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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 summer) 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. Authors are to submit manuscripts electronically to alanreview@lsu.edu. In the subject line, please write: ALAN manuscript submission. All manuscripts should be in a recent version of Microsoft Word and use MLA format. Complete submissions include, as separate attachments, the following documents: (1) a manuscript without references to the author(s); (2) a separate title page with authors' names, contact information, affiliation, and a 2- or 3-sentence biographical sketch. In the case of multiple authors, the author submitting the manuscript will serve as the primary contact unless stipulated otherwise; (3) a brief statement that the article is original, has not been published previously in other journals and/or books, and is not a simultaneous submission.

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
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SUMMER ISSUE Deadline:	JANUARY 15

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From the Editors

As the seasons shift, we can sense other changes—across the nation and in our classrooms, as well. And quality young adult literature is in the middle of it all. The genre is reaching out to more and more young people, who are finding their own diverse voices in the pages of the texts.

In this winter issue, we address a variety of voices—a chorus demonstrating that young adult literature is providing an engaging connection for adolescents in the classroom and beyond.

Kicking off this issue, authors Wendy J. Glenn, Danielle King, Kate Heintz, Jill Klapatch, and Erica Berg share “Finding Space and Place for Young Adult Literature: Lessons from Four First-Year Teachers Engaging in Out-of-School Professional Induction,” the story of four first-year teachers and their efforts to get young adult literature into their students’ hands.

Heidi L. Hallman emphasizes using young adult literature with a more specific audience in “Novel Roles for Books: Promoting the Use of Young Adult Literature with Students at a School for Pregnant and Parenting Teens.” Hallman’s research describes how such literature offers relevant storylines that engage the students.

“Literacy Letters: Comparative Literature and Formative Assessment” by Nancy Frey, Douglas Fisher, and Kelly Moore explains an approach to assist educators in pairing engaging young adult literature and classics that are in the traditional secondary literature canon and literacy letters that provide an opportunity for students to respond.

Also in this issue, Judith K. Franzak shares “Social Upheaval and Psychological Scarring: Explor-

ing the Future in Meg Rosoff’s *How I Live Now*.” Donna Adomat writes about the transformation of two characters who become physically disabled in “Issues of Physical Disabilities in Cynthia Voigt’s *Izzy, Willy-Nilly* and Chris Crutcher’s *The Crazy Horse Electric Game*.”

Authors Wanda Brooks and Lorraine Savage examine the growing genre of street literature in “Critiques and Controversies of Street Literature: A Formidable Literary Genre.” They suggest that this genre receive more scholarly attention based on its increasing popularity with adolescent readers. In another article addressing student engagement, Dwayne Jeffery discusses a list of specific titles and authors to help get adolescent males reading. Check out his suggestions in “Reaching Reluctant Readers (aka Books for Boys).”

Longtime young adult literature enthusiast/critic Patty Campbell tells of the development of scholarship in the field of young adult literature in “Twayne and Scarecrow: An Editor’s Memoir.” Additionally, Bryan Ripley Crandall shares how students can use young adult literature to explore how “normal” and “able” are portrayed in texts in “Adding a Disability Perspective When Reading Adolescent Literature: Sherman Alexie’s *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*.”

In “Roses Are Red: Taking a Leap of Faith: The High School Connection,” Kay A. Smith shares her results and analysis of a survey of teens about faith and religion and literature. Additionally, we offer an article by KaaVonia Hinton-Johnson that features an interview with Sharon M. Draper and addresses how teachers—through the use of young adult literature—can reach reluctant readers.

Helen Bittel’s article, “From Basketball to Barney: Teen Fatherhood, Didacticism, and the Literary in YA Fiction,” takes a look at how young adult literature—such as Angela Johnson’s *The First Part Last*—has portrayed teen pregnancy.

Additionally, check out the more than 30 reviews of current young adult literature in our Clip and File section to see what other educators recommend for your classrooms.

