother, her life is suddenly inter-

rupted when a neighbor takes her into his room to “read” her a story. There he “jams his hands/inside of me/ and takes out his private parts/that I didn’t know could look so huge and strange” (27).

Turner’s language, like the other memoirs reviewed here, is often spare and direct, using a child’s voice to create the immediacy of the experiences. Coupled with the use of poetic vignettes, the narrative carries the reader along with Anne as she learns to navigate the social danger and seek safety nets. The use of the swimming metaphor, with sections entitled “sailing”, “sinking” and “swimming,” serves to anchor the narrative. The memoir begins as Anne attempts to swim without her “pink ring” to buoy her up, reminding us of the potential vulnerability of young girls. She struggles to hold herself up and for a moment she “sail[s] above/the drowned leaves!” (13).

After the abuse begins, she refuses to go in the pond and sits on the grass with her ring. She begins to draw angry pictures, obsessively brush her teeth, and withdraw from her body: “I am flying out/of my body/to the corner of the room/above the willowware plates./ I will stay here/until it is safe/to come down” (51).

When her mother finally asks what the “thick boy” reads to her, she is able to tell the truth. “Telling is what matters./ You have to catch/the words you’ve been hiding/inside . . . pulling the words up/and out . . . dropping them into someone’s/ surprised face that/ is what matters” (111). She can then begin to focus on going on with living and breathing, and learning to swim without the pink ring, rejecting the mantle of vulnerable girl.

Turner speaks of writing the memoir as cathartic. For example, about crafting the autobiographical poems in *Learning to Swim*, Ann Turner writes that, “It was terribly painful, like eating ground glass. But at the same time, when they came pouring out of my heart and through my flying fingers, I felt washed, cleansed, and somehow renewed” (“About”). Her memoir serves as a personal recovery tool: a work of art that transforms the experience, a much needed re-crafting of her storyline, and as a political device. Turner works against the institutional and social practices that often silence girls’ and young women’s all-too common stories of sexual abuse. She not only gives advice for others who have experienced abuse, but also provides the phone numbers for help lines. In

this way *Learning to Swim* functions as both therapy and social critique.

No Pretty Pictures: A Child of War

Anita Lobel, the well known picture book illustrator, opens her memoir of the holocaust, *No Pretty Pictures: A Child of War*, this way: “I was born in Krakow, Poland. In a wrong place at a wrong time.” The story begins when she is five years old and chronicles, with graphic descriptions, years of running and hiding with her eccentric and anti-Semitic nanny who was devoted to protecting her and her younger brother. Nonetheless, they are eventually caught while hiding in a convent, and spend time in a concentration camp they barely escape.

In this memoir, Lobel often captures the perspective of childhood as if she has physically returned to it, although it is written more than fifty years later: years mostly spent in the U.S. In this way she captures the rawness of the experiences and the inexplicability of what happened to her, and the failure of many grown-ups to keep children safe. But in doing so, she rejects the mantle of victim then or now. As she writes: “Childhoods are difficult even in the best of times. I look at children in happy time, and I see little people with wisdom in their eyes at the mercy of big people who don’t know what they are doing . . . It is wearisome as well as dangerous to cloak and sanctify oneself with the pride of victimhood” (Prologue).

The photographs of her family life before and after remind us how real the traumatic interruption in her life was, as do the passport documents photographed in the endpapers that chronicle her movements. Somewhat surprisingly, Lobel juxtaposes this reality by opening and closing her memoir with language reminiscent of fairy tales. She closes her story this way:

In the end, what is there to say? I was born far, far away, on a bloody continent at a terrible time. I lived there for a while. I live here now. My love for this country grows with my years. My life has been good. I want more.

Mine is only another story (Epilogue).

Lobel allows us to enter and witness her childhood—by removing layers of narrative representation and leaving us as close as possible to her chaotic experiences as she now remembers them. She provides limited attempts to explain it to us. There are

few justifications for her attachment to her odd Christian Nanny, yet the irony is not lost on readers. She also explains little about her lack of connection to her own parents when they are reunited. Having already come of age in Swedish sanatoriums, she is more concerned with her shame of being “an ugly, obvious Jewish girl” among the blond Swedes. As she says of this childhood perspective: “I was barely five years old when the war began. Only when I was much older did the horrors and terrible losses of fully conscious people during all those years of terror dawn on me” (Prologue).

In the Epilogue, Lobel recalls the “shame of being watched by a young man while standing naked” as she was bathed by her cousin at a concentration camp, and imagines how the women she knew fared, such as her grandmother. She writes,

I was ten years old when I climbed on to a boxcar transport. I think of my grandmother on one of those trains. Almost certainly separated from Grandfather, she had to have been crammed, sorted, pushed in to the barracks with hundreds of other women, shouted at, forced to take off her clothes. Somewhere the old woman who had made her daughters learn proper German had been stripped naked and shoved and humiliated by strapping young German soldiers. . . . I can picture it. I will never know. (190)

As in other memoirs by women Holocaust survivors, shame of the female body arises as a familiar theme. Lobel’s memoir allows young readers to witness her experiences in all their chaos and incomprehensibility through her crafting of a powerful and complex girlhood narrative against the backdrop of war, dislocation, and humiliation.²

Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood

Like Anita Lobel, Marjane Satrapi deals with the horrors of political repression and war. Satrapi tells the story of her coming-of-age against the backdrop of revolution and war in her graphic memoir *Persepolis*. Influenced by other graphic author/artists such as Art Spiegelman, Satrapi states that, “Images are a way of writing. When you have the talent to be able to write and to draw it seems a shame to choose one. I think it’s better to do both” (“Writing”). Satrapi’s memoir is a three-pronged history of her girlhood, her family, and her country.

² For more on Lobel’s memoir and other Holocaust narratives, see Rogers 2002.

Satrapi writes that she meant her memoir to be read by others unfamiliar with Iran so they would realize that she “grew up just like other children” (“Writing”). Satrapi juxtaposes her everyday coming-of-age experiences—playing with friends, fighting with her parents, smoking her first cigarette—with remembrances of the political turmoil around her. The book opens with a section entitled “The Veil.” Satrapi begins with a self-portrait of herself at age ten, one year after the 1979 Islamic Revolution. She argues that since 1979,

“This old and great civilization has been discussed mostly in connection with fundamentalism, fanaticism, and terrorism. As an Iranian who has lived more than half of my life in Iran, I know that this image is far from the truth. This is why writing *Persepolis* was so important to me. I believe that an entire nation should not be judged by the wrongdoings of a few extremists” (*Persepolis* ii).

After The Revolution it became mandatory for girls to wear the veil at school. Satrapi uses the comic-book



format to make a commentary about the introduction of the veil into everyday life. The caption “We didn’t really like to wear the veil, especially since we didn’t understand why we had to” is accompanied by a graphic in which young girls invent new uses for it (3).

In this way, she teaches the reader about the shift in life in Iran from secular to religious. “We found ourselves veiled and separated from our friends” (4).

For Satrapi, coming-of-age includes a growing understanding of political repression and the realities of war. She learns about the tactics used to torture political prisoners (51) and experiences the execution of her Uncle Anoosh. Images allow Satrapi to capture these traumatic experiences. In one scene, Satrapi details the loss of her neighbor Neta, who dies in a bombing. Satrapi expresses her rage and grief by a black-filled frame and the caption, “No scream in the world could have relieved my suffering and my anger” (142).



Satrapi learns about the reality of this repression after she is expelled from school. She points out to her teacher that her uncle was imprisoned by the Shah's Regime but executed by the Islamic one. Her mother warns her of the gendered dangers she faces. While the Islamic regime was dangerous to both young men and women who rebelled, Satrapi's mother asks, "Do you know what they do to the young girls they arrest?" (145). She tells her daughter that since it is against the law to kill a virgin, a guardian of the revolution would marry the young girl, "take" her virginity, and then execute her.

Satrapi's family history is tied to "2500 years of tyranny and submission" (11), and most recently Western Imperialism. The story of her great-grandfather, one of the last Iranian emperors, her grandfather and her uncle as historical actors is included in the memoir. It is the telling of this history that gives perspective to her life story and to the contemporary events that she witnesses. Satrapi's first person narrative is tied to a larger political and historical

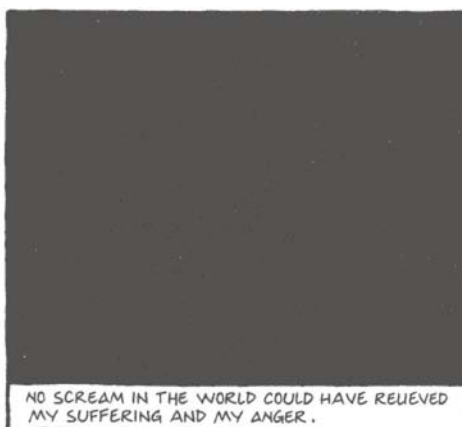
context. As she remembers and rewrites her girlhood, and her family's history, she also reorganizes common misconceptions about her country. In this way, hers is a story of the self and an unauthorized history of Iranians like her uncle, who died because of repressive politics. In her introduction she articulates the dual nature of her graphic memoir,

"I also don't want those Iranians who lost their lives in prisons defending freedom, who died in the war against Iraq, who suffered under various repressive regimes, or who were forced to leave their families and flee their homeland to be forgotten" (*Persepolis* ii).

Conclusion

In distinct ways, memoirs by Susanna Kaysen, Ann Turner, Anita Lobel and Marjane Satrapi offer adult perspectives on feminine coming-of-age that might influence educators as well as young adults. They offer additional narratives about adolescent girlhood. Perhaps most importantly, these experimental autobiographical texts serve as counter narratives to books like Mary Pipher's *Reviving Ophelia*, where adolescent girls are often defined as wounded. In women's memoir, authors suggest that the often-rocky transition from girlhood to womanhood is less about hormones or an inevitable "crash" and more about the ways in which feminine adolescence intersects with the social, the political, and the historical. In this way,

women's memoir surfaces as a genre of young adult literature that allows adolescent readers to explore the ways in which stories of the self can also challenge unjust, and often-gendered, social practices.



Critical Questions for Analyzing Women's Memoir

- What documents does the memoirist choose to include and why?
- What social, historical and/or literary narratives does the author draw on and critique?
- How is memoir both a public and a private text?
- How does the author take up and challenge stereotypes about adolescent girls?
- What does telling a story retrospectively allow an author to do?
- How might you craft your own history into a narrative that challenges common assumptions about gender and/or coming-of-age?

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Can “You” Help Me Understand?

Second-Person Narratives and the Depiction of Depression in A.M. Jenkins’s *Damage* and Chris Lynch’s *Freewill*

About a year ago, an adolescent who is very close to me swallowed a bottle full of pills. Thankfully, she lived and was able to begin treatment for depression—a disease that she has been battling, unbeknownst to me, for years. She isn’t alone. According to the National Institute of Mental Health, approximately four percent of adolescents suffer from major depression each year (“Let’s Talk”). David Hartman, a Virginia psychiatrist, explains that depression in adolescence is brought on by “the moves from childhood to adolescence and adulthood” (Moore 154):

“Adolescence is so turbulent; everything seems exaggerated; the smallest things can become overwhelming. When a boyfriend and a girlfriend break up or when there’s a bad report card which angers parents, some teens cannot cope” (Moore 155-156).

Parents and other adults who care about an adolescent suffering from depression may wonder what they can do to help. I knew to seek out medical help for my friend and to listen to her, but I wanted to do more than help her; I wanted to understand her. While reading about the symptoms associated with major depression and talking with my friend about her feelings was helpful in trying to understand what she was going through, I didn’t feel like I could really comprehend this illness. Then I read a journal entry from one of my twelfth-grade creative writing students. Unlike a mere list of symptoms, his description helped me to grasp the feelings associated with depression and, in some sense, experience the disease myself:

The feeling of depression . . . The sinking feeling of the world becoming too much to handle. Like quicksand it pulls you down and down. The harder you try and fight the faster you sink and the harder it pulls. The feeling that makes you just want to lay in your bed and never get out. Don’t want to watch TV, can’t sleep, and my stomach is full but you still feel as though the black hole in you sucks everything inside of you into nothingness. You sit staring . . . at nothing and everything all at the same time, but you stay silent as a mouse, because you are fine. Everyone probably feels this way. It will pass. But still it stays like a stain on a white shirt that won’t come out, but if you bleach then the shirt might ruin. Like there is nothing to live for but for the sake that you can’t die, but still you are silent, because it is a dirty secret that will make people look at you different, funny. But you hope, wish, pray for it to just go away. You just want to feel happy, energized, alive. Not the dead feeling that drags you down deep into the darker side of life that most don’t like to talk about . . .

After reading my student’s journal entry, I realized that other narratives about depression might be helpful to me in better understanding the disease. As Michael Cart has said, statistical reports may capably describe adolescent issues, “but to emotionally comprehend the problem, to understand how it *feels* to be trapped in that skin, we turn to [a] . . . *novel*” (269; emphasis Cart’s).

Several months later, I happened across Chris Lynch’s *Freewill*. I was struck by Lynch’s use of the second person to depict the disease, and then I remembered that a year earlier I’d picked up (though hadn’t read) A.M. Jenkins’s *Damage*, which also uses second-person narration in a novel where the adolescent protagonist suffers from depression. Both novels

are award winners¹ and were released the same year—*Freewill* in March, and *Damage* in October, 2001. That both authors chose such a unique narrative form to depict depression impressed me, particularly because so many young adult novels employ the first person. Reading these books made me wonder whether second-person narration might be uniquely capable of portraying the disease—and if so, why? I also wondered if I could better grasp my friend’s feelings by reading these two novels.

What is Second-Person Narration?

In trying to answer these questions, I was interested to see the authors’ insights into their choice of narrative style. Though Jenkins hasn’t spoken publicly, that I know of, about her choice of narration, Lynch says that “second person was the only way to get at it all the way I wanted to” (Interview). His emphasis on the exclusive rhetorical capabilities of the form is supported by narrative theory and helps to explain why second-person narration may be uniquely suited for the depiction of depression. In his seminal article on second-person narration, Bruce Morissette suggests that it is “a mode of curiously varied psychological resonances, capable, in the proper hands, of producing effects in the fictional field that are unobtainable by other modes or persons” (Morrisette 2).

Before considering these distinctive effects in regard to the depiction of depression in Jenkins’s and Lynch’s novels, it is worth noting that when talking about second-person narration, we mean what Monika Fludernik calls “real” second person (284). Fludernik, in her introduction to a special issue of *Style* devoted entirely to second-person narrative,² points out the difference between uses of the second person pronoun in a text “which keep[s] addressing a narratee,” such as dramatic monologues and epistolary novels, and “true and proper instance[s] of second-person narrative” in which “the *you* . . . exclusively refers to the protagonist” (282-283). Both *Freewill* and *Damage* are examples of Fludernik’s “real” second person (284).

Recognizing, then, that the narratee (the “you” being addressed) is the protagonist, it is important to understand the relationship of the narrator to the narratee. As Matt DelConte has shown, though the narrator differs from the narratee in some instances of second-person narration, often they are the same

person, creating what he calls “completely-coincident narration” (211). *Damage* and *Freewill* are examples of this. Essentially, these novels are self-addressed: Will and Austin are telling their stories to themselves using the present-tense and the second-person pronoun. However, the novels do not exemplify interior monologue. The case is less clear with *Freewill*,⁴ as Will is clearly questioning himself throughout the novel; but, because of his depression, the narrator is obtrusive and foreign. Instead of presenting his own comfortable thoughts, they are the thoughts of someone he doesn’t recognize, like an invasive presence in his mind.

Reviewers of these novels picked up on the unique capacity of second-person narrative to depict depression—especially this idea of an invasive and foreign voice in the protagonists’ minds, noting that the second person in *Damage* “adroitly pull[s] the reader into Austin’s mind” (Moning) and “effectively conveys the hero’s distance from himself and others” (Publishers Weekly 60). *The Horn Book*’s Peter Sieruta suggests that in both novels, “the second-person voice simultaneously conveys immediacy and distance—getting deep inside a teenager’s head to reveal both emotional torment and dissociation” (587).³ Discussing *Freewill*, reviewers mention that the second person “distanc[es] [Will] from his own existence and giv[es] a dreamlike flavor to the bizarre sequence of events” (Stevenson 270), revealing “to those willing to understand how grief and despair can drive someone deep within themselves” (Lesesne 73).

While these are two very different novels, with two very different protagonists, both utilize second-person narration to portray similar effects of depression on their protagonists—in particular, the feeling of living separated from oneself. Both also successfully harness the ability of second person to transmit this feeling to readers. A closer look at each book, starting with *Damage*, will highlight the ways in which second-person narration accomplishes this.

Damage

Of the two novels, *Damage* is the easier read, partly because it is on familiar adolescent territory with its characters: a high school football star dating the most-sought-after girl in the school—though Jenkins’s use of these characters is hardly cliché. Austin Reid, the “Pride of the Parkersville Panthers” football team begins his senior year inexplicably

suffering deep depression. He begins to feel somewhat better in the company of Heather Mackenzie—the above-mentioned gorgeous classmate. As their relationship progresses, Heather’s companionship eases Austin’s distress—though he does not share with her what he has been feeling. Austin almost attempts suicide, but the novel concludes with him on the path to healing, opening up to his closest friend Curtis, also a teammate and neighbor, about his depression and thoughts of suicide.

Throughout the novel, Jenkins utilizes one of second-person narration’s key attributes—the form’s ability to “manifest [. . .] in narrative technique the notion that someone or something outside of yourself dictates your thoughts and actions” (DelConte 205). The “you” pronoun forcibly asserts itself so that readers can’t help but feel put upon. Despite a particular reader’s desire not to think the thoughts he or she is told “you” are thinking, or do the things “you” are doing, there is no escaping the intrusiveness of the pronoun. For sufferers of depression, the feeling is the same—that someone outside oneself is dictating thoughts and actions. Dr. Gawain Wells, clinical child psychologist and professor of psychology at Brigham Young University, explained to me that particularly depletion depression—depression that comes from “being worn to the nubs” physically and emotionally—can bring the feeling of watching oneself go through life. In other words, depression sufferers feel as if they are observing someone else move and act, living a life that they aren’t controlling.

Jenkins depicts this phenomenon of self-duality by describing images that her protagonist sees of himself, but hardly recognizes. Austin refers to a newspaper picture of himself from last year’s state semifinals, noting the differences between that Austin and his present self: “Shoot, that guy in the picture there wouldn’t lie around on a Saturday night. He wouldn’t think how it’s too much trouble to *breathe*” (2; emphasis original). He also uses the newspaper article’s headline “Austin Reid: Pride of the Parkersville Panthers” to refer to himself in the third person: “Girls are another thing that’s not right anymore. The Pride of the Panthers has always had a girlfriend—but you haven’t had one in a while” (6). Later, Austin again compares his previous persona to his current self: “You know what the Pride of the Panthers would say . . . But you say nothing” (85). A

final image that Austin doesn’t recognize is his football self. While watching game film with his teammates, he is surprised to see his image on the television: “Your eyes stay on the screen now, on number 83. He’s physical proof that you were there last night” (50).

Mirrors also play a key role in Austin’s duality of self. As he contemplates committing suicide, he stands in front of the bathroom mirror: “You don’t bother to look at the reflection. You know what he looks like, eyes flat and muddy. Everything twisted.

“‘Oh, God,’ you hear *the guy in the mirror* whisper” (131-2; emphasis mine).

In addition to these descriptions of self-duality, several times Austin makes even more explicit the sense of depersonalization Dr. Wells described: “You watch yourself walk away and get in line with everybody else” (113); “You’ve become disconnected from your own body, you feel like you’re slipping away, even though you know you’re right there in plain sight” (147); and “In a flash the world shifts and you see yourself from some weird, outside angle” (171).

In addition to the depersonalization characteristic of depletion depression, Dr. Wells explained that sufferers of depression can also experience destructive self-talk. Depressants often talk about their sense of “I” and “me.” The “I” part watches the “me” part act and often poses critical questions—“Why did you do that?”; “Why don’t you get out of bed?”; “Why can’t you enjoy what you used to enjoy?” The “I” part of the depressant believes that if it goes on being critical of the “me” part, then the “me” will change. In fact, in therapy, Dr. Wells mentioned that one of the questions he often asks adolescents suffering depression is “What do you say to yourself?” This is a way to get at the kind of self-talk that his patients are employing.

Austin poses a few self-questions during the novel, but for the most part Jenkins does not depict this phenomenon: “You can’t feel it tonight, but surely it’s there. Isn’t it? Way underneath?” (44); and “It’s scary to feel nothing. What if you never feel anything again?” (44).

Freewill

Freewill includes these same techniques to depict self-duality, though the novel is a more disturbing and challenging read than *Damage*, particularly because its narrator peppers “you” with uncomfortable questions

throughout the narrative. Will, the protagonist, is a seventeen-year-old living with his grandparents because his father apparently killed himself and Will's stepmother by driving off the road. Will attends a vocational school where he spends his days carving wood; there he creates strange monuments that he places at the sites of several teen suicides that occur in his small town. He starts to believe he is a "carrier pigeon of death" and, like Austin, nearly attempts suicide before believing that he can be healed (105).

Will's dual image of himself is made clear as he refers at one point to watching "it" pace in his room. As we saw with Austin, mirrors also play a key role in Will's self-duality:

You catch a half-length vision of yourself in the dresser mirror. Look at you.

Skinny. Naked. Creased.

Killer. Mystic monster. Cult icon.

Panic.

Don't. Will. Don't.

Panic. You retreat, from the mirror, from the *image* with the fifty ribs ready to launch like arrows straight out of the torso. (100; emphasis mine)

Earlier, Will describes his own facial expression in mirror terms when spending time with a classmate: "She cannot see you biting your lip, can she? She cannot see the way your face is now folded into that singular arrangement of conflicting lines that amount to something closer to a fractured mirror image than one coherent expression" (35).

In addition to images of self-duality, Lynch utilizes an abundance of negative self-talk in order to portray Will's depression:

Why is it that you should do the shopping? . . . Do you have some kind of cosmic debt because you have been stuck with them? Isn't that, isn't this, life? You are theirs, are you not? Theirs? *You* didn't kill anybody. Did you? Did you, Will, kill anybody?

Of course not. So why do you owe them? Why should it be that you are treated like an imposition? What does it mean? That you don't belong? That you don't belong there? That you don't belong to them? (13)

This constant questioning is perhaps the most disconcerting element of Lynch's novel. Halfway through my first reading of *Freewill*, I wanted to put it down because the questions were so intrusive as to

give me a headache. It occurred to me that this is precisely Lynch's point—he wants to drive the voices that are in Will's head into the reader's head. For the most part he leaves any reference to Will's name out of the questions (though there is an exception in the above passage). These are questions that could be addressed to any "you," because they generally lack a specific addressee. For this reason, the reader may feel that he or she is the target of the questions, an effect both disconcerting and uniquely capable of forcing the reader to feel the depression along with Will.

How Do *You* Feel?: Second-Person Narrative's Effects on the Reader

Perhaps even more interesting than the feeling the reader gets of being put upon by the intrusive "you" is the unique feeling a reader gets of separating from oneself during the reading of second-person narrative texts like *Damage* and *Freewill*. This feeling comes, theorists argue, because the narrative perspective offers two roles for the reader to assume: observer and addressee. The observer role is the standard role that readers take while reading first- and third-person fictional texts: we do not participate in the fictional world we are reading about; instead, we watch it from afar. The addressee role is unique to second-person narration. Because the text constantly addresses "you," readers may sometimes take on the role of the addressee, participating in the fictional world instead of merely observing it. The extent of this participatory role can vary, as James Phelan notes: "the greater the characterization of the 'you,' the more like a standard protagonist the 'you' becomes, and, consequently, the more actual readers can employ their standard strategies for reading narrative" (Phelan 351). But while there is a general move in any reading toward the observer role with fuller characterization, the reader can move back and forth between these roles: "As readers, we oscillate in complex ways between being participants in the fictional world and in the literary world" (DelConte 206).

As Dennis Schofield has observed, this oscillation causes readers to "experience some of the second person's instances as both forcefully compelling and alienating" (96). It is this compelling alienation that most causes readers to feel what it is like to have depression while reading *Damage* and *Freewill*;

readers are, in actuality, being pulled apart and put back together—enduring the same feeling of duality as people who are clinically depressed. I asked my friend if this oscillation accurately described her feelings while moving in and out of depression. She responded that she'd never considered it that way, but indeed my description of my feelings while reading these novels—that I was losing control of myself, then sometimes gaining it back, only to lose it again—was genuine to her experience.

In short, “the second person has a Protean, shape-shifting quality that can defeat our willful attempts to specify and identify” (Schofield 105). We can lose our identities while reading second-person narration, just as depressants lose their identities to the disease. James Phelan notes that “most writers who employ this technique take advantage of the opportunity to move readers between the positions of observer and addressee and, indeed, to blur the boundaries between these positions. In short, it is not easy to say who you are” (Phelan 351). Both Lynch and Jenkins do take opportunities to swing the reader between the addressee and observer roles. We've already discussed one way in which Lynch does that—by taking out specific references to Will in his constant questioning. Jenkins is subtler. While her story may cover common ground for many teenagers, Jenkins understands that not every reader will relate to Austin's athletic experience, to his sexual encounters with Heather, to his small-town life, or to his depression; therefore, she includes descriptions of events that will include other readers. One example is Austin's waking up for the first day of school:

The alarm clock has been going off for a while. It rasps the air, nagging, insistent.

Today is the first day of school.

You manage to pull the pillow away but can't get the energy to sit up.

Through bleary eyes you see the alarm on the nightstand and reach out, clamp down on it till it shuts up. (21)

Any current or former student can relate to the awful sound of the alarm clock on the first day of school. With this narrative, Jenkins draws the reader into the addressee role. She does it again with this simple paragraph about the weather: “One of the windows is open a little. You can smell the rain outside. It's

afternoon, but dark because of the clouds, and the thunder rumbles like something is coming loose way up in the sky” (84).

In addition to these specific passages, the setting and characters that both Lynch and Jenkins include—adolescents attending school—are clearly meant to draw readers in. By engaging readers in this way, the authors make it easier for “one of the more prominent emotional effects of second-person narration: namely, its decidedly involving quality, which provokes much greater initial empathy with second-person protagonists than with first- or third-person characters,” to further allow the reader to sense the depression that these novels' protagonists feel (Fludernik 286).

Can You Help Me Connect?: Hope for Adolescents with Depression

Although I have focused on the ways Lynch's and Jenkins's texts can serve readers who would like to be able to understand the symptoms of depression, these two novels would also be ideal to share with adolescents struggling with depression themselves.⁵ As Chris Crutcher has said,

I believe stories can help.

Stories can help teenagers look at their feelings, or come to emotional resolution, from a safe distance. If, as an author, I can make an emotional connection with my reader, I have already started to help him or her heal. I have never met a depressed person . . . who was not encouraged by the knowledge that others feel the same way they do. *I am not alone* is powerful medicine. If others feel this way, and they have survived, then I can survive too. (39; emphasis original)

Freewill and *Damage* are uniquely capable of passing on this hope for survival because of their conclusions. Both books end closely following near suicide attempts by their protagonists, and in neither case is there a neat, everything's-better ending. Still, we know that Will and Austin are on their way to healing.

In his Printz Award speech for *Freewill*, Chris Lynch expressed the desire that his novel would offer hope to struggling adolescents:

I hope the books, difficult books like these, . . . help [readers] to believe in things a little bit that they didn't previously believe in. And I don't mean wizards and fairies. I mean, the possibility of life, where maybe life didn't seem like the natural, obvious outcome” (27-28).

For my friend suffering from depression, and for my

creative writing student (who wrote the journal entry that first suggested to me that narrative could help me to understand depression), life was not the “natural, obvious outcome.” Yet, months after I’d read his first journal entry, that same creative writing student included, in his journal, a description of coming out of the darkness of depression and into the light. Like the first entry, the second is in second person. Actually, I realized while working on this article that many of my students write papers in the second person, and I often have to steer them away from using it improperly. As BYU Professor of English Chris Crowe pointed out to me, this isn’t unique to my students: “it’s nearly a universal conversation teen voice;” which led me to wonder why that’s so. My conclusion: it has to do with adolescents calling out to others: “You feel this, too, don’t you?” They use the second person because they want to connect to their peers and to the world around them. They want to know that they’re not alone. The true voice of teen connection, then, is not first person, so often utilized in young adult novels, but second person, which automatically extends beyond the speaker and reaches out to the world. And in the end, perhaps it is not its intrusiveness that makes second person ideal for the depiction of adolescent depression, but its inclusiveness.

Because the second-person narrative in *Damage* and *Freewill* allows both narrator and reader to participate in some of the feelings of depression, these novels made it possible for me to better understand my friend’s disease and would also hopefully make it possible for her—and young adults like her—to connect with someone else who has been in the depths of depression and found a way out. Norma Klein pleads for books to be used to make these kinds of connections:

“I’d like as many [books] as possible to somehow make life easier for adolescents, to make them aware that even their deepest and most private feelings are not freakish or strange but are shared by others, have been experienced not only by their peers, but by us, the older generation, as well” (26).

Fortunately, A.M. Jenkins and Chris Lynch understand this. *Damage* and *Freewill* are complex second-person responses to that adolescent second-person question—“You feel this, too, don’t you?”—that not only affirm that the feelings of depression have been shared by

others, but also seek to share them with those who haven’t been there.

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Notes

- ¹ *Freewill*: Printz Honor Book, ALA Best Book for Young Adults
Damage: New York Public Library Books for the Teen Age, ALA Top 10 Best Books for Young Adults, *Los Angeles Times* Book Prize Finalist, ALA Best Book for Young Adults, Bulletin Blue Ribbon (The Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books), ALA *Booklist* Editors' Choice
- ² For more on second-person narration, see the special *Style* issue (28.3); Dennis Schofield's "Beyond *The Brain of Katherine Mansfield*: The Radical Potentials and Recuperations of Second-Person Narrative" (*Style* 31.1); and

DelConte's recent "Why *You* Can't Speak: Second-Person Narration, Voice, and a New Model for Understanding Narrative" (*Style* 37.2).

- ³ Sieruta, as far as I know, is the only other person to connect these two novels because of their second-person narration. He mentions both in his review of *Damage*. I read the review only after making the connection myself.
- ⁴ Teri Lesesne, in her review of *Freewill*, calls the narration "internal dialogue" (73), while the *Publishers Weekly* review calls it "interior monologue" (90). Lewis Turco's *The Book of Literary Terms* defines interior monologue as "personal thoughts verbalized" (78). My point here is that the thoughts aren't personal, they're foreign and invasive.
- ⁵ For more on the possibilities of using literature to help adolescents with depression, see Sharon Stringer's chapter "I Must Be Going Crazy" in *Conflict and Connection: The Psychology of Young Adult Literature*; the rest of Crutcher's essay, "Healing Through Literature" in *Authors' Insights*; Moore and Hartman's "The Craziness Within and the Craziness Without: Depression and Anger in *Ironman*" in *Using Literature to Help Troubled Teenagers Cope with Health Issues*; and Lauren Myracle's "Molding the Minds of the Young: The History of Bibliotherapy as Applied to Children and Adolescents" in *ALAN Review*.

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Summer Reading—Magic!

By Linda Williams

Keeping teens actively reading and enjoying it over the summer is an important goal, one that concerns teachers, librarians, and parents alike. However, the trick to successfully engaging teens in summer reading is not necessarily a list or an assignment. The magic word here is *choice*. Linda Williams explains how important the element of choice is in her compelling argument for flexibility in summer reading lists and assignments.

Diane Tuccillo

School summer reading lists have interested me since the early 1990s. I was a children's librarian struggling to support the local schools by making the books on their summer reading lists available. The children and teens that visited my library hoped to find that magic book that would ease the agony of having to read in the summer.

The magic books were never on the list.

In the late 90s, as a Children's Services Consultant for the State Library, I was able to ask for reading lists from around my state.



I wanted to explore what libraries could do to help, but needed to understand the overall scope of summer reading assignments. Were they the same everywhere? I read all that I could find and searched for research.

During the summer of 2000 I analyzed the contents of 57 high school summer reading lists and wrote an article, "How I Spent My Summer Vacation . . . with School Reading Lists," for *Voice of Youth Advocates (VOYA)*. My study on high school lists continues. As the self-appointed archivist of Connecticut Summer Reading Lists, I collect and file as many of them as I can find each year. I keep wishing that

someone had done this before, so that I could refer to the lists of the 90s or the 80s—or even the 70s when I was in high school myself. As an avid reader in high school, I remember a lot of what I read for school, but have no memory of summer reading requirements. Summer was a time of freedom from school assigned reading, during which I could read whatever I chose.

I believe that "required" summer reading originated in the 80s and has persisted—virtually in the same format—through to the present. Interestingly, there is a dearth of literature discussing or analyzing the practice. All the doom and gloom statistics make it easy to understand the "why" of summer reading. It's the "how" that merits a closer look. In today's increasingly global society and media culture, is the required summer reading list designed in the most efficient way to be a rung on the ladder to developing the higher literacy levels that will be needed in the modern world? Is it working?

The answer to that question would seem to be no, based on the National Assessment of Educational

Progress (NAEP) 2003 Reading Report Card. If only 32% of the nation's eighth graders are "at or above proficient" in their reading skill, and 42% can only read at a very basic level, we need to do everything at our disposal to increase literacy skills. For students to achieve economic and personal success, and be productive citizens, higher and higher levels of literacy will be required.

It would, of course, be folly to think that higher literacy levels rest on student success with summer reading. But it might be the one of the simplest places to make a start. An Associated Press article in *The Detroit News* notes: "Summer homework has increasingly become a popular tool used by teachers to bridge the gap between the end of one school year and the start of another." The article goes on to quote Etta Kralovec, director of teacher education at Pepperdine University in Malibu, Calif. "Homework is school reform on the cheap . . . Political leaders can say we're getting more rigorous with our academic standards because we're assigning more summer homework, but they really don't do anything at all." (Zongker). It is time to take a close look at the practice of required summer reading and assess its successes and failures.

Adolescent literacy has not garnered nearly as much attention or research dollars as early literacy. However, a Washington, D.C. based advocacy organization, The Alliance for Excellent Education, has published a report, *Reading Next*, detailing 15 elements in two categories, *Instruction* and *Infrastructure*, that describes 15 program elements that they believe will

improve the literacy levels of adolescents (Biancarosa). The report is based on the recommendations of a panel of nationally known researchers who met with Carnegie Corporation representatives and the Alliance. Most of the steps require explicit instruction from teachers and will not be elements that can be employed during the summer, except in summer school programs. However, there are three elements in the *Instruction* category that are of particular interest for those who are in charge of designing summer reading requirements.

The "*Motivation and Self-Directed Learning*" element (Biancarosa, 16) focuses on the need "to promote greater student engagement and motivation." The authors stress the need for building into the school day opportunities for students to select their own reading materials and research topics. "Self-regulation is only developed when students are given choices and the instructional support and aids needed to succeed at their chosen tasks." This element also spotlights the importance of promoting "relevancy in what students read and learn." Tuning in to what students consider relevant can help to "redesign instruction so that it is more obviously relevant to students."

The "*Diverse Texts*" element (18) recommends using materials with a wide range of topics (including "a wide variety of culture, linguistic, and demographic groups") and reading levels. "Too often students become frustrated because they are forced to read books that are simply too difficult for them to decode and compre-

hend simultaneously. Learning cannot occur under these conditions. Texts must be below students' frustration level, but must also be interesting; that is, they should be high interest and low readability." The description of this element goes on to say that "high-interest, low-difficulty texts play a significant role in an adolescent literacy program and are critical for fostering the reading skills of struggling readers and *the engagement of all students*" (italics mine).

The "*Technology Component*" element (19), here described as a tool for improving decoding, spelling fluency, and vocabulary development, can also be considered in designing summer reading requirements.

With these three elements in mind, I looked at last year's crop of middle and high school summer reading lists.

Motivation and Self-Directed Learning

Motivation is a subject near and dear to librarians who work with children and young adults in public libraries. We sometimes envy schools with their "captive audience." Our jobs depend on whether we can be successful at luring kids through our doors and get them checking out books. Developing strategies for getting teens excited about books and reading is what we do best. Finding out what kids really like to read is important, and central to the work we do. Partnering with the public library in your system can be a good way to learn about what students in your school consider relevant. Another excellent resource

for ideas on how to connect kids to the books that will be relevant for them is Teri Lesesne's *Making the Match: The Right Book for the Right Reader at the Right Time, Grades 4-12*.

Most summer reading lists offer lists of titles. Middle and high school lists vary anywhere from 10 to over 500 selections. Students are almost always required to choose 1-3 titles from the list, however long or short. As an interested onlooker I am often baffled when I ponder the question, "Why these *particular* books?" For instance, in a year when there has been an award winning biography, a series book biography of the same subject will appear on a list, begging the question of why the student must read a mediocre biography instead of an award winner?

We just can't resist limiting the choices that young people are allowed to make! Are we afraid that they won't choose "great" or even "good" literature? Some probably won't—at least until they become more accomplished readers. Letting go, however, *could* be the best way to lead them to read more—and maybe even the "classics." Without research, and there is none on reading the canon vs. reading anything else, no one really knows for sure. All we can do is look at what we are doing already and ask, "Is it working?" Peter Kline, in *Why America's Children Can't Think*, says sarcastically "What we have done so far hasn't worked, therefore we must do more of the same." It is difficult to shift to the unknown, but the risk, when we are talking about summer reading, may be worth a try. And there is research that supports giving free

choice a chance. Stephen Krashen has substantially revised his book *The Power of Reading* specifically on "free voluntary reading," to include studies done since 1992. Throughout the book, Krashen makes a powerful case for free choice. And Jimmy Kim at the Harvard Center for Evaluation found that "reading 4 or 5 books over the summer months had an impact on fall reading achievement comparable to attending summer school. Furthermore, *there were no significant differences in achievement based on which type of books children read*" (Fairchild). (Again, the emphasis is mine.)

On summer reading lists, choice is in the mind of the beholder. You may consider it choice if there is a choice of ten titles or fifty or five hundred. I may consider it no choice at all if I am just aching to read J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter and the Half Blood Prince* the minute it's released, it's not on the list, and my parents have told me that I must get my summer reading done before I will be allowed to read *Harry Potter*! Or if I have a driving passion for books about robots, and there's nothing like that on the list. The question is, will it motivate me to know that the books I want to read don't count when it comes to school? Does this make a division between "school reading" and "reading" that is helpful? Or is it harmful?

I understand, particularly in the case of the shorter lists, that students are limited because their teachers want to be able to assess their reading and they feel they can only do this if they have read the book. Is it absolutely necessary to assess *summer* reading? I would

argue that the only reason to assess is to be sure that students have read over the summer. Yet, I have talked to teachers who say that even the threat of one zero grade is not enough incentive for some kids to read over the summer.

We make the assumption that they absolutely won't read unless they know they will be assessed. What is the message we give, if it is clear to students that this is our belief? The mere assumption that they will not read if we don't force them into it lends the appearance that *we* actually do not find any other reason for reading than that someone else has told us to read. It may be a leap of faith, but it may be worth the leap. Let's let go—just for the summer—of assessment. Let's forget—just for the summer—No Child Left Behind. Would foregoing this one grade in the grade book mean disaster?

Instead of assessing them outright on their summer reading, what if the only thing kids had to think about in the fall was a class period discussing their summer reading selections? Let's assume this is a session where they don't have to be worried about the grade they will be assigned. The incentive is having something to talk about with their peers.

Here are some real examples from 2004 middle school lists, and how they could be improved considering the "Motivation and Self-Directed Learning" element:

Middle School A offers this advice, along with a list of 10 choices for summer reading: "We hope you choose a book that you will enjoy reading. Read it on the beach, in a hammock, on an airplane, or by a campfire. If you

start a book and don't like it, by all means choose a different title and try again. The secret to being a lifelong reader is to experiment until you find books that you like!" Two choices are offered as assessments. Both seem interesting and connected to "real life." But there is no discussion based around the summer books.

The books selected as the ten choices are good books, of course. However, the letter says that if you don't like one, you can choose again. If being a lifelong reader is experimenting until you find books that you like, I'm afraid you have to open up the choices to include more than ten books. Thousands of new books are published every year. Limiting these 7th and 8th grade students may mean that they don't actually find that magic book that brings them into the kingdom of readers. The students in this school are required to read one book from this list.

An improvement that would bring this "summer homework" assignment more in line with the "finding the right book" element would be to offer the list as a recommended list, but open it up to free choice. Even though the assessment choices are interesting, they include writing requirements. Dropping this one writing assessment in favor of discussion back at school in the fall may help students to see this reading assignment as less painful—and they might just hear about an irresistible book from a peer—and read again!

Middle School B's letter to students says, "We hope you enjoy a summer of reading, relaxation, and interesting activities. The selection of authors . . . should

provide you with plenty of choices as well as challenges. We encourage you to express your ideas about what you read. Your teachers or librarians would be happy to help you choose books that would be most appropriate for you and most suited to your interests . . . [R]ead a minimum of two books of your own choice from the . . . authors listed." The list of authors is extensive, which begs the question, why? Why is the choice limited at all? Again, what is the school afraid the kids will read? What is the message when we separate the good books from the bad books—the good authors from the bad authors?

The assessment is the typical writing assignment. You can't read your book at a campfire for this school, because you are required to take notes. The assessment screams "homework," which is not very motivating.

Middle School C has an attractive list. The list is extensive and includes lots of new titles and series under the heading of "Really Good Books to Try This Summer . . ." The note to the parents says "students may choose to read any other books as long as they have not previously read them and you approve of the titles." Students must read two. The assessment is to make a storyboard.

This is an exciting recommended list and most parents will not add too many limits to their student's reading. The assessment is art, which will be a deterrent to some kids but many will enjoy it too. Still, the current wisdom is that *talking* about books is the best way to motivate.

Most of the middle school

summer reading assignments include a writing component. Writing is absolutely a skill students need to master. However, "summer reading" and writing may not be the best match.

Diverse Texts

I have seen too many high school students resort to *Spark Notes* to think that it isn't true that students are frustrated by having to read books that are too difficult for them. Many high schools and some middle schools require the reading of canonical literature over the summer when there is no in-class discussion to help with interpretation. The NAEP statistics and the required reading material just don't match up. Teens wanting to meet the summer expectations, but finding the material too difficult, resort to reading plot summaries. It's not that they're cheating, so much as that they are trying so hard to meet the expectation, and simply don't have the skills necessary for the task. Even high-achieving students, like my son who is now a college sophomore, get through high school on *Spark Notes*. Without detracting from the usefulness of plot summaries to help with understanding of a difficult text, I question whether anyone ever would have a life changing experience with a plot summary and become a lifelong reader. Somehow, the idea of being a good reader has gotten mixed up with the idea of being a good reader of "great literature." You *can* be a good reader without being good at analyzing "great literature."

In my first **VOYA** article (2002), I made the observation that high

schools were not including much literature written by authors from minority cultures or women. Only 12.5% of over 2000 titles on 57 lists were written by Asian, Native American, Hispanic, or African American authors, while 24.2% were written by “dead white males.” Female authors wrote 35.6% of the listed titles.

Four years later, looking at the lists presented to Connecticut middle school students, this is an even bigger issue for middle schools. While titles listed on middle school lists are far more current (not many dead authors here), there are very few titles written by authors of the above-mentioned groups (except women). If, as *Reading Next* asserts, “students should be able to find representatives of themselves in the available books, [and] be able to find representatives of others about whom they wish to learn” (Biancarosa, 16), more titles representing other American cultures *must* be found on summer reading lists.

Most summer reading lists offer few, if any, nonfiction titles. Of the 1630 titles included on a sample of 25 middle school summer reading lists from 2004, only 16% were nonfiction titles. High schools are faring better in this regard. Of 1515 titles listed on 25 lists from 2004, 30% were nonfiction titles. Articles and books have been written recently about the particular features of *boys* and literacy. A subject that comes up over and over is the fact that boys, in general, tend to prefer nonfiction. When my sons were in high school, I asked why there was no nonfiction on the summer reading lists.

“We don’t *do* nonfiction in high school English,” was the response. More and more literature is being written about the use of narrative nonfiction in English class. You *can* do nonfiction and you should if you want to engage boys, if not during the school year, then most definitely in the summer.

Technology Component

There are many ways technology can be used in creating summer reading assignments. In my first article for *VOYA*, I looked at the graphic design of summer lists. There were some exciting lists with splashy designs and formats. I recommended getting the art department involved in designing the list. Using desktop publishing software, the students themselves could be in charge of this aspect of the summer reading list.

A large percentage of Connecticut schools—at least half—are now putting their summer reading lists on their websites. Rather than making it just a .pdf document, students could search out links for each book on the recommended list that would help their peers to choose the right book for them.

Another way to add a technology component with a free choice list is to connect students to the online databases and review sites that adults use to select reading material. In Connecticut, anyone with a library card can access the Gale database “What Do I Read Next?” from home or in his or her libraries and schools. Teaching students how to use this database can help them to find other books like the ones they know they like. There are also many Internet sites,

such as *Teenreads.com*, where teens actually write the reviews. Peer to peer word of mouth seems to be the very best way to increase interest in books. *Teenreads.com* is the next best thing.

Other Resources

Outside of the three elements I’ve identified in this article, there are other considerations to be made in planning summer reading assignments. My colleague, Susan Cormier, and I designed two brochures, which are available as .pdfs. Entitled “Creating Summer Reading Lists,” there is one for elementary and middle schools, and another for high schools. I wrote a follow-up article for *VOYA*, “‘Summer Belongs in the Hands of the Students’: Celebrating Choice in School Reading Lists” (2003) in which I have identified key factors to include in a letter to students and/or parents, assessments, and booklists. Also of note is the April 2005 issue of *VOYA*, which announces a new award for high school summer reading lists. The award will be based on the criteria listed in the article.