And, now, we offer a brief introduction to *The ALAN Review*’s new coeditors: Steven Bickmore, Louisiana State University; Melanie Hundley, Vanderbilt University; and Jacqueline Bach, Louisiana

State University. They will be transitioning into their new roles with the summer *Review* and be officially taking charge for the fall 2009 issue. We welcome them to the ALAN family and wish them well in their *ALAN Review* endeavors.



Steven Bickmore, Louisiana State University. Robert Cormier's *I Am the Cheese* changed how I view novels written for young adults. I realized that the characters, plot, and narrative structure of this novel are as sophisticated as most of the books I read as an English major. This finely crafted piece of

literature grips the reader in a tale of suspense, and convinced me that young adult literature could not only help young readers learn to read and digest high-quality "classic" literature, but that many of these novels are quality literature in their own right.

I spent 25 years teaching English—everything from 9th-grade remedial to 12th-grade AP. At every level, I included YA literature as self-selected literature, literature circle options, or as whole-class readings. One year, I placed *Ender's Game* as the first novel in a Senior Advanced Placement class, and that changed the discussion of literature throughout the entire year. My research agenda includes investigating how preservice teachers come to YA Literature and what pedagogy they adopt in the classroom. I also write about promoting YA literature that not only speaks to its audience, but also exhibits high literary quality. I now teach English Methods and Young Adult Literature courses at Louisiana State University.



Melanie Hundley, Vanderbilt University. I fell in love with young adult literature during my first year of teaching seventh grade at a middle school in Georgia. It was a textbook adoption year, so when some of the textbooks were damaged, they were not replaced. I didn't have enough textbooks for

my students; what I did have was a terrific media specialist who helped me get class sets of young adult

novels. *Reading Where the Red Fern Grows, A Wrinkle in Time, Dogsong, Number the Stars, and Bridge to Terabithia with my students gave me a very different perspective on those texts. Those reading experiences and our deep, thoughtful discussions helped me reshape what I thought about literature, about teaching literature, and what texts were key to use with students.*

As a classroom teacher, I used young adult literature in a variety of ways, including reading workshops, as companion pieces to canonical literature, and in writing workshops as examples of the writer's craft. From 7th grade to AP, it engaged students in reading, writing, and critiquing the world. I now teach Writing Methods and Young Adult Literature courses at Vanderbilt University. My research interests include new media, technology and writing, and teacher education.



Jacqueline Bach, Louisiana State University. My first ALAN Conference in 1994, along with guidance from Dr. Pamela Sissi Carroll and Gloria Pipkin, convinced me to read young adult literature with my students. One year, after an especially grueling Julius Caesar unit and an

obligatory week of state standardized testing, I gave my students two weeks to read whatever young adult novel(s) they wanted in order for them to "remember what they liked about reading." Afterwards, my students pleaded: "Why can't we read books like this all of the time?" I now share that comment with my preservice English teachers in the hopes that they, too, will listen to their students.

Since then, I have taught high school English in three states and a YA Lit course, facilitated book clubs whose members read young adult novels, and worked with teachers on incorporating YA Lit into their curriculums. My current research with YA Literature explores how it can be used to conduct professional development with teachers on social issues and how it represents transgender and gender-variant characters. I am in the process of introducing young adult literature to school counselors and administrators in the hopes that they can also benefit from what we know about this field.

Call for Manuscripts

2009 Fall Theme: Growing Up: Young Adult Literature Gaining Stature at the High School Level

This theme is intended to solicit articles about young adult literature, authors, and instructional approaches that illustrate the value of using young adult literature in the high school setting. This might include, but not be limited to, the exploration of specific titles and themes linked to areas of the high school curriculum, the examination of successful implementation of YA into current classes, the value of YA literature in Advanced Placement coursework and as a bridge to college literature studies. This theme is meant to be open to interpretation and support a broad range of subtopics. General submissions are welcome, as well. **May 15 submission deadline.**

2010 Winter Theme: Young Adult Literature in the 21st Century: “Scattering Light” on Our Freedom to Think, See, and Imagine

The theme of this issue asks us to imagine what it means to “scatter light” using young adult literature. Which pioneers in our field have encouraged us to “scatter light”? Which novels or poems encourage young readers to think about their pasts as they continue in the future? How does young adult literature help readers deal with adolescent issues as they think, see, and imagine those futures? What texts give “voice [to those who have] been pushed down hard” by school or society? This theme is meant to be open to interpretation, and we welcome manuscripts addressing pedagogy as well as theoretical concerns. General submissions are also welcome. **October 15 submission deadline.**

James Moffett Award

NCTE’s Conference on English Education, in conjunction with the National Writing Project, offers this grant to support teacher research projects inspired by the scholarship of James Moffett. All K–12 classroom educators who teach at least three hours or three classes per day are eligible to apply for the grant. Moffett Award winners receive a certificate and a monetary award (up to \$1,000) to be used toward implementation of the proposed project. Proposals will be judged on such criteria as the strength of the connection to James Moffett’s scholarship and the perceived value and feasibility of the research. **The deadline for nominations for the 2009 Moffett Award is May 1, 2009.** Winners will be notified in July 2009 and announced at the 2009 NCTE Annual Convention in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Submit nominations to CEE James Moffett Award, NCTE, 1111 W. Kenyon Road, Urbana, IL 61801-1096. For more information, go to <http://www.ncte.org/cee/awards/moffett>.

Finding Space and Place for Young Adult Literature:

Lessons from Four First-Year Teachers Engaging in Out-of-School Professional Induction

Despite research and anecdotal evidence suggesting the value of young adult literature in the school setting, the genre continues to be marginalized and avoided in many classrooms (Glenn, 2007; Baker, 2002; Bean & Moni, 2003; Cadden, 2000; Emge, 2006; Moorman, 2008; Stevens & Bean, 2007).

Arguments surrounding issues of literary quality, controversial content, and the external pressures faced by teachers in a climate of accountability hinder attempts by teachers to bring YA titles to students who need and deserve them. For first-year teachers navigating new settings and new curricula and negotiating new relationships fraught with issues of power and authority (Arends, R. I., & Rigazio-DiGilio, A. J., 2000; Brown, 2000; Gold, 1996; Grossman, 1990; Kane, 1991; Lortie, 1975; Moir, E., 2003; Moir, E., & Gless, J., 2001; Ryan, 1970; Ryan et al., 1980; Veenman, 1984; Wideen, Mayer-Smith, & Moon, 1998), the decision to utilize YA texts involves even higher stakes.

Through professional conversations formalized in conferences and joint-publication ventures, well-informed, caring, and committed beginning teachers might find support in their persistent efforts to do right by their students. This paper features four first-year teachers doing just that, enacting innovative, creative, and unconventional practices and strategies that put YA titles in the hands of kids, even in the face of sometimes loud and persistent opposition, highlighting not only their work in the classroom but the out-of-school professional development activities that

supported their efforts.

Writing and YA Literature in an Age of Assessment: Danielle's Lesson

The process of reading provides a means to enhance students' creative and expository writing skills (Glenn, 2007; Fearn & Farnan, 2001; Garrigues, 2004; Halliday & Hasan, 1976; Hansen, 2001; Langer 1986; Mayo, 2000; Tierney & Shanahan, 1991). One of the most effective ways to encourage young people to develop as authors is to allow them to examine the craft of writing as utilized by authors they respect and admire, particularly contemporary authors who address issues similar to those students face in their lives and often process in their writing. By focusing on the elements of writing craft employed by these authors, students are able to apply and adapt these strategies to their own writing, gaining necessary skills and confidence (and, incidentally, performing just fine on state and national exams of writing and reading competence).

Danielle teaches in a small, suburban town in New England. Her school community is made up of approximately 600 students and 60 faculty members. Her school building is an older facility, with chalkboards and only one computer in many of the classrooms. While technological resources may be hard to come by, her staff members and administration are exceptionally supportive of her ideas and desire to infuse the curriculum with new YA texts. With their trust and support, Danielle has successfully incorpo-

rated several YA titles into her sophomore and senior curricula. The challenge she continually faces, however, is teaching these novels to her students while still making successful efforts to improve standardized test scores in reading and writing, a task for which she is held accountable within the school community.