Conclusion

There are many good things happening with summer reading lists in Connecticut that can be emulated in other communities. Teachers, librarians, administrators, parents, students and other community members can work together to make them even better and more likely to make a difference. *The Center for Summer Learning* at Johns Hopkins University has found that many students experience a learning loss over the summer (Center). Reading practice

is necessary for the development of the literacy skills that will become more and more essential. If we can be successful at stopping summer loss, one step has been taken in the quest for higher literacy skills.

Linda Williams, a member of NCTE, ALAN, ALSC, YALSA, and NCSS, is Children's Services Consultant for the Connecticut State Library. She maintains a web page of "Summer Reading Resources" (<http://ct.webjunction.org/do/DisplayContent?id=6087>).

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<p><i>Anna's Blizzard</i> by Alison Hart Peachtree Publishers, 2005, 141 pp., \$12.95</p> <p>Historical Fiction ISBN: 1-56145-349-8</p> <p><i>Anna's Blizzard</i> by Alison Hart depicts the struggles faced with living on the prairie during a harsh winter. The main character, Anna, loves the prairie and would rather tend to her sheep than to her arithmetic and reading lessons. Anna uses her knowledge of living on the prairie and tending to her sheep and horse to lead the children of the one-room school to safety during a life-threatening blizzard.</p> <p>One weaves the theme of nature versus man throughout this historical fiction book. For example, a blinding snow storm traps the children in the school, forcing them to eat crumbs left over from lunch, boil snow for water, and huddle together for warmth. Their hopes of making it through the night vanish when the roof caves in due to the weight of the heavy snow. Despite all physical obstacles the blizzard brought, Anna uses her courage to bring the children to safety.</p> <p>Erin Jurand Fort Riley, KS</p>	<p><i>Best Foot Forward</i> by Joan Bauer Putnam, 2005, 183 pp., \$16.99</p> <p>Humor ISBN: 0-399-23474-8</p> <p>With <i>Best Foot Forward</i>, Joan Bauer continues the adventures of Jenna Boller. Having concluded the adventures described in <i>Rules of the Road</i>, Jenna returns to Chicago and her job at Gladstone Shoes. Mrs. Gladstone returns, as well, struggling to assert the control over the corporation that was promised to her as Director of Quality Control at the conclusion of <i>Rules of the Road</i>. Mrs. Gladstone's greedy son Eldon continues to engage in shoddy business practices, and Mrs. Gladstone moves through the novel toward the inevitable confrontation that mirrors the plot of <i>Rules of the Road</i>.</p> <p>Added to the mix this time is Tanner Cobb, a good-hearted adolescent on parole for theft and determined to throw his life away. We also meet Charlie Duran, a young man who appeals to Jenna because "He understands retail."</p> <p>As always, Bauer's prose is delightful, and the potentially serious issues (Will Mrs. Gladstone save the soul of the corporation? Will Tanner be rehabilitated?) never threaten to break the essentially humorous spell of the novel. Readers who loved <i>Rules of the Road</i> will have to read <i>Best Foot Forward</i>.</p> <p>F. Todd Goodson Manhattan, KS</p>
<p><i>The Chronicles of Faerie: The Hunter's Moon</i> by O.R. Melling Amulet Books, 2005, 274 pp., \$16.95</p> <p>Fantasy ISBN: 0-8109-5857-0</p> <p>Sixteen-year-old Gwen is excited to spend her summer in Ireland with her aunt, uncle, and cousin Findabhair, who's the same age and beautiful in a tall, skinny kind of way, everything Gwen believes she's not. The two cousins share a love of faerie lore and decide to backpack across Ireland searching for faeries. They spend their first night camping on a sacred hill of Tara, and that night dreams of the king of the faeries fill the minds of both girls as he tempts them with life in Faerie Land. When Gwen wakes the next morning, she discovers Findabhair has been kidnapped by the faerie king. Alone in a foreign land, Gwen must find a way to rescue her cousin and protect her own life with the help of some new friends and a new boyfriend.</p> <p>This book is fun for fantasy enthusiasts and lovers of Irish literature. The author combines elements of Irish mythology with songs and poetry written in the beautiful Irish language.</p> <p>Lisa Armitage Tempe, AZ</p>	<p><i>Claiming Georgia Tate</i> by Gigi Amateau Candlewick, 2005, 196 pp., \$15.99</p> <p>Fiction/Death/Grandparents/Sexual Abuse ISBN: 0-7636-23339-3</p> <p>Considering that the 12-year-old narrator of this novel is sexually abused by her father, remarkably little time is spent dealing with the issue, as if the sexual abuse were more of a plot device to get Georgia back in the arms of her grandfather than a real trauma. That quibble aside, however, the narrative voice here is measured and wise beyond her years, yet rings authentic. Georgia is raised by her grandparents in the rural South, her daily life filled with work, religious worship, friendship, and fun. When her grandmother dies unexpectedly, Georgia's grandfather decides to send her to live with her father. The results are not good, and Georgia must find her way back home. She has the gift, as many protagonists do, of making friends with bizarre strangers who later can help her, in this case: a transvestite, a refugee from Haiti, and a convict recently released from prison. The ending is bittersweet yet hopeful. The characters evoke enough interest to hope for a sequel.</p> <p>Myrna Dee Marler Laie, HI</p>

<p><i>The Convicts</i> by Iain Lawrence</p> <p>18th Century English Social History/ Prison Conditions/Seafaring ISBN: 0-385-90109-7</p> <p>Delacorte Press, 2005, 200 pp., \$17.99</p> <p>Meet Charles Dickens for the MTV generation. The story starts with a six-year-old girl falling from a bridge over the Thames to her death, the mother's resulting madness, the father's bankruptcy and incarceration in debtor's prison, and goes from there to recount the adventures of 14-year-old Tom Tin, which include finding a diamond, losing it in the muck, a trial for murder, imprisonment on a slave ship and an adventure at sea. A final Dickensian touch is the amazing coincidence of Tom's being mistaken for a previously unknown evil twin. Shorn of Dickens' verbiage, but filled with details of the filthy streets of London, the desperation of its poorer inhabitants, and evil conditions of prison life, this book should keep boys reading while teaching them how lucky they are to live in the 21st century. Judging from its abrupt conclusion, this book is the first in a series about Tom Tin and may end up with as panoramic a scope as <i>David Copperfield</i>.</p> <p>Myrna Dee Marler Laie, HI</p>	<p><i>The Cry of the Icemark</i> by Stuart Hill</p> <p>Fantasy Chicken House, 2005, 472 pp., \$18.95 ISBN: 0439686261</p> <p>Stuart Hill's debut novel is a thrilling fantasy epic that will be readily devoured by fans of the genre. His hero is 14-year-old Thirrin Freer Strong-in-the-Arm Lindenshield who "carried her names with ease." Thirrin is the warrior-princess of Icemark, a Norse-styled realm invaded by the unbeaten army of Gen. Bellorum. The novel focuses on Thirrin's quest to build an alliance of people and fantasy creatures before Bellorum's army arrives.</p> <p>Hill builds a fascinating social conflict between Thirrin's and Bellorum's worlds. Among the armies in Thirrin's alliance are the Hypolitan, a warrior society led by women and whose people are often named after famous characters in Greek literature. Thirrin's alliance includes fantasy creatures such as witches and warlocks, vampires, ghosts, and zombies.</p> <p>Hill's writing style is flowing and will be quickly picked up by younger readers. The only minor complaint is that events go so well for Thirrin that it is hard to see a real conflict for her. Nevertheless, his wonderful characters and engaging writing leave the reader desperately waiting for more adventures about Thirrin and her friends.</p> <p>John Ritchie Manhattan, KS</p>
<p><i>The Dark Hills Divide</i> by Patrick Carman</p> <p>Fantasy Orchard Books, 2005, 251 pp., \$11.95 ISBN: 0-439-70093-0</p> <p>Patrick Carman's <i>The Dark Hills Divide</i> is Book 1 in a series of fantasy books from The Land of Elyon collection.</p> <p>While the book gets off to somewhat of a slow start, the reader soon becomes involved in the mystery surrounding the walls of Bridewell and the heroic young lady, Alexa, who will one day assume her place as one of the co-rulers of the kingdom.</p> <p>Led by her new friend Yipes, Alexa travels territory unknown even to adults, bravely facing dangers in order to save the kingdom.</p> <p>Karen Ford Holton, KS</p>	<p><i>Dead on Town Line</i> by Leslie Connor</p> <p>Poetry/Death Dial Books (Penguin Group), 2005, 131 pp., \$15.99 ISBN: 0-8037-3021-7</p> <p>In the spirit of <i>To Kill a Mockingbird</i>, Cassie Devlin, writer of music, loyal friend, and school leader, has been taught to try to walk around in other people's shoes. With this in mind and upon classmate Gail Sherman's request for friendship, Cassie invites her to join Composer's Workshop, a group of dedicated musicians who work on their compositions together at school. For Cassie, this friendship leads to her body buried near the town line.</p> <p>Told in poetic free verse by the ghost of Cassie, the story details her struggle to accept her new existence and her efforts to help her loved ones locate her body. Along the way, Cassie meets another forgotten soul who learns, along with the reader, how Cassie ended up "dead on town line."</p> <p>An interesting mixture of hope and despair, this tiny novel takes a thought-provoking look at jealousy, violence, and life after death.</p> <p>Robyn Seglem Olathe, KS</p>

<p>Flush by Carl Hiaasen Alfred A. Knopf, 2005, 272 pp., \$16.95</p> <p>Dysfunctional Family/Environment ISBN: 0-375-82182-1</p> <p>Noah Underwood accepts the daunting task of justifying his father's outrageous behavior through investigating the Coral Queen casino boat for flushing their sewage tank directly into the ocean. Noah is faced with opposition beginning with his father's arrest for sinking the Coral Queen and his mother's threat to divorce his father due to his anger issues. Noah finds support in his sister Abbey and together hatch a plot to prove their father was trying to stop the pollution and save the beaches, not that he had gone berserk. Help comes to Noah and Abbey from some interesting local characters that often cause Noah to fear for his own safety. These interactions strengthen Noah, providing him with the inner strength he ultimately relies upon to execute his plan to flush dye down the toilets of the Coral Queen to form a recognizable trace.</p> <p>The characters capture the diversity of Florida, creating the flavor of the novel and helping steer the plot. Noah's development into a self-confident boy runs parallel to the challenges he encounters throughout the novel allowing the reader to experience Noah's character development.</p> <p>Patti Rich Phoenix, AZ</p>	<p>The Giant Rat of Sumatra or Pirates Galore by Sid Fleischman Greenwillow Books/Harper Collins, 2005, 194 pp., \$15.99 ISBN: 0-06-074238-0</p> <p>This is a wonderfully descriptive book about a young boy who boards a ship bound for California with a group of mutinous pirates. The adventures that ensue are colorfully described by the author in words that are easily accessible to middle-grade students.</p> <p>The setting of the book makes it particularly appropriate for multidisciplinary study. California in the 1840's was a volatile place. The Indians were still there but had been displaced to some degree by Mexicans and Americans fighting for the vast ranch lands of the state. For this reason social studies and history, as well as multiculturalism, could be easily integrated into the reading of this book. Also, if a teacher were using Robert Louis Stevenson's <i>Treasure Island</i>, this book has many literary parallels to be drawn. This book would probably appeal to male students in particular since the protagonist is a young man who is far away from home on a ribald adventure.</p> <p>Kenan Metzger Muncie, IN</p>
<p>Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince by J.K. Rowling Scholastic, 2005, 652 pp., \$29.99</p> <p>Fantasy/Adventure ISBN: 0-439-78454-9</p> <p>When the sixth book in the Harry Potter epic begins, the wizarding and muggle worlds are terrorized by Lord Voldemort and the Death Eaters. To make matters worse, Snape makes an unbreakable vow with Mrs. Malfoy, and Draco Malfoy is suspected of being a Death Eater. In the meantime, Harry and Dumbledore travel through the Pensieve to learn how to defeat Lord Voldemort. The stakes are high when Draco's plan is revealed and the Half-Blood Prince betrays those who trusted him most. In the midst of poisonings, werewolf attacks, and a tragic death, Rowling adds much-needed comic relief when Dumbledore visits the Dursleys, the Weasley twins create "the constipation sensation that's gripping the nation" (p. 116), and Ron and Lavender are "snogging" all over Hogwarts castle. Fans will be waiting impatiently for the last book in the series to learn more about R. A. B., horcruxes, and Harry's fate.</p> <p>Faith H. Wallace Kennesaw, GA</p>	<p>Hoofbeats: Lara and the Gray Mare: Book One by Kathleen Duey Puffin Books, 2005, 140 pp., \$4.99 (paperback) ISBN: 0-14-240230-3</p> <p>Kathleen Duey says, "Girls throughout history have grown up trusting horses with their friendship, their secrets, and even their lives. The <i>Hoofbeats</i> books are about that trust." Thus, her theme is tried and true, but she has staked out interesting new territory: 17th century Ireland. Nine-year-old Lara is almost old enough to marry in her rural, patriarchal society, but she works like a man, doing chores from making butter and cheese to spreading manure on the fields. The men are gone fighting in constant wars. Lara's life is work, some play, and love for a horse in a society where horses are reserved for warriors. Life is precarious, food is scanty, raiders are a constant threat, and girls are not supposed to have fun. This first book ends at a beginning, with Lara's capture by a raiding party along with the abduction of the foal she saved from death. Lara's voice is engaging and sympathetic if more mature than today's nine-year-old girl.</p> <p>Myrna Dee Marler Laie, HI</p>

<p><i>The Lace Dowry</i> by Andrea Cheng Front Street/Boyd's Mills Press, 2005, 120 pp., \$16.95</p> <p>Historical Fiction/Family Problems/Friendship ISBN: 1-932425-20-9</p> <p>Living in 1933 Budapest, twelve-year-old Juli dreams of exciting careers while her mother schedules dance lessons and commissions an exquisite lace tablecloth for her eventual dowry. Contemporary Juli is unenthused with marriage, dancing, and lace, causing additional discord between mother and daughter. While viewing the tablecloth, Juli befriends the tatter's daughter, Roza, who also differs with her mother, and witnesses their family's hardships.</p> <p>When the lace maker's eyes fail, the tablecloth's progress stalls, and Juli's mother sadly abandons the project. She confides she was once a poor peasant ordered to marry a disagreeable man, but instead stole family money and escaped to Budapest. The dowry was meant to protect Juli from a similar fate.</p> <p>Now contrite and determined to complete the tablecloth, Juli can accomplish this only by simultaneously imitating and defying her mother regarding family money. When the lovely tablecloth is finished, it creates lasting bonds among the women and girls in this simple but engrossing story.</p> <p>Lisa A. Hazlett Vermillion, SD</p>	<p><i>The Manny</i> by Sarah L. Thompson Dutton Children's Books, 2005, 181 pp., \$15.99</p> <p>Love/Dealing With Parents ISBN: 0-525-47413-7</p> <p><i>The Manny</i>, by Sarah L. Thompson, is told from the perspective of 16-year-old Justin Blackwell, whose sarcasm and wit really make this book stand out from others and lots of fun to read.</p> <p>Justin is hired by a wealthy couple to work as a nanny for their four-year-old son, Aspen, one summer in the Hamptons. During the summer, Justin faces the typical teenage issues of how to ask a girl out, how to deal with the girl's hostile ex-boyfriend, and how to respond to adult injustices. Things don't always go smoothly for Justin, but he survives pretty well.</p> <p>Karen Ford Holton, KS</p>
<p><i>Maximum Ride—The Angel Experiment</i> by James Patterson Little, Brown and Co., 2005, 423 pp., \$16.95</p> <p>Adventure ISBN: 031615556X</p> <p>James Patterson, who usually writes intense crime novels for adults, slips in his attempt to write an action-adventure series for kids. This first novel introduces readers to Max, who leads a group of young kids who have had two percent of their DNA altered by evil scientists. This alteration gives the group wings. It also gives them each their own unique special power. Max and her "family" are hunted by the evil scientists and another group of genetically-altered kids who are like werewolves. The premise sounds exciting, but the story itself is filled with every possible comic book/Saturday morning cartoon cliché.</p> <p>Patterson's own writing style seems uneasy. Max is typically our narrator, but Patterson occasionally slips out of the first-person voice to get the audience caught up on other events. When she speaks, Max sounds horribly fake and uses phrases like "son of a gun." Despite Patterson's attention to contemporary issues like animal testing and genetic engineering, his 133 chapters of action without substance will leave readers more sick than satisfied by this ride.</p> <p>John Ritchie Manhattan, KS</p>	<p><i>A Maze Me: Poems for Girls</i> by Naomi Shihab Nye Greenwillow Books, 2005, 124 pp., \$16.99</p> <p>Poetry/Young Womanhood ISBN: 0-06-058190</p> <p>Nye reports that she kept a journal during her 'tween years, maybe writing only three lines a day. Those jottings remind her now of what she observed and felt during those years when her body insisted on growing up while she clung to childhood. These 72 poems grow out of those long ago observations, reminding her and her readers to notice everything, to think about everything, to wonder about the world and how to establish peace around you and in you. These poems are full of daily wonders: silver spider trails, glum Mondays, the heart of a pumpkin the day after Halloween, the little chair in kindergarten where her body no longer fits. If girls could be encouraged to put down the cell phones and the Ipods and look away from television and movie screens and see the sky, the grass, the lives around them with similar wonder and respect, as both girls and women they would shape a better world. This small book is a good place to start.</p> <p>Myrna Dee Marler Late, HI</p>

<p><i>Never Mind the Goldbergs</i> by Matthew Roth PUSH (Scholastic Inc.), 2005, 360 pp., \$16.95</p> <p>Matthew Roth's novel bills itself as "The greatest Hollywood punk rock Orthodox Jewgirl story EVER TOLD!"—it's that and far more. It is also an episodic novel told by its teenage star, Hava Aaronson. Within ten pages, Hava grew on me. Roth gives her a sensitive voice that shows her confusion and anger are real; her insights are fascinating. Whatever one's cultural background, any reader who has ever felt trapped by the mores of his or her society will hear truth in Hava's voice.</p> <p>As Hava leaves New York for Los Angeles to star in a new sitcom about Jews, we follow her attempts to adapt to a very different society. In the LA party scene, Hava confronts issues of sex, drugs, underage drinking and other temptations in a manner that is both shocking and, in Hava's well-crafted voice, realistic. These scenes restrict the novel's potential audience to mature readers. However, they will find in Hava a voice they have been longing for—a voice that speaks to and for those who have ever felt they were living on the margin of "normal" young society.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">John Ritchie Manhattan, KS</p>	<p><i>No Exit (The Big Empty, Book 4)</i> by J. B. Stephens Penguin RazorBill, 2005, 247 pp., \$6.99</p> <p>The United States has turned into a police state after the Strain 7 virus created a crisis. Novo Mundum seems to be the ideal community that supports the arts in a world that is in panic. Dr. Slattery and his military brother who control this community have plans for Novo Mundum and the rest of the world that worries a group of teens. They narrowly escaped the community and are looking for Keely's mom, a virologist, to help them from what might be Strain 8. The teens end up back at Novo Mundum to stop a tragedy and save the community and possibly the world. However, their plans take them in a strange direction. There is an accident, and now they must work quickly to accomplish their goal.</p> <p>The fourth book in a series, <i>No Exit</i> takes readers into a world in which no one would want to live. For readers who expect to breeze through a book, don't give up on this one. It starts slow but comes together and leaves room for another adventure into the lives of the characters you have come to enjoy.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Paula Lane Clay Center, KS</p>
<p><i>Out Standing in My Field</i> by Patrick Jennings Scholastic Press, 2005, 165 pp., \$16.95.</p> <p>On the surface, this novel appears to be a play-by-play account of a little league game. However, the main character, Ty Cutter, hates how his father forces him to play baseball. The baseball game just turns out to be a backdrop for Ty's life, as he deals with a younger sister who is smarter than him, a father who is an emotionally abusive alcoholic and a mother who is in denial. Young men will enjoy this novel, whether or not they like baseball, since it deals with many issues that boys struggle with every day. The story also features a strong female character in Ty's sister. At first I read this novel thinking it would be a tedious account of a baseball game, but I discovered it was a captivating, first-person, present-tense recounting of the life of a young man who strives to discover who he is aside from his parent expectations.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Kenan Metzger Muncie, IN</p>	<p><i>Poor Is Just a Starting Place</i> by Leslie J. Wyatt Holiday House, 2005, 196 pp., \$16.95</p> <p>Dreaming of escaping the confines of her hometown and family in Kentucky during the Great Depression, twelve-year-old Artie Wilson enters an essay contest to win a \$25 savings bond and frantically searches the woods around her home for the answers to the family's secrets of buried treasure. Heritage, the essay contest's topic, forces Artie to examine the lives of her ancestors against the backdrop of her own experiences—the chores of a family farm, extreme poverty, putting food on the table, disease, and a less-than-understanding father.</p> <p>Accurately portraying rural life in the South during the 1930s, this book reveals the dreams and goals of a young woman desperate to overcome poverty and move on to bigger cities and better things. The reality of the story's setting comes crashing home for the reader in that there are no quick and easy solutions to Artie's problems and that it is her determination and courage that finally win the day.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Matt Copeland Topeka, KS</p>