In balancing the importance of teaching YA novels with that of student performance on mandated standardized state tests, Danielle implements a modified version of Reader's Workshop. Her students choose Reader's Workshop books based on their personal interests, as well as peer and teacher recommendations. To supplement the existing curriculum, Danielle's honors students read two books per quarter, while her college-prep students read one. Danielle's classroom library is stocked with YA titles she has acquired through the years from bookstores, the annual NCTE and ALAN conferences, and anywhere else she can. Danielle also works closely with the school librarian. She shares with him the titles of books and the names of the authors her students are currently enamored of, and he makes lists of books to order each month. If students express an interest in checking out books by a particular author, and they are already signed out of the classroom library, she is able to refer them to the school library, confidently knowing that her librarian has a strong knowledge base in the field of YA literature, as well as several titles on his shelves.

Each Friday, Danielle's students enter class excited for Reader's Workshop to begin. They take out their "Reader's Workshop Focus Points" worksheet (see Appendix A) and copy down the focus point of the day (setting, character development, symbolism, etc.). After jotting down the day's focus point, students record any background knowledge they already have about that particular literary term. Next, Danielle conducts a brief mini-lesson on the term to fill in any gaps in each of the student's current knowledge. The students take notes during the mini-lesson, adding to the worksheet which will ultimately serve as a resource guide. For the next thirty minutes, students read silently as Danielle travels around her classroom and confers with individual students about their selected titles. While the students are reading, their task is to focus on how their respective author uses the element selected as the focus point for the day. At

the end of the block of reading time, students write for ten minutes about how their author utilized the literary device or element of author's craft in the reading and evaluate whether or not the author used the element effectively.

Through this process of critically examining how the students' favorite authors use these elements of craft, the students come to understand them on a much deeper level. This understanding becomes especially important when students are faced with high performance goals on statewide standardized reading tests that ask them to reflect on a close reading of a text, analyzing author's intent, effectiveness, and overall success in creating an effective piece of literature. Many students struggle to determine what makes a piece of literature "good" or "effective" or how to pull apart pieces of a text to analyze the author's intent and use of literary devices. Through the focus points that Danielle uses in her Reader's Workshop, she is able to teach students these aspects of close reading and effective writing through books that capture their interest by authors whom they admire. When faced with the broad and often daunting questions about overall quality of a text, students have a bank of "focus points" from which to draw as a result of the work they have done in Reader's Workshop.

The final component in Danielle's Reader's Workshop process involves having her students use their notes on how various authors used different literary elements in the consideration of their own writing. When students struggle with a writing assignment, Danielle first asks them to look back at their evaluations of how their authors dealt with

As a result of the Reader's Workshop process, Danielle's students prepare themselves for the state standardized tests in reading and writing. More importantly, they learn important literary devices beyond the terminology; they understand how they are used. In turn, students are able to apply this knowledge to their own writing.

specific issues, like beginning or ending a story, effectively using dialogue or foreshadowing, for example, to garner strategies or approaches they, themselves, might employ. During her short story unit, one of Danielle's students used her examination of Sarah Dessen's character development techniques to work toward creating her own memorable characters.

As a result of the Reader's Workshop process, Danielle's students prepare themselves for the state standardized tests in reading and writing. More importantly, they learn important literary devices beyond the terminology; they understand how they are used. In turn, students are able to apply this knowledge to their own writing. Most importantly, students gain confidence in both their reading and writing abilities, thus increasing their self-efficacy and passion for the English Language Arts.

Independent Reading in an Age of Fiscal Limits and Packed Curricula: Kate's Lesson

Most educators long for students to be intrinsically motivated to pick up a book and read for pleasure, and multiple independent reading programs have been designed and implemented by teachers in the attempt to meet that goal (Allington, 2002; Katz, 2005; Robb, 2002; Waff & Connell, 2004). These approaches, however, are sometimes avoided by classroom teachers due to the perceived complications that result from limited resources and classroom time and a lack of vision as to what might be possible.