<p>Prom by Laurie Halse Anderson Viking Press, 2005, 225 pp., \$16.99</p> <p>Relationships/Family ISBN: 0-670-05974-9</p> <p>Ashley Hannigan, an 18-year-old senior, has no interest in school or school-related activities until prom is canceled. Ashley's long-term plan has been to get through high school, have a boyfriend, move out of her parents' house, and get a job. All of these she plans to do with minimal effort. Among other things, her grades are abysmal, her boyfriend's a dropout, and her waitress job involves wearing a rat costume.</p> <p>With the urging of her best friend, she becomes involved in saving the prom. After being given some decision-making power and responsibility for the prom, Ashley discovers that school is actually not so bad. She wants to go to the prom! Being permitted to attend is another matter.</p> <p>Students will enjoy the first-person account and the short chapters. The humorous antics of quirky characters add to the fun. The story's resolution is satisfying as Ashley is not willing to settle for a life with few possibilities. She is going to try the local community college. One knows she will make it.</p> <p>Joy Ferichs Chatsworth, GA</p>	<p>Ranger's Apprentice by John Flanagan Philomel Books, 2005, 249 pp., \$15.99</p> <p>Fantasy ISBN: 0399244549</p> <p><i>Ranger's Apprentice</i> is the first book in a trilogy following six orphans. The first book focuses on Will, the reluctant Ranger's Apprentice. Will, orphaned from birth, has convinced himself he is the son of a brave warrior and would much rather be apprenticed into battle school. His slight size makes him a poor candidate for that particular school, but his quick thinking, honesty, and castle-scaling abilities make him a perfect candidate to be Halt's hardworking apprentice.</p> <p>Danger is quickly approaching the kingdom, as Lord Morgarath is plotting to overtake the land, and Will must put his skills to use to help Halt save the kingdom. In the end Will is faced with a life-altering choice and the key to unlock his parentage. <i>Ranger's Apprentice</i> is a wonderful read for lower middle school students into fantasy like <i>Lord of the Rings</i>. This book focuses on friendship, honesty, and other values, without being "preachy." While I am not usually into fantasy, one of my students recommended it to me, and I could hardly put it down.</p> <p>Kim Osenga Manhattan, KS</p>
<p>Scrub by David Ives HarperCollins, 2005, 208 pp., \$15.99</p> <p>Humor/Western/Mystery ISBN: 0-06-059841-7</p> <p><i>Scrub</i> is the first-person account of William Stanley Christmas who, at the age of thirteen, runs away from home and begins his life as a scribe. Traveling all over the West, Scrub (William) makes his living writing letters for those who are illiterate. The intrigue begins in chapter one when he discovers that he is being followed by a mysterious stranger who wants him dead. Chapter titles such as "Attack at the Triple X Ranch" and "I Write a Letter and am Murdered" provide the reader with quick, interesting summaries of the action that will take place.</p> <p><i>Scrub</i> would be an excellent book to be read to students. As many words are phonetically spelled ("mazewell have a thoro look"), they sound authentic read aloud; they could create confusion for individuals reading silently.</p> <p>Lisa Scheriff Knoxville, TN</p>	<p>The Sisters Grimm: The Fairy-Tale Detectives by Michael Buckley Amulet Books, imprint of Abrams, 2005, 304 pp., \$14.95</p> <p>Fairy Tale ISBN: 0-8109-5167-9</p> <p>At almost twelve, Sabrina is a savvy survivor. From the day her parents disappeared, she and her younger sister Daphne have been shuffled from one horrible foster home to another. When the book opens, she and Daphne have been sent to Ferryport Landing to a woman who claims to be their grandmother. Unfortunately, Granny Relda is a genuine nut case. However, Sabrina's doubts are dispelled when she sees the giant for herself and meets a host of fairy tale creatures, from Prince Charming to the Big Bad Wolf. When Granny is captured by the giant, Sabrina and Daphne must discover who has let the giant loose and rescue their grandmother. Then Sabrina learns that the Everafters (as the fairy tale creatures prefer to be called) can't leave Ferryport Landing until she and her sister are dead!</p> <p>In this modern-day fairytale, Buckley has succeeded in creating a sympathetic heroine with a realistic voice plopped down in a fantastic setting. Most lovers of fantasy fiction will enjoy this book. It may even delight girls who enjoy realistic fiction because of Sabrina's plucky personality.</p> <p>Virginia Beesley Quinter, KS</p>

<p><i>The Sledding Hill</i> by Chris Crutcher Greenwillow Books, HarperCollins Publishers, 2005, 230 pp., \$15.99</p> <p>Eddie Proffit suffers “a hurricane of calamity” (p. 19) when he first finds his father dead at the family gas station and only two months later finds his best friend, Billy, dead in the school gymnasium. In that moment, Eddie stops speaking. Speaking is the only piece of his life that he can control. When he stops speaking, Eddie begins to listen, really listen, to those around him: Billy reaching out from the dead, Reverend Tarter trying to control his students and censor their experiences, and newfound friends confessing to being alone and afraid. When Eddie begins speaking again at a church service, he has a great deal to say, much to the chagrin of Reverend Tarter. In his first novel for a middle-grades audience, Crutcher masterfully captures the pain of adolescence: surviving death, strained family relationships, and questioning your faith.</p> <p>Faith H. Wallace Kennesaw, GA</p>	<p><i>Sophie Pitt-Turnbull Discovers America</i> by Dyan Sheldon Candlewick Press, 2005, 185 pp., \$15.99 ISBN: 0-7636-2740-2</p> <p>Sophie is devastated when she learns that her family is not going to France as usual for their summer holiday. However, the situation improves when she is invited to change places with the daughter of a family friend, which means living in New York for the summer. Little does Sophie realize that she will not stay in Manhattan (like she thought) nor have a relaxing vacation (she shares a room, sleeps on the floor, and has to supervise two precocious children).</p> <p>Dyan Sheldon’s easy-to-follow story chronicles Sophie’s adventures navigating Brooklyn in the summer heat, supervising the kids, and interacting with the neighborhood residents.</p> <p>Most female readers will be able to relate to this humorous tale. With short chapters and relatively easy vocabulary, the novel would probably appeal to girls in grades six through ten. A helpful glossary at the end provides clarification for any foreign terms.</p> <p>Lisa Scherff Knoxville, TN</p>
<p><i>The Sword that Cut the Burning Grass: A Samurai Mystery</i> by Dorothy and Thomas Hoobler Penguin, 2005, 211 pp., \$10.99</p> <p>In this the fourth samurai mystery by these authors, Seikei, a fourteen-year-old samurai, is sent on an important mission by the shogun: Seikei must convince the young emperor to perform his ceremonial duties. Seikei learns that the boy emperor believes he is not the true emperor, but before Seikei can solve that problem, the emperor is kidnapped, rebellion breaks out against the shogun, and Seikei is being blamed for allowing both disasters to occur. Fortunately, a young woman and a mysterious warrior come to Seikei’s aid. The three odd companions set out on a dangerous mission to rescue the emperor and stop the rebellion. Although this riveting book is labeled a mystery, it is also a fascinating historical fiction. Young people will love its fast pace and be drawn into the exotic world of sixteenth century Japan where adolescents take on adult responsibilities and significance.</p> <p>Virginia Beesley Quinter, KS</p>	<p><i>We Beat the Street: How a Friendship Pact Led to Success</i> by Sampson Davis, George Jenkins, and Rameck Hunt with Sharon M. Draper Dutton’s Children’s Books, 2005, 183 pp., \$16.99 ISBN: 0-525-47407-2</p> <p>Sampson, George, and Rameck were three boys growing up in tough New Jersey neighborhoods. Drugs, robbery, and murder were normal. But a handful of positive influences guided them away from destruction toward each other. They made a pact to go to college. Their friendship and dedication to the pact led all three to graduate from college and medical school. Today they practice medicine and dentistry in the communities where they grew up.</p> <p>I could not put this book down. Each chapter shares an anecdote and personal remarks from one of “The Three Doctors.” These are their stories from age six to adulthood. Speaking honestly of their discouragement, failures, and successes, they offer encouragement to kids who find themselves in hopeless situations. This book should be carefully shared with upper elementary and is a must-read for middle and high school.</p> <p>Vicki Sherbert Wakefield, KS</p>

<p><i>Westminster Abby</i> by Micol Ostow Penguin Group, 2005, 168 pp., \$6.99</p> <p>Coming of Age/Relationships ISBN: 0-14-240413-6</p> <p>Abby Capshaw's application to the Students Across the Seven Seas Study Abroad Program has been accepted. She has mixed emotions as she heads to London. She sees herself as vanilla ice cream; sweet, plain, and not very exciting. Never one to be a risk taker, this trip is stretching her limits. This may be the perfect opportunity to assert her independence from her over-controlling parents, escape a disastrous break-up with her boyfriend, and become one big hot fudge sundae!</p> <p>Upon arriving in London, Abby determines to do things she wouldn't ordinarily do. She introduces herself to a green-haired girl. She commits lies of omission to avoid conflicts with her parents. And she ventures into a new relationship, even though she's not looking for one.</p> <p>I enjoyed watching the relationships unfold in this book. Middle and high school girls will relate to the issues of friendship and dating. Readers will enjoy realistic characters interacting with peers in a foreign country. This is the first book in a series that focuses on adventures of teen-age girls studying abroad.</p> <p>Vicki Sherbert Wakefield, KS</p>	<p><i>Wright & Wong 1: The Case of the Prank that Stank</i> by Laura J. Burns and Melinda Metz Razorbill, Penguin Group, 2005, 182 pp., \$5.99</p> <p>Mystery/Friendship/Asperger's Syndrome ISBN: 1-59514-014-X</p> <p>Orville Wright and Agatha Wong have been friends since second grade. They are not social outcasts, but they aren't exactly popular, either. Agatha is honored, and Orville, diagnosed with Asperger's Syndrome, is ambivalent when the student body president and the captain of the junior high football team ask them to join the committee to plan the yearly prank for the big game with the rival Sharks. What promises to be an outstandingly successful prank turns to disaster when their opponent's clubhouse catches fire, and the football field itself soon goes up in flames. Orville is positive their prank couldn't have caused the fire, but all signs seem to point to them. Abandoned by their own student body, the pair set out to prove their innocence.</p> <p>This was a fun, fast read. Orville's Asperger's Syndrome is introduced to readers, and Agatha's loyalty to him takes precedence over her desire to gain popularity. Middle school students will relate to believable characters and social groups that can change daily.</p> <p>Vicki Sherbert Wakefield, KS</p>
<p><i>The Xanadu Adventure Starring Vesper Holly</i> by Lloyd Alexander Dutton's Children's Books, 2005, 145 pp., \$16.99</p> <p>Girls' Adventure Quest ISBN 0-525-47371-8</p> <p>Lloyd Alexander, well known for his more adult fantasy novels, is with this book closing out the Vesper Holly series, one created to fill the empty spaces where smart, spunky, adventurous heroines ought to be. Vesper has been called on several times in past novels to save the world in exotic places, and this narrative set in Xanadu, is no exception. Vesper has her final showdown with the evil Dr. Helvitiutis, accompanied as always by her biographer, the prissy Professor Brinton Garret and his beloved wife Mary, and a newer character, "the Weed," or Tobias Wister Passavant. Vesper is comely and wealthy. The Weed is gangly and awkward but of a scientific bent. After all the villains are [finally] conquered, Vesper and Tobias marry and produce a child, thus apparently putting an end to her need to travel. Witty prose and sly jokes at Dr. Brinton Garret's expense make this a lively read. Fans of this series will grow up to read and enjoy Elizabeth Peters.</p> <p>Myrna Dee Marler Late, HI</p>	<p><i>Publishers who wish to submit a book for possible review should send a copy of the book to:</i> 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>



Hearts and Wings:

Using Young Adult Multicultural Poetry Inspired by Art as Models for Middle School Artists/Writers

We were recently invited to lead a summer writers' workshop for racially-diverse, at-risk middle school students in Emporia, Kansas, population 26,000. How, we wondered, could we inspire these students to look at their world in a new and meaningful way? And then enable them to communicate their observations and insights to an audience?

We began the week-long "Hearts and Wings" workshop by introducing participants to two recent young adult collections of multicultural poetry and art—Jan Greenburg's *Heart to Heart: New Poems Inspired by Twentieth-Century American Art* and Belinda Rochelle's *Words With Wings: A Treasury of African-American Poetry and Art*. Greenburg's collection offers nearly fifty pieces of art work and a poem stimulated by each of the art pieces. Rochelle's book pairs twenty poems written by distinguished African-American poets with twenty works of art created by African-American artists.

In her introduction, Rochelle quotes a line from Georgia Douglas Johnson's poem "Your World": "Your world is as big as you make it." If this is true, writes Rochelle, "then the poems and paintings in this book enable us to make our worlds bigger. Poems are words with wings, wings made out of words. But we just help give the poems and art their wings by bringing to them our own experiences and histories, and our willingness to let them take us somewhere new."

We had two goals for the workshop: (1) to immerse workshop participants in the richness of the color, texture, and imagination of the art and poetry

included in these two collections and (2) to inspire them to discover something about themselves and to capture it in art and poetry.

The "Hearts and Wings" five-day workshop was conducted in two hour sessions. We worked with fifteen students in the mornings and another fifteen students in the afternoon. We met in the Emporia Arts Center because we wanted the students to be surrounded by art in the gallery. Each participant was given a journal, and the art center provided art materials and two art instructors to assist us. For most of these at-risk students, this was a first visit to the arts center; their world was already expanding.

After a tour of the gallery, we gathered around a table to get to know each other and to chat. Participants shared earlier experiences with art. Where had they seen art? Had they ever created a piece of art that was later displayed? Did they know any artists? Did they enjoy the art we had just viewed in the gallery? What did that art make them think about? How did it make them feel?

We then introduced the two books and gave them a few minutes to look through the books with a partner. We looked together at Greenburg's introduction. Most students were interested in Greenburg's memories of visits to an art gallery as a youngster and her responses to the sculpture *Little Dancer* by Edward Degas.

We spent the rest of the first day examining more closely several of the art reproductions in the books and the accompanying poems. We responded to the art work in Greenburg's book by using the four modes

of expression she uses to categorize the pieces in her collection—“stories,” “voices,” “impressions,” and expressions.” Greenberg explains that the poets responding to the art pieces chose either to tell a story the art work suggested to them, or wrote in the voice of one object in the painting, or used description and “vibrant word pictures,” or transferred “the artist’s considerations of form or light or space into poetic language.”

As a group, we discussed three pieces of art and their accompanying poems from *Heart to Heart* and one set of art and poetry from *Words with Wings*. We began with Cesar Martinez’ “Bato Con Khakis,” a mixed media painting depicting a young Hispanic man. Several told stories they “found” in the piece—they related closely to the young man’s dark glasses and pose. Next, several shared what the figure in the painting might be saying to us—they gave him an accent and their own jargon. Others described what they saw in the painting—the colors, texture, lines, contrasts—and talked about why the painter showed only part of the figure, used a dark background, etc. Finally, we talked about what thoughts and feelings the painting elicited from us—an effective way to teach visual literacy.

Then we examined Jainto Jesus Cardona’s accompanying poem. We looked at its form and the words the poet used. We noticed that the poet connected to the painting in a very personal way by comparing himself to the man in the painting. The students admired the poet for doing this, even if he did describe himself as a “bookish bato.”

We next looked at Kiki Smith’s 1990 print “Untitled (Fluttering Eyes).” The print, using blacks and grays, shows four pairs of eyes in a vertical arrangement. Again, we tried telling a story, gave “voice” to the eyes, described the artist’s techniques and choices, and explored the feelings this print elicits. Perhaps because this print appeared simple to them at first, the students felt comfortable talking about it. We then read Kristine O’Connell George’s “Pantoum for These Eyes” and guessed what George meant in her last line, “Let yourself slide under their spell.” We also observed the pantoum poetic form with its unusual repetitive pattern and decided that using repetition to describe this painting is effective since the painting itself represents a repetitious pattern.

After viewing the starkness of Kiki Smith’s print,

students were drawn to Georgia O’Keeffe’s colorful 1927 “Poppy” oil on canvas. The students especially enjoyed comparing the poppy to other familiar objects and experiences. They were delighted with the poet Janine Pommy Vega’s metaphor of the swirling skirts of a Spanish dancer in flamenco rhythms in her accompanying poem “The Poppy of Georgia O’Keeffe.”

Finally, we looked at Horace Pippin’s painting, “Saying Prayers,” found in *Words With Wings*. We focused on the three figures in this painting of African-American family life, the background details, the soft lines, the dark and light contrasts, the textures. Students relished making up stories for this picture and giving voice to the painting’s figures. We then turned to Nikki Giovanni’s accompanying poem “Legacies” and explored why the editor paired this poem with the painting. We speculated on the meaning of “legacies” and why Giovanni gave her poem this title. We also mined the meaning of the poem’s closing lines—“ . . . and neither of them ever/ said what they meant/ and i guess nobody ever does.”

On day two, students leafed through the two young adult collections of art and poetry introduced the day before, looking for one painting they would like to imitate. They read information about the artists found in the back of the books. After they selected a painting, they wrote in their journals three reasons for choosing it and then began sketching their own picture, using the techniques and format of the chosen artist’s painting to capture something about their own lives.

Students continued sketching their paintings on day three. After consulting with an art center instructor, each chose an appropriate art medium for her/his painting. Some used acrylics; others used markers, chalk, pen and ink, or colored pencils. In their journals, participants wrote a story about their painting and/or wrote about what an object in their painting might say.

On day four, after completing a painting, each student made a list of words in her/his journal describing the finished artwork and how someone might feel when looking at it. After rereading some poems from the books, they drafted poems about their own painting, reviewing their journal entries for possible ideas. Workshop leaders conducted mini-conferences with students as they worked on their poems. After students completed their poems, they

copied them on heavy paper suitable for mounting.

By day five, all of the students had completed pieces of artwork and poems to accompany the pictures. They were ready to celebrate! Their family, friends, and teachers gathered in the gallery for a showing and reading. Each student was introduced and invited to talk about his/her painting and share why he/she had chosen a specific artist to imitate. Then each student read the poem he/she had written.

Lucy shared her chalk drawing inspired by artist Horace Pippin's *Saying Prayers* found in *Words With Wings*. [Figure 1] She explained that she had been drawn to the painting because her family also gathers in quiet, peaceful ways. The painting made her think especially about her Tia Lola and Tia Maria sitting on the front porch. Her memories of the aunts are a legacy for her similar to Nikki Giovanni's ideas about legacy in her poem, "Legacies." Inspired by Greenberg's invitation to tell a story about her painting, Lucy wrote this poem to hang in the gallery with her drawing:



Figure 1.

Sunday Afternoon

By Lucy

Two members of our family
Tia Lola and Maria
Talking about people
On the front porch
By themselves
Quiet afternoon
They're getting along
Staying cool, calm, and content.

Patricia continued to be fascinated with Kiki Smith's *Fluttering Eyes*, included in *Heart to Heart*. She used colored pencils to sketch her own eye artwork. [Figure 2] Unlike the Smith painting, Patricia added color to her piece, making each set of eyes a contrasting color. When she began composing her poem, she first decided to describe the eyes by their colors and started with the first set of eyes, the blue ones. A young male at her table said, "Oh, azul eyes!" That was just the inspiration Patricia needed and she began interspersing her first language, Spanish, into her draft. Using the idea of reflection, she wrote about what each set of eyes might be seeing. Her poem "Happy Eyes" relies on what Greenberg labels "impressions."

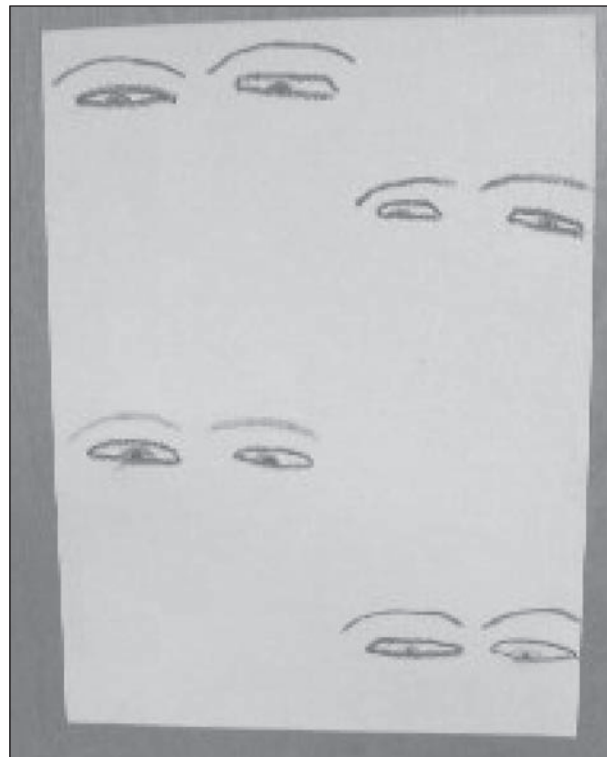


Figure 2.

Happy Eyes

By Patricia

Azul eyes reflect the starry night
Verde eyes mirror tender green wheat fields
Turquoise eyes follow a parrot in flight
El gato eyes hide in the Boston fern

Michael chose Cesar A. Martinez' painting *Bato Con Khakis* as his model. He especially liked the colors Martinez used and could already hear the man speaking. Michael created his painting, using acrylics, similar colors, a plain background, and two figures from the waist up only. [Figure 3] He decided to give his figures voice in his poem.

Hold Up

Poem for Two Voices

By Michael

Hey You!

Hey what?

Give me your money!

What?

Give me your money

Or I will drop you

Dead

Ahh!! Here, take it!

Fifteen dollars?

What's that gonna

Get me?

Next time, have more!

O-okay

Danielle chose to imitate Georgia O'Keeffe's *Poppy* from *Heart to Heart*. [Figure 4] The painting is much like Danielle—bright, warm, energetic, and assertive. She used acrylics to paint a butterfly, with shading to add dimension and a background to serve as an extension of the butterfly's appearance. She composes what Greenberg would call an "expression" poem.

Georgia O'Keeffe and Me!

By Danielle

Georgia's red poppies

Fill the whole page

Big, bold, alive!

My butterfly

Sits on the velvet orange poppy

Big, bold, alive!

Georgia and I

See things alike!



Figure 3.

The public reception in the art gallery concluded with snacks and informal interaction with the young artists/poets. Their work was hung on the gallery walls and left as the featured display for several days.

Although we were fortunate enough to use the Emporia Arts Center facilities and materials, this project could easily be adapted for classroom use. Although meeting in an actual art gallery was very inspiring, a teacher can quickly turn a classroom into



Figure 4.

a gallery with a few posters on loan from colleagues and friends. Or, the public library or local art center may be willing to provide artwork as well.

Accumulating art materials may be the biggest challenge. If a school has a well-stocked art department, the classroom language arts teacher could collaborate with the art teacher, allowing students to work in both classroom settings. If not, the language arts teacher can collect simple art materials to use in the classroom. Students could draw pencil sketchings. Some students might decide to paint the picture at home. If not, they can simply describe how their pencil sketch would look if painted. Or, the teacher can ask for donations of dried up washable markers, which when dipped in water, gain new life as water colors. Or, several students could work on a mural-sized painting together. A large piece of butcher paper taped to a wall and colored chalk would be easily accessible and inexpensive for mural work. Most printing companies will donate end rolls of paper for classroom use.

When your class is ready for a reading/showing, ask the librarian or media specialist if you could meet in the library. Be sure to display the art work and provide an appropriate spot for the poets to stand as they share their poems and drawings. Invite another class, or families, or school staff. Maybe students from the cooking class will help plan the event and donate a batch of cookies.

In another variation of this project which would foster media and technology literacy within the language arts classroom, ask students to explore the Internet for pictures of art and let them find poems to match each piece of artwork. Students could then create a power point presentation or web site to display their findings and choices.

Using two recent young adult books for inspiration and models, the culturally-diverse, at-risk young people participating in this workshop revisited, captured, and shared parts of their experiences through art and poetry. In the process, their world indeed grew bigger, sprouted wings, and took us someplace new.