Kate teaches high school English in a sleepy shoreline town in New England where her students range from reluctant, disengaged readers to voracious lovers of the written word. Spanning two grades and three course levels, Kate's students vary in both learning ability and motivation level. Teaching in a small district with a limited allotment of resources and a lofty curriculum that leaves little room for supplemental programs, Kate developed and currently implements an independent reading program that relies upon the creation of a classroom library shelved with fresh YA titles along with partnered support from the town and school libraries. Understanding the importance of instilling interest and curiosity in prospective readers, Kate initiated her program by pairing book talks and read-alouds with jaw-dropping

facts on the correlation between independent reading and literacy rates. Students could not believe that "the percentage of 17-year-olds who read nothing for pleasure has doubled in a decade," and they were equally amazed that "reading scores for 17-year olds are down significantly" (CEA Advisor). By sharing this information, she confirmed the importance of independent reading for the present bookworms and sparked motivation in the more reluctant book-openers.

From the start, Kate's department and library staff members were exceptionally supportive of her ambition to implement an independent reading program with her students. Upon arriving at her new school, Kate found that the English department had recently established a Book Chat program; students were afforded the opportunity to showcase their recommended titles on a library book shelf with an enthusiastic blurb as to why this text was one to read. Excited by the exhibit—and seeing its potential connection to her project—Kate shared her ambition with the library specialist and department chair to build upon the established interest in independent reading to her classroom and curriculum. Grounding her rationale to implement an independent reading program with sound theory, passion, and the promise to authentically create, implement, and reflect on the product and process, Kate was able to successfully gain the support of both the English and library/media departments. While the library personnel continued to provide additions to the selection of available YA books, Kate created her own classroom library which primarily included YA titles guaranteed to get students reading. Initially, if Kate's shelves did not house a title that a student was curious about, she bought it. It was not a matter of expense; the independent reading program was a vehicle to allow every kid to love a book, and Kate's role was to ensure that every kid found one to love.

Today, students elbow each other at the classroom library bookshelves as they eagerly sign out titles for the third marking period. Already proficient in the independent reading process, the students get right to work. Between now and the end of the quarter, each student will read a book of his or her choice, logging the place, time, and number of pages read as part of an initiative to discover and reflect on who they are as readers (see Appendix B). Once they have finished

their books, students will create authentic products that demonstrate their personal connections with and understanding of the text, showcase their strengths and interests as readers, and highlight significant themes and elements of the story. Kate has found that the quality of the work submitted each quarter exceeds her expectations. From ingenious comic strips that retell a portion of a story through detailed drawings to a letter written to an author from the perspective of a publisher accepting or rejecting a book for publication, students produce projects that genuinely display their investment in the stories read. Both stressing to students the importance of choosing titles that are truly interesting to them and providing them with the creative freedom to express themselves and what they take away from the reading produce powerful results.

Kids want to read when the environment which surrounds them values reading as relevant and the content as real. Embedding lesson initiations with references to a YA title has an effect. Recently, Kate began a lesson on characterization in *Fahrenheit 451* by reading the first chapter of Jerry Spinelli's *Stargirl* aloud to her students, asking, "What connections do we see between Stargirl and Clarisse McClellan? How do the students at Stargirl's school respond to her unique character and why?" Consistent references to YA literature and independent reading texts make the act of reading by oneself less foreign, less daunting. Exposing students to fresh, young, relevant titles through these means allows these adolescent readers to broaden their pool of possible must reads. Both deliberate exposure and word-of-mouth hype are helpful vehicles for increasing interest in and frequency of reading. Some of Kate's biggest allies are her students. When a student finishes a book that he or she "just couldn't put down," word spreads to other students, friend-to-friend recommendations are made, and students ask to put their books on the shelves of the classroom library because others "have to read it!"

Kate's classroom library has grown significantly since the start of the school year; the group of fifty or so books that she contributed has expanded to include two floor-to-ceiling shelves that house additional purchases along with books donated by students. The argument that limited funds hinder independent reading has not panned out in this classroom. Kate

credits this to her persistent efforts to inspire curiosity and interest. There is no better motivator than a student ranting and raving about how awesome a book is; others want to read it. Students ask to borrow the book that everyone's talking about. A student asks a parent to bring him or her to the bookstore to pick up that book or another that he or she thinks may be just as big of a hit. All that any one student needs to become an avid reader, or even a less reluctant one, is to have a positive experience and a meaningful connection with a book he/she likes. Kate's mission has been and continues to be showing kids that those books exist.