Dr. Gerrit W. Bleeker, Professor of English and Associate Dean of Liberal Arts and Sciences at Emporia State University, specializes in young adult literature, English education, and American literature. **Barbara Bleeker**

teaches in the Department of Early Childhood and Elementary Education at Emporia State University, where she is a specialist in children's literature and reading and writing connections. They co-author a column about children's and young adult books for The Topeka Capital Journal.

Works Cited

- Rochelle, Belinda, editor. *Words with Wings: A Treasury of African-American Poetry and Art*. New York: HarperCollins, 2001.
- Greenberg, Jan, editor. *Heart to Heart: New Poems Inspired by Twentieth-Century American Art*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2001.

A Suggested List of Additional Young Adult Books Pairing Poetry and Art

- Clinton, Catherine, editor, and Stephen Alcorn, illustrator. *A Poem of Her Own—Voices of American Women Yesterday and Today*. New York: Abrams, 2003.
- A collection of poetry and paintings celebrating the perspectives and insights of American women.
- _____. *I, Too, Sing America—Three Centuries of African American Poetry*. Boston, 1998.
- A collection of poems and artwork capturing the passionate voices of black Americans.
- Folley-Cooper, Marquette, Elizabeth Goldson, Deborah MacAnic, and Janice McNeil, Compilers. *Seeing Jazz: Artists and Writers on Jazz*. San Francisco: Chronicle Books LLC, 1997.
- A compilation of art and poetry inspired by jazz.
- Grimes, Nikki. Ashley Bryan, illustrator. *Aneesa Lee and the Weaver's Gift*. New York: HarperCollins, 1999.
- A combination of poems and illustrations capturing the art of weaving and building community.
- Lewis, J. Patrick. Christopher Canyon, illustrator. *Earth and You—a Closer View*. Nevada City, CA: DAWN, 2001.
- A collection of free verse poetry and colored paintings celebrating the connections between all living things.
- Nye, Naomi Shihab, editor. *Is This Forever, or What? Poems & Paintings from Texas*. New York: HarperCollins, 2004.
- A collection of contemporary poems and art work from Texas.
- Panzer, Nora, editor. *Celebrate American: In Poetry and Art*. New York: Hyperion, 1994.
- Some of America's finest poems paired with artwork from the Smithsonian's National Museum of American Art.
- Siebert, Diane. Stephen T. Johnson, illustrator. *Tour America*. New York: North-South Books, 2004.
- A collection of mixed media artwork and poems celebrating the many treasures of the United States.
- Wood, Nancy, editor. *Serpent's Tongue: Prose, Poetry, and Art of the New Mexico Pueblos*. New York: Penguin, 1997.
- Poetry paired with artwork illuminating the New Mexico Pueblo history and culture.



Exploring the 'Academic Side' of Cynthia Voigt

Over the past twenty-four years, author Cynthia Voigt has published twenty-seven books for readers ranging in age from pre-school (*The Rosie Stories*) through college (*Tell Me if the Lovers are Losers*) to adult (*Glass Mountain*). She has experimented with different genres, including the fantasy-adventure "Kingdom" series, the Tillerman family saga, historical fiction (*David and Jonathan* and *Tree by Leaf*), and two mysteries (the gothic *The Callender Papers* and the contemporary *The Vandemark Mummy*). She has addressed issues running the gamut from elementary and middle school friendship/peer relationships (the "Bad Girls" series) to racial and ethnic stereotyping (*Come a Stranger* and *David and Jonathan*) to learning to cope with a physical disability (*Izzy Willy-Nilly*) and surviving sexual abuse (*When She Hollers*). Finally, she has successfully broken some common "rules" for young adult (YA) books; for example, although the average YA novel contains from 125 to 250 pages, *Seventeen Against the Dealer* and *The Wings of a Falcon* run well over 300 and 400 pages, respectively.

After nearly a quarter of a century, every book that Voigt has published is still in print. To what can the endurance of her work be attributed? Certainly, her novels are peopled with realistic teen protagonists, and their themes are among those that interest adolescent and YA readers: relationships with parents, siblings, and friends; loneliness, self-isolation, and



popularity; meeting obligations and keeping promises; understanding and being understood; self-respect and respect for others, particularly valuing individual differences; the insidious nature of rumor; masking one's thoughts and feelings to stay "safe"; and discovering one's rightful place in the world. Voigt also tackles important life issues in ways such that young adults can learn about and understand them: slavery (*Come a Stranger*) and the underground railway (*Building Blocks*); the Holocaust (*David and*

Jonathan); conscientious objection (*The Callender Papers*) and the pain and grief precipitated by war (*Tree by Leaf*, *The Runner*); fate and free will (*On Fortune's Wheel*, *Building Blocks*); coping with the death of a friend (*Tell Me if the Lovers are Losers*) or family member (*Dacey's Song* and *The Runner*); and divorce (*Bad, Badder, Baddest*). There is a richness to her work that transcends topical stories with teen-oriented, identity-focused themes. I believe that her stories have maintained their appeal because they are skillfully crafted and highly literate. By this I mean that they are suffused with allegory, literary allusion, classical mythology, and traditional folk and fairy tales.

Surprisingly, although Voigt's novels have been positively reviewed and well received by readers, and despite the fact that she has won a Newbery Medal, an Edgar, and the Margaret A. Edwards Award, there is very little critical analysis of her work. This is

unexpected, given that it withstands literary analysis well, whether the criticism be “new,” historical, archetypal, historical, psychoanalytical, or even feminist. (Although Voigt has disavowed being a feminist in several interviews, there is no denying the independent natures of the majority of her female characters, most notably Dicey [*Homecoming*, *Dicey’s Song*, *Seventeen Against the Dealer*], Mina [*Dicey’s Song* and *Come a Stranger*], Gwyn [*Jackaroo*], Berial [*Elske*], and, of course, the self-proclaimed feminist, Althea [*The Vandemark Mummy*].)

Because the theme of this issue of *The ALAN Review* lends itself so readily to an overview, I will not be dealing in great detail with any single Voigt novel. Neither will I exhaust the topic of Voigt’s use of archetypal patterns by cataloguing every instance in each of her twenty-four adolescent/YA novels. My purpose here, rather, is to lead the reader back to Cynthia Voigt’s work with a new eye by providing several well-chosen examples to serve as evidence of the broad scope of Voigt’s “academic side” (Reid 111).

Allegorical Aspects

Parable is the allegorical method of choice in *David and Jonathan*. In an ongoing game of intellectual one-upmanship over his friend Henry, to make his points, Jon will recite Biblical and Talmudic parables and, when it suits him, create parables of his own.

However, allegory most often takes the form of metaphor in Voigt’s novels. One method with which she is very effective is in the creation of landscapes that echo story development. In *The Callender Papers*, for example, when Enoch Callender is seemingly confiding in Jean in order to enlighten her about the Callender family history, Jean says, “The river ran beside us, going in the opposite direction. As we went uphill, great boulders began to appear, as if they had forced their way up through concealing earth, like the earth’s secrets forcing their way into daylight” (55). Of course, Jean’s confidence in Enoch at this point in the story is misplaced, as she later learns when the truth of the family’s secrets is revealed. *Tree by Leaf* is particularly atmospheric. The peninsula bequeathed to Clothilde by her great aunt is more than her “future” (7)—it is her literal present. Being of an independent nature, she does not follow the dirt road that runs beside the fields; rather, she “prefer[s] her own path” (3). When she is confused, we find her walking

through dense fog (106), and when she is angry, a dark wind blows at her back (175). When James and Sammy are searching for their father in *Sons from Afar*, James’s disappointment is complemented by a gray and heavy sky (120) and, later, Sammy’s contentment by a rocking boat and a “blanket” of warm air (241).

Voigt is particularly skillful with extended metaphor. As metaphors for life, she uses sailing in *Homecoming*, the juxtaposition of land and ocean in *Dicey’s Song*, and cross-country track in *The Runner*. However, in no novel is she more successful with this technique than in *A Solitary Blue*, from the point early in the novel when Jeff—who is feeling alienated from his father—catches a glimpse of the solitary blue heron “half-hidden in the pale marsh grass” (73) to the end of the novel when he realizes that, although he does not always understand his mother’s or father’s actions, both are a part of who he is, and “even the blue herons nested together in colonies, all of them together” (306).

Literary Allusions

References to specific poems, plays, and books flow through all of Voigt’s YA novels, and always with purpose. For example, when Gram is recovering from pneumonia in *Seventeen Against the Dealer*, the final book of the Tillerman series, she asks Dicey for a copy of *David Copperfield* to read. For *David Copperfield*, the two most important developmental constants of childhood—home and family—have been subject to repeated change. So, too, have they been for Dicey. Like David when he becomes an adult, Dicey (now 21 years old) is making choices for herself which frequently are not wise ones. Just as David leaves Agnes in order to pursue his ambition to become a writer, Dicey distances herself from Jeff and focuses all of her energies on becoming a boat builder. There are multiple references to literature throughout the Tillerman saga, primarily due to Dicey’s brother James, who is the studious one of the four Tillerman children. In *Sons from Afar*, the novel in which James plays the largest role, he struggles to discover/establish his own identity, in large part through his attempt to learn about his father, who left the family when James was a young child. In this novel, we find allusions to Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*, *The Tempest*, and *Hamlet*; Hemingway’s *The Old Man and the Sea*;

Hugo's *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*; Saint-Exupéry's *The Little Prince*; and Camus' *The Myth of Sisyphus*—all woven carefully into the plot. However, *Sons from Afar* does not meet *David and Jonathan* when it comes to erudition. In the latter, the reader encounters lines of poetry by Emily Dickinson (although not quoted precisely, as is occasionally, and deliberately, Jon's wont) Keats, Noyes, Emerson, T.S. Eliot, and MacLeish; Latin and Italian quotations; references to the *Talmud*; oblique references to Shakespearean characters; and direct references to works by Jane Austen, Camus, Kafka, Kipling, Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky, Plutarch, Chekhov, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Thurber, and Hemingway.

Sometimes, a specific piece will serve as a controlling metaphor for an entire novel. This is the case in *Tell Me if the Lovers are Losers*, a line taken directly from the poem "Cool Tombs." In that poem, Sandburg writes of Lincoln, Grant, and Pocahontas and notes that they will remember nothing of their lives "in the dust, in the cool tombs." In Voigt's novel, Niki and Ann's roommate, Hildy, is killed, and Niki says, "Why bother? It all comes to the same thing at the end. We all die" (176). Ann rejects this view. In his last stanza, Sandburg proposes love as, perhaps, the one meaningful thing we have to sustain us in life; Ann opts for living well and striving for excellence. In either case, the key is that, as Miss Dennis sums up near the end of the novel, "We go on in the hope that [what we do in life] does matter" (185).

I should note here that Voigt does not confine her literary references only to the "Great Books written by dead white men." Although her later novels are more liberally populated with the names of television programs, movies, and pop icons than with literary references, the last are still to be found. In addition to Dickens and Shakespeare in *Izzy, Willy-Nilly*, the reader also encounters Emily Dickinson and Judy Blume. In *Bad Girls*, Mikey has just finished the latest book by Virginia Hamilton, and Althea, from *The Vandemark Mummy*, is a self-taught expert on Sappho.

Classical Mythology

Egyptian mythology undergirds *The Vandemark Mummy*, but generally Voigt employs classical Greek and Roman myths as touchstones. On its surface, the

most obvious use of such a mythological model among Voigt's novels is *Orfe*, based on the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice. In this novel, the genders have been reversed, i.e., Orfe is the singer who attempts to save Yuri, the man she loves—in this case from his dependence on drugs. Directly after their wedding, Yuri is given a piece of cake laced with drugs and follows some old "friends" back to their house. Although Orfe goes to the house in an attempt to save him, he does not follow her out. Like Orpheus, she dies, broken-hearted. This myth is used more subtly in other Voigt novels, as music frequently is a character's way of attracting, comforting, and even retaining strangers. In *A Solitary Blue*, for example, Jeff is unable to gain Dicey's attention until he begins playing a song on his guitar. She turns in his direction, seeming to see him for the first time, "as if the music were some kind of string winding around the long legs" (221).

Another myth that appears in more than one of her novels is the myth of Daedalus and Icarus. Orfe writes and performs a song named "Icarus," in which her back-up singers echo "Up, High, . . . like birds flying up into the crown of the sky . . ." (112). In *Sons from Afar*, when James is trying to convince his brother to accompany him in his search for their father, he tells Sammy the story of Daedalus, Icarus, and the feathers held together with wax. The point he tries to make to Sammy is that, if Icarus had listened to his father, he would not have tumbled from the sky. James is feeling the lack of having grown up with a father, and the narrator tells us, "Sometimes, what really scared James was the sense that he was being blown along on some wind, and he couldn't do anything about it" (14).

Quite probably, Voigt's quintessential use of a model from Greek mythology is the myth of Odysseus in *Homecoming*. On this subject, some critical writing has been done. Carol Hurst's commentary on the book is typical of that of most reviewers when she writes that the novel is an odyssey the main theme of which is family ties (1). James Henke goes into greater depth, actually pinpointing parallels between books IX, X, and XIX of *The Odyssey* and specific pages/chapters of *Homecoming*. Interestingly, once again Voigt has given the male role in the myth to a female protagonist. As Henke and Jameson point out, Dicey is a modern Odysseus.

One of the activities that I have done with students in my adolescent and young adult literature class is to follow the course of a particular protagonist through a novel comparing events as we go to the characteristics of the classic hero's quest. (Joseph Campbell writes most eloquently about the journey of the hero in his book *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, and Peter Stillman distills this information handily for teaching purposes in *Introduction to Myth*.) *Homecoming* is a natural choice for this exercise, of course, but it is also fun and instructive with less obvious selections like *The Callender Papers* or *Izzy, Willy-Nilly*. Then, of course, there is Voigt's deliberate rendering of the quest, *The Wings of a Falcon*—part three of her Kingdom series, itself a real departure from the rest of her work. Classified on most booklists as “fantasy,” “adventure,” and even “science fiction,” the four-part series is a stunning work of political and social commentary in which the question of the relative power of cultural tradition versus law predominates.

Traditional Folk and Fairy Tales

In addition to the heroic aspects in the Kingdom books, there are two primary folk tales underlying the series—the legend of Robin Hood (presented in most detail in *Jackaroo* but reappearing throughout) and the legend of King Arthur (appearing most clearly in *The Wings of a Falcon*). Some have taken exception to Voigt's reenvisioning of these legends, but I think they have missed an important point: one of the overarching themes of the series is how much stories change in the telling over time.

Although the Kingdom series is a good place to start when looking for folk and fairy tale influences in Voigt's writing, they appear, like the literary and the mythological, throughout her work. In *Building Blocks*, for example, Brann conjures up the tale of King Arthur and Excalibur to give him the courage to “grab onto his fate” (74). Later in the novel, when he awakens from a long sleep, his father says to him, “I thought you'd sleep forever . . . like King Arthur under the hill. To be awakened in time of need” (112-13).

Fairy tale references, too, abound. Even the grim *When She Hollers* includes a reference to “Rumpelstiltskin,” as Tish struggles to put a name to what her stepfather has been doing to her. In *Orfe*, in an early exchange between Orfe and her elementary school

classmate (and, in adult life, close friend), Enny, “The Princess and the Frog” foreshadows coming events. Enny insists that if one makes a promise (as the Princess does to the frog), she is obliged to keep it. (Keeping promises is a fundamental theme in Voigt's work, from the early Tillerman saga to the most recent Bad Girls series.) Orfe argues that if *she* had a chance at “the perfect thing,” she would “promise anything to get it back” (10), and so she does when she finds a perfect love with Yuri. In her wedding vows, she promises herself, her heart and her work, to him; when she feels that he must be retrieved from the drug users' house, others try to dissuade her, but Enny understands: “If there is someone like Yuri in your life, the only sensible line of action is to do everything you can to keep him or get him back. Anything else is . . . cowardice or a failure of love” (101). Voigt uses “Hansel and Gretel” in a similar way in *Homecoming*. In the first few pages, while the Tillerman children wait in the car for their mother to return, Dicey asks James to tell a story to Sammy and Maybeth. When he cannot think of one, she suggests “Hansel and Gretel.” Soon thereafter, the reader realizes that Momma is not coming back for them, and their journey to find a home begins. (See Henke's article, mentioned earlier, for some very specific parallels, including the suggestion that Gram is the fairy tale's Wicked Witch.) Two recurring fairy tales for Voigt are “Snow White” and “Beauty and the Beast.” Mina (a “colored” character in the Tillerman books) is cast as the wicked witch in “Snow White.” In *Tree by Leaf*, Clothilde recalls the tale of “Beauty and the Beast” as she ponders a way to help her father, who has returned from World War I frighteningly disfigured, rejoin the family in the main house.

Recommendations for Using Voigt's Novels in the Classroom

Cynthia Voigt's literary skill in “weaving modern realism in [familiar] archetypal patterns” (Jameson 3) results in characters and stories that abide in readers' memories. Additionally, a bridge is created between YA and classic literature. Four years ago, Don Gallo wrote a thought-provoking article for the *English Journal* entitled “How Classics Create an Aliterate Society.” In that article, he argues that the teaching of classic literature to high school students actually may

discourage them from reading and that teachers ought to use young adult literature to engage their students. Most of us who have taught or are teaching English in the secondary schools will agree that it is neither realistic nor feasible to expect that we can or will jettison the classics from our classrooms. (Even Gallo admits this at the end of his article.) However, given that Voigt's novels deal with concerns and themes of interest to adolescent and young adult readers *coupled with classic elements*, we certainly can follow Herz's (with Gallo) and Kaywell et al.'s leads and pair them with classic literature to foster and enhance students' interest in and understanding of works we likely will continue to ask them to read. Gallo writes, "Everyone knows there are easy teen novels for younger and less able readers, but there are also some superb novels in this genre that are more complex—sophisticated enough for even AP readers" (36). He offers as examples books by Robert Cormier, M.E. Kerr, Chris Crutcher, and Chris Lynch. To that list, I am adding Cynthia Voigt.

Herz and Gallo make some recommendations for pairing Voigt novels with other works treating common themes. In Kaywell's series, there are specific titles suggested, including the pairing of *Dacey's Song* with *The Awakening* (Carroll) or *Oliver Twist* (Monseau); *Homecoming* with *The Odyssey* (Ericson) or *Oliver Twist* (Monseau); *Izzy, Willy-Nilly* with *The Miracle Worker* (Kelley); *The Runner* with *Death of a Salesman* (Cline); and *A Solitary Blue* with *Our Town* (Ericson). I would like to suggest an additional seven possible pairings: *Tell Me if the Lovers are Losers* with *King Lear*; *Seventeen Against the Dealer* with *The Prince*; *The Callender Papers* with *Jane Eyre*; *Come a Stranger* with *To Kill a Mockingbird*; *The Wings of a Falcon* with *Macbeth*; *Elske* with *Antigone*; and *Sons from Afar* with *Hamlet*.

Conclusion

In *Presenting Cynthia Voigt*, Suzanne Reid merely scratches the surface when she proffers: "The aca-

Jaime Hylton spoke with Cynthia Voigt by email on July 26, 2005

JH: You have made major contributions to the field of YA literature, including negotiating various genres, creating memorable characters, and dealing with serious life issues. You have received popular recognition and won critical awards. What are your writing goals at this point? Are there new/different things you still aspire to do?

CV: There are always new, different things I want to take a shot at. How much wisdom there is in that desire, I don't know. My job, as I see it, is to figure out how to get my best work out of myself . . . or, at least, something I think is my best work. For me, not doing the same things results in better thinking and writing. When I was working on the Tillerman books, for example, I alternated them with non-Tillerman efforts. To stay fresher.

JH: The theme of personal integrity—by which I mean knowing oneself, living up to one's responsibilities, and honoring one's word—runs through

your YA novels. When you are working on a book, which is more important to you—imparting values or telling a good story? Or is there something else that matters even more?

CV: Actually, while I hope for a good story (as Aristotle said, plot is the most difficult thing), what I am aiming for in writing is the same as in teaching. I want to raise questions. I used to tell my students, "We are in No Right Answer mode. There are educated guesses and defensible theories, i.e., there are ways to examine and prove one's ideas." I just wanted to ask the questions that got them thinking. I feel the same way about stories.

JH: What are you working on currently?

CV: I never talk about what I am currently working on (describing myself as a closet writer), but I am happy to report that the last bad girls book is due out next year. They are in 9th grade.

dem side of Voigt is evident not only in her favorable portrayal of characters with curious minds but also in her many literary allusions, ranging from Shakespeare's plays and *The Odyssey* to fairy tales like 'Hansel and Gretel,' 'Rumpelstiltskin,' and "The Frog Prince" (111). I have offered here multiple examples to show that, in her use of allegory, allusion, mythology, and tale, Voigt's academic side in fact pervades her adolescent and YA novels. It is this quality that makes Cynthia Voigt, as Ken Donelson told Jim Blasingame in a 2003 interview, one of a handful of writers who "have provided us with books, some year after year, that are always fresh and always significant" (605).

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Reviving Ophelia with Young Adult Literature

We are at a picnic table just an overhand pitch from the ocean, and the sun is shining something fierce. I'm about to give Bobby James a peck on the cheek because I'm feeling so good, when out of the blue he says something funny. As in funny peculiar. Just why did I want to get hitched up with him anyway? he asks. And I can see he doesn't really want the answer, and he's starting to heat up the way he does. What you need to do then is play him out on a long line and wait till he can be reeled back in. But this time he winds up tighter and tighter, and then he just pops me.

And like that, with the back of his hand.

And some voice inside tells me not to cry out, some voice that's been there all the while I guess, just waiting for the right time. (6)

Valerie Hobbs' novel, *Letting Go of Bobby James, or How I Found Myself of Steam*, is the story of Jody, the young wife of Bobby James Walker, and her struggle to free herself from an abusive relationship. Hobbs is only one of many young adult authors who address the issues identified by Mary Pipher in *Reviving Ophelia: Saving the Selves of Adolescent Girls*. In her 1994 text Pipher describes the radical changes that occur as girls enter adolescence. As preadolescents they are confident, enthusiastic, and androgynous. But during their teen years, they reject their true selves and become "oversocialized" as they try to meet the expectations of family and peers and to match the media's concept of the feminine role. Pipher uses an allusion to Shakespeare's Ophelia to illustrate her point. A young and confident Ophelia enters adolescence, falls in love with Hamlet, and strives to please both Hamlet and

her father. When Hamlet rejects her, her confidence is shattered, and she takes her own life.

Pipher claims that young girls are pressured by society "to split into true and false selves" (22). She identifies three forces at work in their lives: (1) physical and emotional changes, (2) cultural forces including "sexism, lookism, and capitalism" (23), and pressure to become independent of parents. Acknowledging that adolescence has always been a turbulent time for American girls, Pipher claims that girls coming of age in the 1990s must confront many challenges their parents did not experience.

As a psychologist, Pipher supports her claim with vivid case studies illustrating the causes and effects of the oversocialization of girls during adolescence. If girls want to be accepted by their peers, they must deny their true selves and conform to the role society expects and the media perpetuates. She cites families where girls suffer from physical abuse, alcoholic parents, and divorce; schools where girls are treated differently from boys and "lose IQ points as they become feminized" (63); and a society where girls are judged by their appearance, where they are pressured to have sex and to assume the blame when they are raped.

Based upon research in our schools that finds "girls are exposed to almost three times as many boy-centered stories as girls-centered stories" (62), Pipher recommends that adolescent girls read more books by and about women, thereby allowing them to identify with protagonists who are struggling with and overcoming the same problems they are confronting in

their own lives. Her plea has been echoed in two recent texts. Sara Shandler was a high school student when she read Pipher's book and discovered the lives of her friends reflected in it. Hoping to give them an opportunity to share their own stories, she collected essays from her peers, and *Ophelia Speaks: Adolescent Girls Write About Their Search for Selves* was published in 1999. Like Pipher, Shandler believes that young girls need to know they are not alone in their struggles. In 2001, after reading Pipher's book, Cheryl Dellasega, wrote *Surviving Ophelia: Mothers Share Their Wisdom in Navigating the Tumultuous Teenage Years*. Because her daughter was anorexic, she solicited manuscripts from other mothers whose daughters struggled "more than most during adolescence" (4). Reading their submissions gave her hope; she knew she was not alone. Young adult literature offers an abundance of literature written by talented women who address the very issues that Pipher, Shandler, and Dellasega identify in their texts—literature that describes the lives of young girls struggling with society's expectations while striving to be true to themselves. And, most importantly, this literature portrays them as survivors.

Society's expectations

The pressures to conform to the expectations of society are vividly illustrated in several young adult novels: Cherie Bennett's *Life in the Fat Lane*, Laurie Halse Anderson's novel *Speak*, M. E. Kerr's *Deliver Us from Evie*, Jacqueline Woodson's *I Hadn't Meant to Tell You This*, and Valerie Hobbs' *Letting Go of Bobby James, or How I Found Myself of Steam* are all good examples of novels whose heroines overcome the pressures described by Pipher and survive as independent young women. In Bennett's novel Lara Ardeche, a high school junior and a teen-age beauty queen, is attractive, smart, and talented. Her training for beauty pageants has taught her that "beauty queens are friendly, controlled, sweet, and soft-spoken at all times" (11). Lara's life and sense of self worth revolve around this image of perfectionism. Her mother, a former homecoming queen, maintains her own slim figure by working out continuously and by smoking instead of eating. Her handsome father sees Lara as his little princess. Her circle of friends shares Lara's values. When Pipher describes "bulimic young

woman" and "their anorexic sisters," she could be describing Lara Ardeche. According to Pipher they are "oversocialized to the feminine role. They are the ultimate people pleasers. Most are attractive with good social skills. Often they are the cheerleaders and homecoming queens, the straight-A students and pride of their families" (170).

Melinda Sordino, the heroine in Anderson's novel, has broken one of the rules of her peer group; therefore, as she enters ninth grade, she is ostracized by her friends from middle school. As Melinda tells her story, she gradually reveals the details of a party she attended the previous summer. When a handsome senior approached and asked her to dance, she was naïve and flattered. But before she had a chance to say "no," he raped her. Instinctively she called 911; the police arrived and arrested the drunken partygoers while she escaped from the crowd and walked home to an empty house, telling no one of her ordeal. Now Melinda is an outcast. Piper reports on a survey by the American Association of University Women in which one-fourth of high school girls report being cornered and molested (170). When girls report such incidents, their friends blame them for getting the attacker in trouble (233).

In Kerr's novel, *Deliver Us from Evie*, Evie Burrman is 18 years old and six feet tall. She wears jeans and flannel shirts and smokes, and she can fix any piece of equipment on the family farm. Her younger brother Parr hears jokes about his "brother" Evie. Her mother is disappointed that Evie is not interested in clothes and appearance, while her father appreciates Evie, knowing she is the best worker on his farm. But when Evie and Patsy Duff, the daughter of the local banker, become friends, rumors of homosexuality spread quickly through their small farming community. Piper reports on various cases where girls struggle with a sense of isolation because of their homosexuality. Even when their parents are accepting and understanding, these girls express a need to meet other lesbians and "to read more about girls like me" (111).

Woodson's novel introduces the reader to two protagonists. Marie and Lena build their friendship upon a common bond; they have both lost their mothers. Lena's mother died; Marie's mother abandoned her and her father. Now she has found "a soul mate, another girl floating through this world without

a mother" (49). There are, however, unwritten rules that separate them. Marie is black, her father is a university teacher; she attends a predominantly black high school where she and her circle of friends set the fashion standards. Lena is poor and shabbily dressed; she is what Marie's father calls "white trash." It eventually becomes clear that Lena is struggling with a serious problem within her family, one that involves more than the loss of her mother and her life of poverty. When she finally confides in Marie, she insists that Marie tell no one that her father is molesting her. According to Pipher, when a family member commits a sexual assault, it is an injury to everyone in the family (229). Lena's main concern is the protection of her younger sister. She vows to save Dion and pleads with her father to use her and spare her sister.

Jody has been married only thirteen weeks when her husband strikes her, leaving her with a bruised and swollen black eye. There is no apparent reason for his anger, and Jody had thought she knew how to handle him when he started "to heat up" (6). Her first person narrative reveals that she has been raised to believe that pleasing others is important; she claims the best day of her life was "when I won eighth-grade Miss Congeniality and even had a crown" (43). She holds traditional beliefs in regard to marriage: "A good wife would have turned all she had over to her husband, like my mama always did" (16), and, when her Texas driver's license expires, "Bobby James said I wouldn't be needing to drive a whole lot, now that I was a wife" (42). But when he strikes her, she cannot understand because "mostly I tried to keep Bobby James happy" (3). According to Pipher, young girls are "pressured to sacrifice their wholeness in order to be loved. Like Ophelia, all are in danger of drowning" (73).

Conformity

Each girl faces strong pressure to conform and ostracism when she does not. When Lara (*Life in the Fat Lane*) is elected Homecoming Queen, her life seems perfect until the unbelievable happens. She begins to gain weight. Despite a vigorous workout schedule and starvation diets, she continues to gain until she weighs over 200 pounds. Lara is eventually diagnosed with Axell-Crowne Syndrome, a condition causing patients to gain weight regardless of the

amount of food they eat. Although the doctors offer hope that she may eventually lose all she has gained, Lara must, for now, learn to live as an obese girl in a society that worships thinness and is incredibly cruel to those who do not meet this expectation. All Lara's friends except her boyfriend Jett and best friend Molly abandon her, and she endures the cruel remarks of classmates and strangers.

Melinda (*Speak*) too is abandoned by her friends from middle school. No one speaks to her in the halls, she has no one to eat lunch with, her books are knocked out of her arms, and, at a pep rally, she is pushed down several rows of bleachers. She makes friends with Heather, who is new to the district, but when Heather is adopted by "the Marthas," a clique of the most popular girls, she abandons Melinda telling her bluntly, "you are the most depressed person I have ever met" (105). Melinda's lips become dry and encrusted as she bites her lips and seals a secret deep inside.

Evie (*Deliver Us from Evie*) refuses to conform to her mother's expectations of femininity, arguing that "some people like me the way I am" (24). But Patsy Duff's father does not like Evie the way she is and warns her never to come near his daughter again. This discrimination affects not only Evie but the entire Burrman family. Mr. Burrman fears that his mortgage may not be renewed, and Parr, her younger brother, is in danger of losing his girlfriend because of Evie's reputation.

Marie and Lena (*I Hadn't Meant to Tell You This*), living in a city that is clearly divided between black and white, find themselves caught in the middle. Despite the ridicule of her friends and the loss of her best friend Sherry, Marie refuses to abandon Lena. Even before she knows the source of Lena's sorrow, she wants to "wipe that broken look out of Lena's eyes" (19). When Lena finally confides in her, Marie finds it hard to believe that any father could commit such an act, but, despite her misgivings, Marie is loyal and keeps her promise not to tell.

When Jody (*Letting Go of Bobby James, or How I Found Myself of Steam*) leaves her husband, she is breaking the rules under which she has been raised. Although divorce may be commonplace in much of American, it is not accepted in the small rural Texas town where she grew up. A letter from her mother assures her that their "Pastor says your place is with

your husband, Bobby James Walker, and you will come to your senses” (63). Jody constantly questions herself as to why she is no longer with her husband. His sexual appeal is still strong, and she wonders, if she saw him again, would she have the strength to resist.

Parental support

These heroines receive little or no support from their parents. Piper believes that parents cannot help their children when they themselves are struggling with depression, addiction, and poverty (65). When Lara gains weight, her father is disappointed and no longer calls her by his pet name of “Princess.” Her mother is preoccupied in maintaining her own weight and youthful appearance and in trying desperately to retain her husband’s affection. Lara’s family life eventually shatters when she learns that her father is having an affair with a younger woman. Her mother has no inner core of values and, like Ophelia, tries to commit suicide.

Melinda’s parents are busy with their own careers and interests. The family corresponds mainly through notes they leave for each other in the kitchen. When Melinda makes a half-hearted attempt at suicide by scratching her arm with a paper clip, her mother’s only response is “I don’t have time for this Melinda” (88). But when Melinda’s grades fall and she plays hooky, the principal calls a meeting with her parents. They respond in anger, but they have no insight into Melinda’s life because she refuses to speak.

Evie’s parents are kind and concerned about their children, but they cannot accept what their intuition is telling them—that Evie is gay and in love with Patsy Duff. Her mother blames Patsy for tempting Evie and blames her husband for encouraging Evie to work with him on the farm. Eventually she accepts the fact that Evie is homosexual, but she continues to believe that simply changing Evie’s appearance will help to make her life easier, that people will be more accepting of her. When her father finally recognizes the truth, he refuses to speak to Evie, and the tension continues to build between them. Only her younger brother Parr realizes that love happens, that Evie loves Patsy just as he is infatuated with Angel Kidder. Both parents, however, eventually allow their love for Evie to guide them, and the novel ends when Mrs.

Burrman advises Evie and Patsy: “Don’t you two be strangers” (148).

Marie has lost not only her mother but also her father who becomes emotionally distant from his daughter as she begins to mature. She longs to be hugged and consoled by him, while Lena is struggling with a situation that Marie finds hard to believe. When Lena’s father touches her, her only escape is to picture herself somewhere else, and she willingly sacrifices herself to protect her younger sister, Dion, from her father’s abuse. She even defends her father, explaining that she has to love him because he has nothing else left after the death of her mother.

Jody’s mother is a weak role model offering no support to a daughter who is struggling to find her independence. Her mother remains in a relationship with a husband who continually abuses and abandons her, only to return and begin the cycle one more time. Jody knows she cannot turn to her mother for advice: “If you have ever looked into the eyes of a hound that’s had too many whippings, then you know how it is to look at mama” (53-54). According to Jody’s mother, her father was so handsome that she wonders why he ever looked at her. But Jody realizes her mother is afraid to leave him: “By the time Daddy got through with her, she had no self of steam at all” (54). When Bobby James returns to Purley, Texas, Jody’s mother writes to tell her that he has “took up with another woman,” (135), one who, like Jody, won the Miss Congeniality contest. This is proof to Jody’s mother that Bobby James still loves her daughter, and she advises her that “it’s not too late for you to have things the way you want them right here in Purley” (135). Her mother cannot conceive of a life of independence for a woman.

Survival

These heroines, however, are survivors with the strength to remain true to themselves. Despite pressure from family and peers to focus her life on a perfect appearance and pleasing personality, Lara retains a sense of independence and a personal value system. Bennett skillfully chronicles Lara’s changing attitude as she views society from the perspective of a fat girl. Lara begins to realize that she too has held stereotypical opinions about people who are overweight, assuming that they are simply weak and

undisciplined. When Lara agrees to play a piano solo at the school concert, it is evident that her confidence is slowly being restored.

Like Lara, Melinda is able, over the course of the school year, to find the way to self-acceptance with or without the approval of her peers. As the school year evolves, Melinda begins to show signs that she is “reviving,” that she is accepting, not blaming, herself as she takes tentative steps to re-enter the world. She is ready to help not only herself but also her former best friend who is dating Andy Evans, “the beast” who attacked her. Feeling compelled to save Rachel, she warns her and, for the first time, tells someone why she called 911. When Andy, seeking revenge, once again attacks Melinda, this time she “speaks,” she screams, she fights back and wins.

Evie and Patsy outwit both sets of parents. Evie resists her mother’s attempts to arrange dates with Cord Whittle. She leaves the farm she loves and moves to New York City where she is eventually joined by Patsy. They make a new life for themselves, and it is clear that Evie is at peace with her values and her true identity. The loyalty of Evie and Patsy to each other is a strong contrast to the superficial relationships her brothers have with girls who are pretty but foolish and self-centered.

Marie disregards her father’s advice that black people “need to stick together” (69) and his warning that Lena will one day turn on her. She remains a loyal friend to Lena despite her own misgivings. She longs to tell her father what is happening but hesitates for fear of losing Lena’s friendship. She wants to tell the police, but Lena refuses all outside help, fearing she will be separated from Dion. But, when her father begins to touch Dion, she rescues the young girl by running away with her. With Lena and Dion safely removed from the scene, Marie feels free to tell their story. She can hear Lena’s voice assuring her that “maybe someday other girls like you and me can fly through this stupid world without being afraid” (13).

It is not easy for Jody to leave Bobby James, so she waits in the rest room of the Econo station for him to leave her. While he bangs on the door and threatens that he is “not waiting around all day” (8), she calmly removes her hair rollers and tries to fix her face and blackened eye. Unlike her mother, when Bobby James hits her, she realizes “we have reached some kind of place that we can never go back from” (7). But life on

her own is hard. With little money, she sleeps in an unlocked car and in a movie theater before she begins to build a life for herself with a job and new friends. When Bobby James returns, she acknowledges that she still loves him, but she finds the strength to resist. Having assisted in the birth of her friend’s baby, she decides “I could be a paramedic, or a nurse, or even a baby doctor” (104). As her story ends, she realizes that “Bobby James was the one who wronged me. He had no right to hit me” (113), and she takes the first step toward her new goal as she pursues her GED.

Pipher cites case studies of girls who are raped and abused and suffer as Melinda and Lena do. Society assumes the victim invited the attack. Girls blame themselves for not stopping the attacker. They are afraid or ashamed to tell what happened. She helps girls like Jody who are seeking their independence, who need to be assured of their self worth. She counsels girls like Lara who are obsessed with weight and appearance, girls who are anorexic and bulimic, who stop making good grades because good grades are not the road to popularity. She advises families like the Burrmans, helping them to accept their daughters and their true identities. All of these heroines survive and fight their way back to self-acceptance. Melinda is able to acknowledge what happened and to realize that she was not to blame. She reclaims her life and values despite the pressures exerted by a peer culture. Jody resists her mother’s advice and Bobby James’ threats as well as the love she still feels for him. Her experiences have provided the confidence she needs to begin a new and goal-oriented life. When Jett returns to Lara, realizing that he still loves her, Lara welcomes him back, but her values have changed. Although she still longs to be thin, her sense of self worth is no longer based solely on appearance. Evie Burrman never falters in her journey to self-acceptance. She loves her family but refuses to be restricted by their community’s narrow and restricted beliefs and values. She proclaims her independence and is satisfied with her role in life. Marie remains loyal to Lena. After she disappears from Marie’s life, her father, sensing her loneliness, is able to take her face between his hands each morning and ask if she is OK. Perhaps he too has learned Lena’s lesson that “We all just people here” (115).

Pipher recommends that girls read books by and about women. Authors such as Bennett, Anderson,

Kerr, Woodson, and Hobbs not only provide novels by and about women; they also offer role models for girls who face the pressure of growing up in a society that offers little support and acceptance for females who want to remain true to themselves. Lara, Melinda, Evie, Marie, Lena, and Jody illustrate for the reader a path to survival through the turbulent years of adolescence.

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Depictions of Evil in Lois Lowry's *Messenger*

Crumbling is not an instant's Act
 A fundamental pause
 Dilapidation's processes
 Are organized Decays.

'Tis first a Cobweb on the Soul
 A Cuticle of Dust
 A borer in the Axis
 An Elemental Rust-

Ruin is formal-Devil's work
 Consecutive and slow-
 Fail in an instant, no man did
 Slipping-is Crash's law

Emily Dickinson

Evil, or as Dickinson calls it, ruin, is not a sudden or unambiguous force in our world today, yet children's and young adult fantasy literature have often portrayed evil in dichotomous or uncomplicated ways. Indeed, St. John's early study of evil as portrayed in Newbery Award and Honor books between 1945 and 1972 found that, while evil had multiple representations within most of these books, good and evil characters in fantasy were generally presented one-dimensionally as all good or all evil so that young readers would have no trouble telling the difference. Robinson noted in a more recent article that since good and evil are often still shown as complete opposites in adolescent fantasy literature, this depiction may lead students to continue to view good and evil in superficial ways which do not reflect the complexities of the adult world.

There is, of course, some cause for this simplistic representation of evil in books written for adolescents. The work of Piaget, Kohlberg, Gilligan and other

developmental theorists warns us that young readers do not process information in the same way as adults, and as a result their literature will need to be more concrete and clear. Yet while this is certainly true, it does not mean that adolescents should not be exposed as they mature to more complex views of good and evil. Coles, for example, in his book *Spiritual Life of Children*, noted repeatedly the capacity his young patients had for ambiguity. And Frye pointed out that young readers are in the business of "building unities out of units" (36). It would seem especially important for young readers, who are endeavoring to build their own moral traits, that depictions of good and evil as they naturally appear on an ever-changing continuum be available for consideration. *Messenger*, the third book by Lois Lowry in what is coming to be known as *The Giver* trilogy, addresses this need for fantasy literature with more ambiguous and progressive depictions of good and evil.

Messenger is a young adult fantasy novel in the subgenre of utopian/dystopian fiction, an area of literature in which good and evil are often dichotomized. *Messenger* is the newest book in a loosely connected series which includes Newbery winner, *The Giver* and *Gathering Blue*. Although Lowry did not set out to write a series or even to write a sequel to *The Giver*, she did so to "sort things out" for herself ("Interview"). All three books deal with utopian/dystopian societies that have the familiar elements identified by Hintz (254) of a controlled society, a choice for the good of society over the good of the individual, and an adolescent protagonist who is grappling with how to mature individually and make a difference in such a controlled society.

While all three books use variations of this utopian/dystopian setting and follow an adolescent protagonist as he/she progresses toward individuation and societal usefulness, *Messenger* has features that make it particularly useful for the study of evil. These features include the point at which we join the story which is as good and evil begin to meld and become less distinguishable from one another, the increased ambiguity of good and evil within characters, and the portrayal of evil as progressive and cumulative. These areas form the base of the discussions in this article.

Before beginning this examination, though, it may be useful to briefly summarize *Messenger* and its connections to the previous books in the trilogy. In *The Giver* the young protagonist, Jonas, makes the choice to help his society by leaving it. We join him several years later in *Messenger* as Leader of the utopian Village, to which his flight in *The Giver* brought him. The adolescent protagonist in *Messenger*, who is named Matty, also fled as a child from the dystopian society portrayed in *Gathering Blue*. He left behind there the young woman, Kira, who chose to help her society by staying in it. Kira's father, Seer, was violently blinded and driven away from Kira's society. He now lives in Village and serves as the foster father for Matty. In this way the quests of Jonas in *The Giver* and Kira in *Gathering Blue* are interwoven with Matty's quest in *Messenger*.

The reader joins Matty just as he stands on the edge of adulthood, signified by the time when he will receive his true name, which he hopes will be Messenger. Not only is Matty on the edge of a vast change, but his society is also at a turning point. This timing makes the analysis of *Messenger* particularly important for exploring what evil looks like in its early, more subtle stages before it is readily discernible to all. As noted in a *Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books* review of *Messenger* (427), Village is a utopian society that is not built on lies or deception. In fact, when Matty first arrived in Village, calling himself the Fiercest of the Fierce, he was so accustomed to a world of lies that he found it hard to change. He says, "It bothered him a little to lie about small things. But he always had; he had grown up lying, and he still found it strange that people in this place where he now lived thought lying was wrong" (8). But as Village turns toward evil, it also turns toward increased secrecy. In relating to his foster father what

happened at Trade Mart, for example, Matty notes that what people are trading *for* is made public, but what they are trading *away* is whispered and recorded in a guarded book (61-63). This movement from truth and openness to secrecy and lying coheres with what M. Scott Peck describes in his book, *People of the Lie*, as the very basis for all evil. Peck notes that evil is a "particular variety of narcissism" in which people not only lie to one another but lie to themselves in an effort to appear good (76-77). In Village, we see the secrecy necessary for evil developing rapidly in a previously open society.

This change to increased covert behavior is only one of several observable changes taking place in Village at this time. There is also a movement from tolerance toward intolerance as evidenced by the reaction to her handicapped husband by a woman who had recently traded. Before the trade she was described as, "Gentle. Cheerful. Very loving to her husband" (65). After the trade this woman ". . . made a sneering face at him [her husband] and she imitated his way of walking. She made fun of him" (66).

Intolerance of this sort is particularly noteworthy in Village because most people there are described as "damaged." Many had come from places with, "cruel governments, harsh punishments, desperate poverty" (25), and they arrived injured or ill. Some were like Seer who lost his eyesight to violence before coming to Village. Others, like Mentor who had a large birthmark on his face and was stooped, had left their old places because imperfections like these were not allowed. A defining trait of Village had been that the broken, damaged, ill and orphaned were all welcomed and cared for. Yet, as evil gains strength in Village, intolerance for physical imperfection increases and with this intolerance comes a desire to change these imperfections. As evil becomes stronger in Village, for instance, Mentor's birthmark fades away and he becomes less stooped (51). Paradoxically, perfection which would often be considered a synonym for good, and imperfection which would seem to better describe evil, play reversed roles in *Messenger*, again highlighting evil's deceitful and ambiguous nature.

Perhaps the moves in Village toward lies, perfectionism and intolerance might best be summed up as a reviewer of *Messenger* in *Horn Book* did by saying Village is "changing into a selfish society" (332-333). This is demonstrated numerous times, such as when

Mentor pushes others aside to be able to trade first (59), or when a formerly caring mother shakes her coughing child to make her be still (84). Matty feels the sting of this selfishness personally during a defining moment at a town meeting called to decide whether Village will close its doors to more “new ones.” Matty’s foster father, Seer, is arguing that Village should remain open, and he uses the contrast between the old stealing and swearing Matty who arrived in Village years ago to the productive Matty of today as an argument for Village’s importance in people’s lives. This argument is perverted, however, by a woman who yells out, “I remember what he was like! If we close the borders, we won’t have to deal with thieves and braggarts and people who have lice in their hair . . . ” (86). Matty looks to see who is speaking so harshly about him and finds to his surprise it is his own kind neighbor who had lovingly made clothes for him when he first arrived. He remembered that, “She had a soft voice then, and talked gently to him while she sewed” (86).