What about the curriculum? The 58 minute class period? How can time be spent on pleasure reading when the students are bogged down with homework each night? All fabulous questions, each warranted given the high stakes teachers face today. The implementation of an independent reading program need not impede a curriculum, nor must it regularly occur during class time (although it certainly might). Introducing the program requires some direct instruction and class time for preparation and clarification. However, the adoption of any independent reading program must be seen as a long term investment. Kids will require a significant amount of cheerleading; they may need encouragement and assistance when choosing a book and teacher leadership in the creation of a classroom culture in which independent reading is integral, a constant in their academic routine. With time, stu-

Recently, Kate began a lesson on characterization in *Fahrenheit 451* by reading the first chapter of Jerry Spinelli's *Stargirl* aloud to her students, asking, "What connections do we see between Stargirl and Clarisse McClellan? How do the students at Stargirl's school respond to her unique character and why?" Consistent references to YA literature and independent reading texts make the act of reading by oneself less foreign, less daunting.

dents will become increasingly proficient with both the act of reading independently and the process of reading to engage, reflect, and connect.

YA Texts in an Age of Conservatism: Jill's Lesson

Both classic and traditional literatures often address controversial ideas and topics, but, because classic texts have an accepted place in literary history, the material is often considered educational and safe for students. Writers of YA literature regularly explore the reality of being a teenager today, and issues of sexuality, violence, drugs, and depression frequently

emerge. Without the weight of history behind them, YA titles and their authors more readily come under attack (Alsup, 2003; Author, 2006; Stallworth, B., Gibbons, L., & Fauber, L., 2006; Glasgow, 2001). However, with commitment, care, and clear justification, teachers can navigate this potentially contentious territory.

Jill teaches sixth and eighth grade Language Arts at a fundamental school in St. Petersburg, Florida. Students elect to attend the school from around the county. While the socio-economic status of enrolled students varies greatly, one thing binds members of the school community together: a commitment to education based on responsibility, community, and respect. Administrators and

teachers work closely to foster meaningful learning opportunities for students, ranging from organized author visits to cross-curricular fieldtrips. The district is committed to making learning meaningful, and this sentiment is shared by parents and community.

Despite this support, however, teachers may still face challenges when bringing YA literature into the classroom. There are many ways to face this challenge and find common ground between the new and the traditional so that all students can benefit.

Choosing appropriate YA texts for use in the classroom can be tricky, particularly for newer teachers or those less familiar with the myriad titles that have been and continue to be published in the field. Parental and collegial scrutiny can also be rather intimidating. A necessary first step is to read any YA title before considering its use or recommending it to students. While pre-reading the book, teachers might pay particular attention to potential student connections to characters (age, setting, experiences, culture), writer's craft (perspective, word choice, sentence fluency, voice), community issues (environmental, political, social), and values emphasized by the book (cultural, traditional, historical, international). In addition, teachers might check with the school librarian to see if the book is cleared for all students to read in accordance with any school/district book selection guidelines, as some books may be limited to certain ages or grades or may require written informed parent consent. Teachers might also draw upon online resources, such as Amazon.com, to read reviews to garner multiple perspectives regarding appropriateness of content and recommended age group. With these components in place, an informed decision can be made.