This same incident also serves to propel the evil that has been growing in Village from an individual level to a collective one. At the beginning of the book, it is obvious that certain negative changes were happening in individual people, such as Mentor, but the collective wisdom of Village was still oriented toward good. Eventually though, enough Village people move toward evil and a synergistic change takes place in the very character of the town. Peck, in *People of the Lie*, devoted Chapter 6 to the phenomenon of group evil and calls it, “. . . the diffuse cancerous forces at work in our society” (212). In his chapter on group evil, Peck noted that one of the best ways to increase the likelihood of group evil is to encourage the demonization of some outside enemy (225).

This happens with increasing regularity in *Messenger* and is brought to the foreground in the same incident described above in which Matty’s neighbor publicly criticized him. At the moment the woman called out to remind the people that Matty had been “a thief and a braggart” when he arrived at Village, “. . . her voice incited others, and now large numbers of people were calling out, ‘Close Village! Close the border!’”(87) This mob behavior leads to the vote that Village will not accept any more newcomers and eventually culminates in the building of a strong

wall around Village to keep “new ones” out.

Peck pointed out that group evil is more likely to occur when individuals no longer must be accountable for their actions (218). However, clearly it is the individual who forms the building block of group evil by individually choosing evil, committing evil and condoning evil. It is necessary, then, whenever evil is present to look at individuals in stories who are evil or who are becoming evil. In Lowry’s, *Messenger*, Mentor is the most obvious character who is changing from good to evil. It is, therefore, illuminating to examine the changes we find in Mentor as the story progresses.

All the people in Village are given a true name when they reach maturity. This name reflects the true self of the person, and therefore, the name Mentor alone gives us insight into this character. Mentor is the beloved school teacher who becomes the leader of the group that wishes to close Village’s borders to newcomers. The startling changes in his character are described several times. For example, Mentor’s daughter, Jean, says of him, “Father always welcomed new ones. It was the most wonderful part of Father, how he cared for everyone and tried to help them learn” (70). Later she says in a puzzled voice, “It was so important to him and he made it important to me: poetry, and language, and how we use it to remind ourselves of how our lives should be lived. [. . .] Now he talks of nothing but Stocktender’s widow, and of closing Village to new ones” (82).

As Mentor changes inwardly his physical appearance also begins to change. Jean realizes that her father is trying to become more physically perfect so that he is attractive to Stocktender’s widow. Jean describes the changes as, “He’s becoming taller and straighter. The bald spot at the back of his head has grown over with hair. His birthmark has disappeared” (69). This narcissistic fixation on physical perfection mirrors the increased emotional selfishness demonstrated by Mentor in his wish to close the borders of Village, making the change from good to evil all the more obvious to adolescent readers. Yet the real question to be answered is how do these changes come about in a previously virtuous character? Further, how does the truthful, tolerant, welcoming Village move progressively toward increasing evil? The focus point of all these changes is repeatedly shown to be the old custom of Trade Mart.

Trade Mart is first mentioned on page two of

Messenger and dominates the first half of the book as a depiction of the place where evil begins. Both Seer and Leader remember Trade Mart as a very old custom that used to be a lighthearted thing but has changed in some way they cannot quite describe. Leader says of Trade Mart, "I never go anymore, but I did in the past. It seemed folly and time-wasting. Now it seems worse" (74). And Seer says, "It's changed, Matty. I hear people talk of it now, and I feel the changes. Something's wrong. . . . There's a secrecy to it now" (53). Matty goes to Trade Mart once and describes the atmosphere as one of intentness, seriousness and worry, nothing like the light-hearted and good-natured ambiance of Market Day. Leader, Seer and Matty have never traded at Trade Mart, and though they cannot fully explain their reservations, each one knows in a visceral way that something is amiss.

It is Jean, though, who understands what happens at Trade Mart that is so dangerous. She has been able to observe the work of Trade Mart closely through her father who has been actively trading to make Stocktender's widow love him. Jean realizes that what her father has traded away is "his deepest self" (69). This helps Matty understand why no one at the Trade Mart he watched carried anything tangible to trade. While the people are trading for tangible items such as physical attractiveness they are often trading away intangible possessions, such as character traits that are not easy to describe.

It also explains to Matty why the things people traded away were kept secret. Lowry leaves most trades ambiguous, though she does hint that at least in one case a mother has been willing to trade away the health of her children (84). Clearly, though, the trades recorded in the guarded book are of a life-altering nature. Trademaster, the shadowy figure who "had come already named, as a new one some years before" (58) serves as a satanic representation who approves and records each secret trade as the people take part concretely at Trade Mart in the age-old story of selling their souls to the devil.

In the specific case of Mentor he has traded his deepest self in an irreversible trade for physical attractiveness. Others trade unknown attributes for an easier lifestyle as represented by a fancy sewing machine (87), or superficial pleasure as represented by a much-coveted Gaming Machine that spits out candy if three pictures match when a handle is pulled (16).

Each of these physical acquisitions, however, demands less obvious character payments in the people who receive them. In general these changes set a trajectory toward an increase in intolerance and selfishness and a decrease in truthfulness, but it is easy to understand how the physical goods of Trade Mart could be so alluring when the payments for these goods are nebulous and unexamined by the traders. Trade Mart, then, which began as a seemingly innocuous bit of fun, has now become the place from which evil emanates.

This is the real strength of Lowry's portrayal of evil in *Messenger*. Since the story begins when Village is mostly good and progresses to a point when evil has taken control of the town, the reader is able to examine the subtleties and ambiguities of evil as it gains strength. Many fantasies for young readers, with their polarized depictions of good and evil, do not allow the reader to see the early, elusive and complex forms of evil in a way that young readers could understand. Yet one of evil's most frightening aspects is its cumulative nature. In *Messenger* we see clearly that it is the trajectory of evil that is important. Early manifestations may be unalarming as in Trade Mart's light-hearted beginnings or may even appear to be positive as in the lightening of Mentor's birthmark. Yet the trajectory is set by the motivations behind these early actions, and the slow and cunning progression of evil begins, often without conscious thought on the parts of the people who are succumbing. As Dickinson points out in the poem at the beginning of this article, evil is, ". . . consecutive and slow."

Developmental theorists remind us that young readers need concrete manifestations if they are to successfully deal with abstract concepts. In *Messenger* we find a story addressing the very complex theme of the nature of evil. Lowry figuratively seems to be asking such questions as: "What does evil look like when it begins?" and "How does evil gain ground in a good society?" Yet Lowry often depicts the answers to these questions in concrete terms that make them more comprehensible to adolescents. Young readers who see Trade Mart as the origination of evil, Mentor's lightening birthmark as the physical manifestation of evil and the building of the wall to close the borders of Village as the culmination of evil are encouraged to see the subtle complexities of evil in ways they can concretely envision.

One of the main values of utopian/dystopian literature in general is to illuminate real problems in our own world through their understandable examination in a fantasy world. Madeleine L'Engle, in discussing the subject of evil in her own writing, once said, "I think there are powers of evil. [. . .] I think the best thing we can do is to give a child light to see them" (Hearne, 30). As teachers, then, we have the responsibility of helping our students recognize and examine evil in the light of our classroom discussions. *Messenger* can serve as a thought-provoking beginning to these discussions. Questions, such as "Could our current desire for physical perfection lead to evil as it did for Mentor," or "What would Trade Mart be for our world as the source of evil" can pull the abstract discussions of this book toward the real-life depictions of evil prevalent in our world today. Noting that in *Messenger* evil is cumulative and deceitful, teachers can ask how we can recognize it in its early stages before the trajectory is so firmly set toward border-building? Young adults need to grapple with these questions, and are eager to do so. Discussions of *Messenger* can lead to increased understanding of the nature of evil and may also lead to ideas on how to prevent evil from gaining ground in our own society.

The following additional discussion questions may be helpful to teachers who want to lead their classes into a deeper understanding of this book.

- What do you think is the significance of the title of this book? Why didn't Lowry name the book *Healer*?
- In the first part of the book Trade Mart represents evil, but in the second this representation shifts to Forest. How are these two settings alike? Different?
- Each of the main characters has extraordinary gifts. What do you think these gifts signify? Do you know people who have these same sorts of gifts? Do you have any of them?
- What is Kira's significance in the story? Why is it important that she is handicapped?
- How does Matty change from the beginning to the end of the book? How does Mentor change?
- Why do you think the book ended the way it does? How would you end it differently?
- The main characters in this book sometimes have an uneasy feeling that they cannot describe that tells them something is wrong. Have you ever had

the unexplainable but real sense of evil? How would you describe it?

- What one important learning can you take from this book that will help you recognize and combat evil in your own life?

Messenger is especially good at illuminating the progressive and cumulative nature of evil with all its ambiguities to a young audience. But beyond this group of implied adolescent readers, the book also speaks to adults in its uncanny depiction of a good society moving toward increased secrecy, intolerance and selfishness which is so frighteningly recognizable as the trajectory in numerous societies of our world today.

Messenger, then, fulfills its title by becoming a messenger to our general society warning us of the abstruse and wily ways in which evil gains ground in a society while people are preoccupied with other things. Edmund Burke is widely quoted as saying, "It is necessary only for the good man to do nothing for evil to triumph" (qtd. in Partington: 160). The charge to young readers, and to us, of *Messenger* may be to do *something*. Recognize evil in its infant manifestations of secrecy, intolerance, perfectionism and selfishness and stand against it before it grows into a life-threatening force. This is the strong message delivered to adolescent and adult readers alike by this *Messenger*.

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The Adolescent War:

Finding Our Way on the Battlefield

Adolescence is a war zone—an emotional, hormonal war zone filled with angst, uncertainty, and fear. By nature, adolescent literature tends to capture the emotions and struggles faced by characters in their various coming of age stories as they search for their own identity. So, when that conflict is complicated by the harsh realities of war, the internal battles of adolescence are shadowed by the destructive forces and cruel emotions of the battlefield. Adolescent war fiction is not a new genre. From as early as 1895 with Stephen Crane’s *The Red Badge of Courage*, authors have been combining the tensions of these two kinds of war—the external and the internal. While many books such as Bette Greene’s 1973 *Summer of My German Soldier* and Janet Taylor Lisle’s *The Art of Keeping Cool* from 2000 have centered the story on the home front and the adolescent’s struggle with a friend or family member’s involvement in war, others like Harold Keith’s 1957 *Rifles for Watie* and L. M. Elliott’s *Under a War-Torn Sky* from 2001 have focused on a young person’s direct involvement in battle. The latter best illustrates the unique search for identity that takes place as adolescent protagonists face the firsthand trauma of war.

When a nation is at war, its teachers have an unfortunate “teachable moment.” They can, of course, ignore the topic in an attempt to escape any political conflict, but good teachers often find themselves looking for ways to teach adolescents about the complexities of real world problems, including the nature of war. Pretending that students are not capable of understanding world conflicts is often a way of hiding from the truth. With the ready availability of a

variety of media materials—including music, videos, movies, newspapers, and magazines, not to mention the human resources of soldiers and their families—we have a rich supply of resources to supplement the study of these novels. But when we take on the role of educating adolescents, we also take on an obligation to lead them to their own search for identity—a search that includes contemplating the world we live in. That world—at least part of it—is, unfortunately, at war.

I suppose there is also a bit of the personal in my rationale—a bit of my own search for self. Here in Clarksville, Tennessee, near Fort Campbell amid the franticness of the 101st Airborne’s preparations to return to Iraq, there is a bustle that reminds me of Emily Dickinson’s poem as the Black Hawks and Chinooks circle the city. My students, many of them veterans or the wives, sisters, husbands of soldiers, prepare to teach the children of soldiers in local schools. At a faculty luncheon yesterday, our substitute waiter—obviously flustered—explained that one of his workers had collapsed in the kitchen after finding out that her husband was returning to Iraq. We teased his clumsiness and ate our soup. Today, I cry for her—and say a prayer. And I talk to my son every day, thankful for his safe return from Afghanistan and thankful that he seems himself, but I worry over what he has seen, and I wish quiet dreams for him each night. We are a nation at war, but most of us are without the daily reminders or even the World War II sacrifices of rationing and can drives. Instead, in our helplessness, we hang ribbons on our cars and swear that this cannot be another Vietnam—and we teach. So, it is in my helplessness that I write this article as a

suggestion for others who feel helpless.

While there is a wealth of adolescent war fiction, the primary analysis here centers on four books written by American authors since the Gulf War. *I Had Seen Castles*, Cynthia Rylant's 1993 novel, and *Soldier's Heart*, Gary Paulsen's book published in 1998, focus on the experiences of young men who are drastically changed by their experiences on the battlefields of World War II and the American Civil War. Cathryn Clinton's *A Stone in My Hand*, from 2002, relates the experiences of an eleven-year-old girl's struggles in 1988 Gaza City, while Meg Rosoff's 2004 book, *How I Live Now*, tells the story of an American girl's adventures in an all-too-real hypothetical war in England. These particular books were chosen to reflect not only the variety of young adult war literature available, but also the unique struggles faced by adolescent protagonists—both male and female—searching for an identity on battlefields of drastically different historical time periods.

The early 1990's saw a huge influx of adolescent war books, perhaps because of Desert Storm and other conflicts in the Middle East. Many of these books, including Paul Fleischman's *Bull Run*, Isabelle Holland's *Behind the Lines*, and Clifton Wisler's *Red Cap*, are set in the American Civil War, a natural draw for adolescent war stories because so many young people fought and died in America's bloodiest war. What sets Gary Paulsen's book, *Soldier's Heart*, apart from these other books is his graphic description of the battles and the main character's, Charley Goddard, final demise. But Cynthia Rylant chooses World War II for her *I Had Seen Castles*, a book that she set in 1939 Pittsburgh. The first-person narration of her seventeen-year-old male protagonist, John Dante, is the personal account of one young man's transformation on the battlefields of Europe, as well as his family's struggle to come to terms with their role in the war. Both books are filled with graphic descriptions of battle, as well as the harsh struggles of daily life for a soldier. Both books also address the life the young men leave behind, but from the soldier's perspective so that the reader gets a clear image of life at war. The teenagers in both novels enter war with eagerness and a sense of duty, yet neither book celebrates war as a glorious notion or the young men as particularly heroic. While many adolescent war stories contain characters who face battle and perform some outstanding heroic act,

Paulsen and Rylant create ordinary young people struggling to find an identity through their life at war.

Charley Goddard from Gary Paulsen's *Soldier's Heart* is fifteen years old when he lies his way into the First Minnesota Volunteers to fight for the Union in 1861. Charley convinces his mother that he should join because it's his "chance to be a man" (5). In his words, "A boy wouldn't go off to earn eleven dollars a month and wear a uniform. Only a man. So I'm going to be a man and do what a man can do" (5). Cynthia Rylant's protagonist, John Dante, from *I Had Seen Castles*, is equally anxious to enter the war and describes the feelings of a nation that has been attacked. "Every man I knew wanted to fight. . . . The bombs that dropped on Hawaii sent a shock wave straight into the outraged soul of every man in America, and like Neanderthals, we had a primitive, fearless, screaming desire to kill" (13). John wants to accompany his friend Tony who wasn't waiting for graduation. "Yes, I wanted to go. I wanted to go with Tony . . . We'd look out for each other. We'd come home together after we'd destroyed the Japs" (14). Like Charley, John also considers lying about his age. "But I was ready to go to war, and, of course, it was war I was too young for, war we were all too young for, and the reality of that is what we could not find at our dinner table" (16). His parents, however, refuse to let him go at seventeen but are only able to keep John at home for a few more months. When he turns eighteen he claims, "there was no question that you were not considered a man unless you signed up. No question that you would be regarded with utter contempt and loathing if you chose not to volunteer" (31). Both young men see war as a right of passage to manhood. In John's words, "I needed to affirm my manhood, my worth" (31). Each young man feels society's pressure and judgment, pushing him to become a man by going to war.

Rylant and Paulsen both show the concerns of family left behind, as well as the difficulties the young men face in trying to communicate with their parents. The Dante and Goddard families share a belief that the war will be over quickly. Perhaps all families promise themselves that when they are sending a soldier to war. Charley's mother consoles herself with memories of songs, parades, politicians, and newspapers who all told her "it would be a month or two, no longer. It would all be over by fall" (6). The Dante family also

believe in a speedy victory as they sit down to dinner. “We deceive ourselves into believing we can clean up the enemy, put him back in his place, and have our chicken parmigiana another night. Soon. A quick war and, intact, we all sit down again to eat” (16). When John enlists, he is concerned about his parents. In his words, his father “supported the war. He supported the draft—but it is one thing to believe in an idea. Quite another to give up your child to it” (62). His mother, who had never worked outside of the home, goes to work for a factory which produces artillery. Years later, John understands that by working these extra hours, she was hoping to produce enough weapons to “singlehandedly wipe the Germans and the Japanese off the face of the earth” (28). She “wanted her only son to be spared this war. She wanted to save his life” (27-28). As each young man goes into battle, he finds himself unable to share the horrors of war. John expresses his concerns for writing home. “My letters home were brief. I found that I grew less and less able to be cheerful and reassuring in them, so those that I did write were mainly for the purpose of telling my family I was still alive” (80). Charley’s letters are even more brief, “Here is some money. I’ve been in a battle. I was scart some but it’s past now. I can’t come home” (42). This he writes after witnessing the horrors of Bull Run.

Both books are also filled with graphic scenes of battle, something oddly missing from many adolescent books about war. Neither author spares young readers from a view of the realities of war. From Paulsen’s book, Charley witnesses the following scenes.

Next to him Massey’s head suddenly left his body and disappeared, taken by a cannon round that then went through an officer’s horse, end to end, before plowing into the ground. (21)

He could not identify men he’d known for months. They were all bloated, pushing out against their uniforms; clouds of flies were planting eggs in the wound openings and eyes and mouths of the bodies. The smell was sweet, cloying, the smell of blood and dirt and decaying flesh—the smell of death. (36-37)

. . . the screams of the wounded horses hit by soft, large-caliber expanding bullets, horses with heads blown open, horses with jaws shot away, horses with eyes shot out or with intestines tangling in their hooves, horses torn and dying—screamed louder than a thousand, louder than a million men. (80)

He helps a wounded soldier commit suicide, drinks from a stream tainted with blood, and piles bodies of dead soldiers as a barricade against the cold wind. In his angry words, “I am not supposed to see this, God. No person is supposed to see this. How can You let this happen?” (25). Rylant’s book also reveals the horrors of war as John witnesses the traumas of the battlefield.

There are the horrifying specters we carry with us forever. A buddy crouching out in the open during a barrage of artillery. “What the hell is he doing?” I yelled, and I ran to him. When I touched him, his head fell off. (78-79)

The shoes with feet and legs up to the knees still standing, and nothing more. The rest of the body is gone. Or the chest cavity blown wide open so that the heart can be seen, still beating, and the boy to whom the heart belongs reaches out and asks to be helped to die. (78)

I saw sheep standing in a green meadow on this beautiful sunny day. Then mortar shells began to land in that meadow, and the sheep were hit and lay bloody, half-alive, their bowels spilling among the meadow flowers, and we were all in it. We were all in the Second World War. (71)

He comments on the contrast between the battlefield and home as “people were making more money than they ever dreamed possible” (78) and dancing at the USO. “At the drugstore the young women behind the counters lined up the lipsticks to form a V. And in Europe someone was sobbing for his mother and searching for his arms” (79).

Charley and John also come to the same realizations about fighting the enemy. Charley wants “to kill them. . . . All of them. Stick and jab and shoot them and murder them and kill them all Kill them all. Before they could kill him” (51). At the beginning of his struggles on the battlefield, John believes in a “divine mission” and that they “would all be finer human beings” for their part in the war (73). After three months in war, he realizes that he cannot fight for ideals. “. . . I could not kill them for words. Not for *democracy*, nor *freedom*, and certainly not for *religion*. No one I knew fought for these words. I killed to keep from dying. I killed to protect the boys in my squad” (75). They kill to keep from being killed. By the end of the war, Charley also experiences an “insane joy, the joy of battle, the joy of winning, the joy of killing to live” (84) as he slashes and stabs men with his bayonet. While each soldier is certainly changed by his experiences at war, neither young man

can find happiness in later life. "What does one say after transformation?" John asks himself as he tries to speak with his mother at the end of the war in Europe. He cannot return to his "boy's room" in his parents home and spends much of his life drifting until finding his way to Canada because he could not "stay in America because America had not suffered" (95). Charley, at age twenty-one, suffering from what might now be called "battle fatigue" or "shell shock" as well as several war wounds, contemplates suicide at the end of his story.

Each young man is "transformed," to use John's word, and each searches for his own identity through the foxholes and ramparts of war in an attempt to find manhood. According to John, "I wasn't anyone then. I had so little sense of self I don't know that I could have told anyone what I cared about, what I loved, what I wanted" (75). Instead of each young man finding himself on the battlefield, each seems more lost by the end of the war. Both Cynthia Rylant and Gary Paulsen use their stories to illustrate the complete disorder of war and to show young people that the battlefield is not the best place to find an identity. In the classroom, these two books are not only excellent tools for illustrating the history and sentiment of two entirely different conflicts, but are also good resources for demonstrating the realities of the battlefield. Young people need variety in their reading choices, and they especially need books that do not romanticize the grim realities of war.

Much has changed in the decade or more since Paulsen and Rylant wrote their stories. Since the year 2000, adolescent war fiction has continued to stretch into new directions. America's acceptance of women on the battlefield has been a slow process, so we are just beginning to see stories of young women at war. Books such as Bette Greene's 1973 *Summer of My German Soldier* and James Lincoln and Christopher Collier's 1983 *War Comes to Willy Freeman* and Seymour Reit's *Behind Rebel Lines* from 1988 have featured female protagonists, but the conflicts faced by some of the more recent female adolescents have become even more complicated. To gain a female perspective on the subject of war, we can turn to Cathryn Clinton's *A Stone in My Hand* and Meg Rosoff's *How I Live Now*. Clinton's book set in 1988 Gaza City could not be more different from Rosoff's present day to not-too-distant future novel of rural

England. Their characters, a shy introverted eleven year old and a fifteen-year-old New Yorker with an eating disorder, are also quite different. Unlike John and Charley, they do not kill, and neither believes in war, but both find themselves protecting the young men of their lives as the battlefield comes to their homes. These young women portray the reality of war in modern times in which sometimes no one has to "go to" war, since war comes to them.

Malaak, the eleven-year-old narrator of *A Stone in My Hand*, dreams of living in the eyes of her pet bird, Abdo, so that she can fly high above Gaza City. "I soar out of the Gaza Strip. Nothing stops me, not the concrete and razor wire, not the guns, not the soldiers" (1). These are the visions of a young Palestinian girl trapped by war in her own home, where she and her family slowly come to terms with the death of her father, a mechanic who happened to be working on a bus when it exploded. Malaak, her mother, and sister try desperately to keep her brother Hamid out of the fray of battle, but the twelve-year-old boy is determined to fight the soldiers with stones. He shouts, "We are fighters. The stones speak. The soldiers will have to listen" (3). Like Malaak, the fifteen-year-old Daisy of *How I Live Now*, is also faced with war in the homeland, but like Malaak, she is not actually living in her own homeland. Malaak's family was driven out of their home by the war, and Daisy was sent away from her home in America by her father and step-mother. Daisy's wry New York sense of humor comes through in her attitude about the possibility of war.

I didn't spend much time thinking about the war because I was bored with everyone jabbering on for about the last five years about Would There Be One or Wouldn't There and I happen to know there wasn't anything we could do about it anyway so why even bring the subject up. (15)

Malaak and Daisy have no desire to enter battle and seem content to live a quiet life, but modern war sometimes comes to the home land when it is least expected. Each young girl is forced to find the courage in her own search for self to save the life of those she loves—but once again, like John and Charley, neither girl commits the huge heroic act to save the day. Instead, their rescues are quiet acts of courage.

Unlike the young men of Rylant and Paulsen's novels, these female protagonists resist war rather than running toward it. Malaak believes her mother's words, "Bravery is not seen in one act. It is measured

by the choices and deeds that fill every day of our lives” (42) and tries to help her brother listen. Later, she pleads with him in anger as he accuses her of being “just a girl.”

Yes, yes. Just a girl. . . . But does the Islamic Jihad think about the people who die? Real fathers, mothers, and children die when someone sets off a bomb in a bus or a car. Does Islamic Jihad think about those who are left? No, no. (116)

Daisy responds to the bombing of London where “something like seven or seventy thousand people got killed” (24) with more humor and denial, saying “it didn’t seem to have that much to do with us way off in the country” (24). She and her cousins welcome the break from any parental authority, and she and Edmond become romantically involved. The young people plan for a siege by collecting food, but none seem particularly afraid of war as Daisy jokes about “the end of the world about to happen” (26). Both Daisy and Malaak want to keep the world from changing around them, and each resists war in her own way. In Daisy’s words of denial, “I guess there was a war going on somewhere in the world that night but it wasn’t one that could touch us” (64).

But, regardless of the resistance or denial, war comes to both families. Like Paulsen and Rylant, Clinton and Rosoff also use graphic scenes to capture the destruction and waste of war. Although Clinton’s book is less explicit, the storyline is dark and a bit hopeless. Malaak’s brother’s best friend was quite small when he witnessed his father’s death. He carried home a piece of his father’s shirt, moaning into the night, “The pieces, the pieces” (77). When Hamid is shot for throwing rocks at soldiers as Malaak runs to stop him, he falls on top of her. She screams for help and watches the blood pool behind his head. “As I wait, I breathe in Hamid’s blood, his sweat. I open my mouth and pant” (158). The scenes of *How I Live Now* are even more vivid as Daisy and Piper, her cousin, witness several deaths. At a routine checkpoint, a man riding with the two girls begins shouting at the soldiers and “there was a loud crack and part of Joe’s face exploded and there was blood everywhere” and later Daisy realizes that “Joe was still alive, gurgling and trying to move the arm that wasn’t caught under his body” (104). In another killing, she describes “blood welling up in holes all over him” and “brains splattered everywhere” (105). Still later she and Daisy

witness the after effects of a massacre where she chases away foxes and birds as they “were pecking at a dead face . . . tugging at the skin and using their beaks to pull jagged purple strips of flesh free from the bone” (141). Daisy methodically checks each of the seventeen bodies of men, women, and children to see whether they are family members.

Both Daisy and Malaak mature as they find the strength to help their loved ones through the trauma of war. Malaak first struggles to convince her brother to resist violence through words, but her brother resists by claiming that “There are widows and orphans in every war, Malaak. It is no different now” (116). Malaak remembers her father’s words, “Terrorism is like a wild dog. It only breeds violence,” but Hamid responds with, “Terrorism may be the only weapon for people who have no army” (45). When words repeatedly fail Malaak, she risks her own life to save her brother. She jumps in front of a speeding car, leaps before an armed soldier, and in the end, smuggles her father’s Palestinian flag into the hospital in hopes of giving Hamid the strength and reason to recover. In *How I Live Now*, Daisy gains new respect for her own life as she fights to save Piper and get her home to her brothers. She plans their journey and keeps them moving through the backwoods journey, and in helping to find food for Piper, Daisy conquers her own eating disorder. After witnessing the results of the massacre, Daisy keeps Piper moving through her shock toward home, assuring her all the way that she loves her. And in the end, when she is finally reunited with Edmond, Daisy is the strength that slowly begins to bring him out of shock—the result of witnessing a traumatic battle. Through their own sacrifices for family, both Malaak and Daisy grow to find a strength of purpose and self.

Searching for an identity on the battlefield proves to be a difficult and risky feat as we see John and Charley lose themselves in the confusion, but Malaak and Daisy find a sense of purpose. Regardless of the tragedy that each character faces, we see a senseless brutality represented by all four authors. From Cathryn Clinton’s Malaak who believes the Square of the Unknown Soldier is funny since “all Palestinians are unknown soldiers” (102) we see a war without hope of ever ending. From Gary Paulsen’s Charley, we see a young man at age twenty-one contemplating suicide and feeling too old.

Not old in years—in years he still hadn't started shaving or learned about women. But in other ways he was old, old from too much life, old from seeing too much, old from knowing too much. (98)

And from Cynthia Rylant's John, we also learn about the importance of youth in war. In his words, "Only the young are easily shipped to the front. Innocent and hopeful, they willingly go" (74). But it is Meg Rosoff's Daisy that puts everything so bluntly in words that haunt us. "If you haven't been in a war and are wondering how long it takes to get used to losing everything you think you need or love, I can tell you the answer is No time at all" (111).

"Is it possible to teach English so that people stop killing each other?" asks Mary Rose O'Reilly in her *The Peaceable Classroom*, a question Virginia Monseau also raises in the introduction to her edited collection *A Curriculum of Peace: Selected Essays from English Journal* (xiv). In "New Wars, Old Battles: Contemporary Combat Fiction for the High School Canon," Randal Withers answers that by teaching antiwar novels, "educators can not only help today's students understand our world, but can educate them so that the tragedy of war is not repeated" (55). These are incredibly huge goals, but English teachers believe completely in the power of literature—the power of words—to transform the world.

After twenty years of teaching grades 7-12 in Louisiana public schools and three years training future English teachers in Ohio and Tennessee, Ruth Caillouet has returned home as an Assistant Professor of English at Southeastern Louisiana University in Hammond, Louisiana. Her passions include adolescent literature, teacher education, the works of Toni Morrison, Buffy, the Vampire Slayer, and keeping her son safely home in the United States.

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Censorship Report

In the April 2005 issue of *American Libraries*, Robert Cormier's *The Chocolate War* headed the list of the most censored books this year. Other children's and young adult books are: *Fallen Angels* by Walter Dean Myers, the Captain Underpants series by Dav Pilkey, *What My Mother Doesn't Know* by Sonya Sones, *In The Night Kitchen* by Maurice Sendak. *Of Mice And Men* by John Steinbeck and *I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings* by Maya Angelou. The Office of Intellectual Freedom of the American Library Association reported they received 547 formal challenges this year, reports filed with a library or school.

What does this mean for the very good young adult books just coming out that have profanity and/or explicit sex? I know that it is easier to get these books on the shelves of public libraries; but can we get these books on the shelves of school media centers, on the shelves of classroom libraries, or as books being taught in class sets or as part of thematic units?

I am not exaggerating.

At a meeting of the New Jersey Council of Teachers of English, I

spoke with a number of teachers and asked how many were using Chris Crutcher books, which are among the best being written today? I received no replies. As one teacher stated: "We are afraid for our jobs. Do you know what it is to be brought before a superintendent, a group of hostile parents, and a Board of Education?"

My answer was, "Yes, I do."

I have had strong issues with Boards of Education and even state department officials. Once I had Neil Postman and Nat Hentoff as keynote speakers on a college campus at an English conference. Once these gentlemen started speaking, a group of teachers arose, walked out, and the next thing I knew, my college president wanted to speak with me. An audio tape of the speakers had been made, and I was asked to turn this over to him, and then the tape was sent to Trenton. I never heard anything else about this incident. The tape was never returned. Was I now on the infamous FBI list?

Now this brings me to a major point about today's literature. I cannot get straight answers from a number of publicists about the issues that some of the books on

their new lists are making. A few wanted to change the subject. One had a great answer: "It's freedom of expression, like all art."

I told them about my experience in one school where the media specialist said, "All that these kids want to read about is sex. I can't and won't reduce my library to that level." So the library in some schools are used for research purposes, and the number of books that are being purchased are very carefully scrutinized.

Just to Get Started . . .

Be that as it may, I must admit there are some very good books being turned out. If sex and profanity are going to bother some people, they will have to look among the new books for ones that won't offend. There are plenty of those also.

How I Live Now by Meg Rosoff (Delacorte) is a love story between cousins. One is a New Yorker, Daisy, who is going to visit cousins in England, and she falls in love with Edmond. She's just fifteen, but she's willing to accept the fact that love conquers all and age has nothing to do with it. She is not

happy at home with her new pregnant stepmother. The freedom she feels in England is thrilling, even though a war is threatening everybody and Aunt Penn is off to a trip to Oslo. So the kids are left alone. Cousin Piper adores Daisy and enjoys being with her. This is quite a different environment than the one she left. But there is a time she needs to return to New York. And although relationships have improved, she missed Edward and Piper and her other cousins and Aunt Penn. So she decides to return to England. Things have changed considerably. The story is moving, romantic, and has its surprising moments,

Me And Orson Welles by

Robert Kaplow (Penguin) is the story of seventeen-year-old Richard Samuels, a stage-struck young man, who accidentally meets twenty-two year-old Orson Welles as he is preparing the opening of The Mercury Theatre's production of *Julius Caesar*. Richard falls in love and witnesses the variety of emotions that flow from Orson as he readies for opening night. Kaplow seems to have captured the tumultuous Welles as he shows readers the actor's-director's unexpected behavior. Here is one of those rare novels for me which shows the turbulent and talented nature of theater people. The only way to describe this novel for me is to say I couldn't put it down. Welles is hypnotizing. Richard is lost in the glow of his debut. What a time! Kaplow has done an excellent job in recreating the era and characters.

The Search For Belle Prater by

Ruth White (Farrar Straus Giroux) is a sequel that was well worth

waiting for. When Belle disappeared out of the blue in ***Belle Prater's Boy***, (Farrar Straus Giroux), I wondered what was going to happen to Woodrow and how he and Gypsy and the rest of the family would get along. While the concept is serious, Ruth White's writing is anything but heavy. There is plenty of humor. This is a warm story, and one can't help but feel for the broken homes and the poverty surrounding events and several characters. I loved the way Cassie has her "insights." Miz Lincoln and Joseph add to the hope in the story and show how these country people seem to pull together to help people in need. A good read.

Guys Write For Guys Read

edited by Jon Scieszka. Scieszka has devoted a web site and much energy to prove that guys read. He has gathered from many outstanding writers and illustrators a collection of memoirs, essays, and drawings. Proceeds from this excellent collection go to support *Guys Read* website. There is humor, action, sports, and adventures galore...all in short bits... by such writers as Jerry Spinelli, Chris Lynch, Richard Peck, John Marsden, Daniel Pinkwater, William Sleator, Gordon Korman, Jerry Pallotta, Erik P. Kraft, Darren Shan, Ned Vizinni, Graham Salisbury, and plenty more. Once boys start reading this book, they can skip to any author and will soon find something that should appeal. The guys in this book enjoy what they are doing for the important cause to prove that *Guys Read*. Jon is right; the right book in the right hands can get the most reluctant reader to find joy and

success. Perfect in every way.

Flower by Irene N. Watts (Tundra) is a story about a family with its ups and downs. Set in Halifax, the story shows us Katie at times taking refuge in hoping for a major part in the school production of *The Secret Garden*, as well as in the visions she has of a girl showing up in her room when the moon shines through. When she discovers some letters from World War I, she gains some understanding about British orphans being sent to Canada for safety. They were known as "Home Children." War definitely affects the lives of the young who are vulnerable in so many ways. They often don't get answers to many of the questions that disturb them the most. Watts has created a most poignant tale for our times. Today, as children from all over the world are being adopted, (one always hopes for the best), what are the consequences for those adopted, placed in foster homes, or just left behind? This should be a prize-winner.

While I have written about short story collections and anthologies in the past, I have waited until now to refer to the excellent series, ***Rush Hour***, (Delacorte). In ***Sin***, ***Bad Boys*** and ***Face***, each is a collection of literary and artistic pieces which focuses on the theme of that issue. Cart calls it "a cutting-edge literary journal of contemporary voices." Today's young adult readers are bound to be hooked. The authors for these various journals include such renown writers as Brock Cole, Joan Bauer, Tom Feelings, Nikki Grimes, Jack Gantos, E. R. Frank, Jan Greenberg and Sandra Gordon, Ron Koertge, David Lubar, Robert Lipsyte,

Jacqueline Woodson, David Yoo, Blake Nelson, Aidan Chambers, Richard Mosher, Marc Talbert, to name just a few.

Where to begin? (Time and space won't permit me to analyze each volume piece by piece, although I'd love to). From **Faces** I selected David Yoo's "Turning Japanese," the story of a Korean, born and raised in the United States, who is thought to be Japanese co-worker. (Do all Asians look alike?) She wants him to teach her Japanese because the company is bringing over a Japanese guest as part of an international visitation program. He knows no Japanese and tries to fake it and even tries to learn some Japanese so he can pull the whole deal off. It really is quite a funny story. The narrator of the story works one day a week at this company as a temp, and he likes the hours because it allows him plenty of time to work on his book. So he does anything he can to accommodate this co-worker and others. Great fun. Keep these journals coming, Michael. We need them.

Summer and Fall Reading

I'll take the risk of not going along with all of the recommendations that various organizations have made considering "the best books for young adults." I like to put my own stamp on what I recommend for students and teachers to consider.

I know that the late Ted Hippie used to sample ALAN members' opinions about what they thought were the best YA books, and he didn't put copyright date limits on what they listed. This always

interested me, because I did put some time limits on what I submitted. Why? Because Paul Zindel did write more than *The Pig Man*; Robert Cormier's *The Chocolate War* was matched, in my judgment, by *The Rag And Bone Shop*. I always liked Judy Blume's *Tiger Eyes*. Paula Danziger's *The Cat Ate My Gynsuit* was among her best. But other writers have come along and shown their talents to stimulate my imagination and emotions. That's what reading is to me—a personal matter.

I've written lots of reviews, and I hasten to point out that these are MY OPINIONS, not to be taken as words from any holy mount. I enjoy sharing what I enjoy.

I hope others will think more seriously about what to do to fill the needs and abilities and interests of particular groups of students in their classes.

Peter Abrahams. *Down The Rabbit Hole*. Harper Collins.

Farah Ahmedi. *The Story Of My Life: An Afghan Girl On The Other Side Of The Sky*. Simon Spotlight.

Mary Amato. *The Word Eater*. Holiday House.

Gigi Amateau. *Claiming Georgia Tate*. Candlewick.

Laurie Halse Anderson. *Prom*. Viking.
M. J. Auch. *Wing Nut*. Henry Holt.

Andrew Auseon. *Funny Little Money*. Harcourt.

Alex Bradley. *24 Girls In 7 Days*. Dutton.

Joseph Bruchac. *Code Talker*. Dial.
Ed Butts. *She Dared: True Stories Of Heroines, Scoundrels, And Renegades*. Tundra.

Kate Cary. *Bloodline*. Razorbill/
Penguin.

Judith Clark. *Kalpana's Dream*. Front Street.

John Cooper. *Season Of Rage: Hugh Burnett And The Struggle For Civil Rights*. Tundra.

Alison Croggin. *The Naming*. Candlewick.

Gillian Cross. *The Dark Ground*. Durtton.

Louise Erdrich. *The Game Of Silence*. Harper Collins

K. L. Going. *The Liberation Of Gabriel King*. Putnam.

Adam Gopnik. *The King In The Window*. Hyperion.

Carol Gorman & Ron J. Findlay. *Stumptown Kid*. Peachtree.

Nikki Grimes. *Dark Sons*. Hyperion.

Louise Hawes. *The Vanishing Point*. Houghton Mifflin.

Stephanie Hemphill. *Things Left Unsaid*. Hyperion.

Carl Hiaasen. *Flush*. Knopf.

Tracy & Laura Hickman. *Mystic Warrior*. Warner.

Charlie Higson. *Silverfin*. Miramax/
Hyperion.

Jeanette Ingold. *Hitch*. Harcourt.

Steven Krasner. *Play Ball Like The Hall Of Famers*. Peachtree.

David Laroche. *Absolutely, Positively Not*. . . . Scholastic.

Sofie Laguna. *Surviving Aunt Marsha*. Scholastic.

Julius Lester. *Day Of Tears*. Hyperion.

David Lubar. *Sleeping Freshmen Never Lie*. Dutton.

Alfred C. Martino. *Pinned*. Harcourt.

J. D. McNeil. *The Last Codfish*. Henry Holt.

Lauren Myracle. *Rhymes With Witches*. Amulet/Abrams.

Per Nilisen. *You & You & You*. Front Street.

David Patneaude. *Thin Wood Walls*. Houghton Mifflin.

Adam Rapp. *33 Snowfish*. Candlewick.

Dietlof Reiche. *Ghost Ship*. Scholastic.

Marilyn Sachs. *Lost In America*. Roaring Brook.

Graham Salisbury. *Eyes Of The Emperor*. Random House.

Alan Lawrence Sitomer. *The Hoopster*. Hyperion.

William Sleator. *The Last Universe*. Amulet Books/Abrams.

James Smith. *The Boys Of San Joaquin*. Atheneum.

Gary Soto. *The Afterlife*. Harcourt.

David Stahler, Jr. *A Gathering Of Shades*. Harper Tempest.

Tammar Stein. *Light Years*. Knopf.

Amy Stolls. *Palms To The Ground*. Farrar Straus Giroux.

Theodore Taylor. *Billy The Kid*. Harcourt.

Jean Thesman. *Singer*. Viking.

Ann Turnbull. *No Shame, No Fear*. Candlewick.

Judy Waite. *Trick Of The Mind*. Atheneum.

Sarah Weeks. *So Be It*. Harper Collins.

Michael Winerip. *Adam Canfield Of The Slash*. Candlewick.

Rick Yancy. *The Extraordinary Adventures Of Alfred Kropp*. Bloomsbury.

Jane Yolen & Patrick Nielsen Hayden, eds. *The Year's Best Science Fiction For Teens*. Tor.

And I stop here. There are so many more. But this will allow teachers to get monies for their classroom libraries, I hope.

Series Books

I grew up to be a reader because I loved The Hardy Boys, Nancy Drew, Judy Bolton, and wonderful comic books. (I say

welcome to the graphic novels.) I wanted to read everything in the series. And then I read Big Little Books. I read. There is something wonderful about following characters from book to book.

Here are some of the series that I still enjoy:

Eoin Colfer. The Artemis Fowl series. *Artemis Fowl; The Opal Deception*. Hyperion/Miramax.

Cornelia Funke. The Inkheart series. *Inkspell*. Chicken House.

Anthony Horowitz. The Alex Ryder series. *Scorpio*. Philomel.

Erin Hunter. Warriors series. *Warriors: Midnight*. HarperCollins.

Catherine Jinks. The Pagan Chronicles. *Pagan's Scribe*. Candlewick.

Katheryn Laskey. Guardians of Ga'Hoole. *The Shattering*. Scholastic.

Jeff Mariotte. Witch Season series. *Winter*. Simon Pulse.

Daniel Parker and Lee Miller. Watching Alice series. *Find The Miracle*. Puffin.

Tamora Pierce. The Trickster's series. *Trikster's Queen*. Random House.

J. K. Rowling. Harry Potter series. *The Half-Blood Prince*. Scholastic.

Alex Sanchez. The Rainbow Boys series. *So Hard To Say*. Simon & Schuster.

Lemony Snicket. A Series of Unfortunate Events series. *The Grim Grotto*. Harper Collins.

DK

DK is a British publisher who has produced some of the most fascinating nonfiction books for American readers. The heavy use of

pictures and photographs has made this very easy to read and very appealing to students and teachers. The publisher has done many genres in the nonfiction field, and I thought it might be fitting to recognize just a few of their exceptional books.

Peter Ackroyd. *Kigdom Of The Dead*. (Ancient Egypt)

Mike Evans. *Elvis: A Celebration*.

Tim Haines. *Walking With Prehistoric Beasts*.

James C. Humes. *Winston Churchill*.

Patrick Morris. *Wild Africa*.

Tony Reichhardt. *Space Shuttle*.

Sister Wendy Beckett. *The Story Of Painting*.

In the DK Biography Series:

Anne Frank.

Helen Keller.

John F. Kennedy.

Martin Luther King, Jr.

Abraham Lincoln.

George Washington.

There are plenty of books on science, several done in conjunction with The Smithsonian Museum. And there are books on many aspects of American and world history and geography. Travel books galore. A good series for teaching geography.

I have never singled out one publisher before. But I think these are such unusual books in concepts and design that they should be mentioned

Listening Library

In a recent article in *The New York Times*, an editor mentioned that The University of Texas was getting rid of the book collection and replacing these with technology, mainly computers. There is so

much up-to-date information by which students can get up-to-date information, that a reconsideration of the library for research has led to the donation of these books to other libraries.

More and more schools are buying good audio tapes. These enable readers of all abilities to keep up-to-date with current books and to hear good stories read aloud. Who doesn't appreciate a good storyteller? A number of years ago I was privileged to go to Broadway to hear the late Charles Laughton do readings and the telling of stories. He held the audience in the palms of his hands. Storytelling is a skilled art.

Among the audio tapes I would like to recommend for listening and practicing the art of storytelling are:

Stand Tall by Joan Bauer (Read by Ron McLarty)

Girls in Pants: The Third Summer of The Sisterhood. (Read by Angela Goethals)

Last Shot by John Feinstein (Read by the author)

Seek by Paul Fleischman. (A full cast production.)

47 by Walter Mosely (Read by Ossie Davis)

The Land by Mildred Taylor (Read by Ruben Santiago-Hudson)

And Finally . . .

Sara Nelson has written *So Many Books, So Little Time: A Year Of Passionate Reading* (Putnam), which tells of her plans to read a book each week and how the plan fell apart. But she learned much

about her reading efforts, discovering the personal joy in the freedom to select books of all kinds for her many moods and minutes. Just discovering the variety of books, classics and modern, books for kids, books for adults.

While I said I wrote about books that touched me personally, I should have also said, I find a passion in the storybook world. "Once upon a time" turns my mind to all kinds of possibilities. Reading, when started young, lets us travel on and on and on. As Dr. Seuss would have said, "Oh, the places we could go!"

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