Some people might ask, "Why go to all this trouble? Just draw from tried and true classic titles." In response, teachers might draw from several lines of thought. From a language perspective, for example, YA titles might encourage student admission into the reading process. Classic literature can feature dated language that leaves struggling readers behind and unmotivated. YA literature, in contrast, often incorporates more contemporary forms of the English language, thus providing a perfect opportunity to draw from samples of classic literature to compare language use and track its changes over time. YA literature can also be used to teach conventions of language, supporting students' understandings of how language works while keeping them interested in the content being read. YA texts often incorporate technology and communication, including e-mails, texts, blogs, and IM, the very language forms that students increasingly

However, the adoption of any independent reading program must be seen as a long term investment. Kids will require a significant amount of cheerleading; they may need encouragement and assistance when choosing a book and teacher leadership in the creation of a classroom culture in which independent reading is integral, a constant in their academic routine.

value. Although teachers might not feel knowledgeable about these forms, their students love to share their culture; if teachers struggle with the slang in the text, students will gladly don the role of expert and teach them! Perhaps even more significantly, many YA authors are alive and available to talk to students about issues of language and writer's craft; many will visit schools, hold online chats, answer letters, post to blogs, etc. In fact, once Jill and a group of students looked up a poet in an online phonebook, called, and got their question answered in a matter of 10 minutes. Talk about authentic learning.

With respect to motivation, teachers should consider ways in which they might capitalize on the taboo nature of YA titles. Just as some have argued that parental restriction was the best thing to happen to rock music sales ("The History of the PMRC"), it could be claimed that reluctant readers may be intrigued by controversial books that they can relate to. Case in point: one of Jill's students reported that she hated to read but would try an MTV series book, assuming that the title would resonate with her contemporary interests. Having previously used Stephen Chbosky's *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* successfully, Jill believed this to be a suitable choice for the student. Before checking the novel out of her classroom library, Jill sent home a parent note with reviews of the book and her own review listing the potentially controversial issues. The parents signed off, and the student has since finished the book and moved on to additional texts. To demonstrate the power of these titles despite (or because of) the controversial issues they address—and to foster literacy in the larger community—teachers might extend the invitation beyond a simple granting of permission and invite parents/guardians to read a YA text along with their children.

Thematic Units in an Age of the Shackled Curriculum: Erica's Lesson

Thematic units provide an innovative, interdisciplinary, and richly complicated way to feature YA texts in the classroom (Glenn 2008, 2003a, 2003b; Beane, 1995; Drake, 1998; Monseau, 1992). Educators can develop thematic units that relate and appeal to adolescents, focusing on such high-interest and relevant adolescent themes as identity, perceptions, or

attraction. In the exploration of the given theme, the YA text plays a central role in supporting reading, writing, thinking, and speaking skills among students, all while creating opportunities for students to deepen and enrich their understanding of big ideas, themselves, and others. If we, as teachers, are committed to fostering a stance toward life-long learning, we are obligated to make space in our curricula for opportunities to engage students and encourage meaningful connections to literature, even in school settings that require particular texts and/or adhere to an established curriculum.

Erica teaches at a comprehensive four-year high school in New England that draws students from two towns that vary significantly with respect to socioeconomic status. District leaders have identified student achievement as a primary goal. In 2006, the district was the only school in the state removed from the list of schools identified as "In Need of Improvement" as per *No Child Left Behind* legislation. The high school English curriculum is comprised of year-long, required grade level courses. Each year-long course focuses on differing aspects in the English content area. For example, all sophomores are required to read John Hersey's *Hiroshima* and write a persuasive essay that aligns with the interdisciplinary portion of the state standardized assessment. The college-level sophomore curriculum also includes required short story and poetry units. There are optional class sets of a few additional texts available to teachers: *A Tale of Two Cities*, *Man a la Mancha*, *Les Miserables*, *Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants*, and *Julius Caesar*. With the creative infusion of YA titles into the existing units of study, Erica has successfully broadened the reach and scope of the content to which her students are exposed.

For example, with the generous financial support of the department head, Erica incorporated Ben Mikaelson's *Tree Girl* into an existing and required multicultural unit. Using *Tree Girl* as the vehicle, students analyzed the larger constructs of social and cultural justice. They compared the plight of Mikaelson's protagonist, Gabriela, with the problems of other characters they read about in the unit, including both classical and contemporary multicultural stories, and examined their visions of self by researching and discovering works written by those who share their cultural identities. Using "Project

Implicit” (<https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/>), students explored their own subconscious feelings toward particular races or cultures. Paul Kivel’s “Examining Class and Race: an Exercise” offered meaningful opportunities for students to discover disparities in the race and class differences within the

The activity challenged the assumption that many of the students shared: that they all had equal opportunities in life. The students looked into their own school, family structure, and society to ascertain social and cultural injustices and how they might promote reform—all resulting from study of a YA text.

classroom. The activity challenged the assumption that many of the students shared: that they all had equal opportunities in life. The students looked into their own school, family structure, and society to ascertain social and cultural injustices and how they might promote reform—all resulting from study of a YA text.

Using Don Gallo’s short story collection, *Destination Unexpected*, Erica also enhanced the short story unit for her tenth graders, opting to organize the readings around the thematic construct of adventure. Erica and her students examined both classic and contemporary YA stories to

consider how the theme has evolved in literary permutations over time (all while meeting school requirements in the process; the short stories in the curriculum are suggested, and the literary terms are required). Using mini-lessons to elucidate key literary terms evident in the stories (plot structure, foreshadowing, and characterization), Erica enhanced student learning by couching the language study in literature centered on themes related to their lives. The stories “Keep Smiling,” by Alex Flinn, and “Bad Blood,” by Will Weaver, promoted particularly rich class discussion about what it means to be a good person and whether or not intention should figure into the definition.

Building a bridge between the classics and more contemporary titles in the context of the thematic unit allowed for richer discussion around an important

question that was applicable to students’ lives. In the employment of the thematic approach, teachers might begin by providing students numerous pieces of literature that examine the same theme from multiple perspectives. If *Romeo and Juliet* is the required text, for example, a teacher could explore the theme of forbidden love drawing from such YA texts as *Lucas*, by Kevin Brooks; *Twilight* by Stephenie Meyer; *Romiette and Julio*, by Sharon Draper; *Annie on my Mind*, by Nancy Garden; and *If You Come Softly*, by Jacqueline Woodson. *If You Come Softly* presents a forbidden love between individuals of a different race, while *Twilight* reflects the love between a mortal and an immortal. Teachers might then look to literature circles as an instructional approach that encourages students to discuss how the given theme is presented in the YA text and how this contrasts and connects to the original required text, *Romeo and Juliet*. The teacher may also supplement the unit with YA poetry, short stories, novels in verse, images, and nonfiction texts (see Marion Dane Bauer’s collection of short stories, *Am I Blue? Coming out from the Silence*, and David Levithan’s novel in verse, *The Realm of Possibility*, as a way to draw students into the theme before ever cracking the cover of the required core text.

Designing the literature curriculum thematically from questions of high interest for adolescents and infusing this study with YA titles that offer contemporary takes on age-old problems encourages a deeper understanding of literature and the larger world. While some may argue that there just isn’t room for YA titles given the already full curriculum, such an inclusion actually creates a gateway to richer discussions of common themes in literature.

The Lesson in These Lessons

In recent years, there has been growing interest in supporting, guiding, and orienting beginning educators as they transition into their first teaching positions. Such supports have been touted as potential means through which to increase teacher retention rates through the provision of a network upon which those new to the profession can draw as they maneuver their way through their first days in the classroom (Cochran-Smith, M., 2004; Kelley, L.M., 2004; Smith, T., & Ingersoll, R., 2003; Ingersoll, R.M., & Smith, T.M., 2004). These networks, however, have typically

been conceived and grounded in school settings where, it has been argued, the immediate school climate and opportunities for connection and collaboration serve as determinants of whether or not teachers remain in the profession (Johnson & Birkeland, 2003; Johnson & The Project on the Next Generation of Teachers, 2004). The in-school mentoring structure, in and of itself, fails to guarantee sufficient professional interaction and collective responsibility among teachers across experience levels, both of which new teachers need to thrive (Kardos 2004, 2001). Indeed, even when teachers report their involvement in a mentoring program in their school, effective assistance does not necessarily follow (Ingersoll, 2000). Each of the new teachers described in this paper participated (with mixed success) in a school mentoring program designed to provide support from experienced English language arts teachers at the school site. This institutionalized mentor support system was designed to provide guidance as these first-year teachers wrestled for the first time with the realities of limited resources, interactions with parents and administrators, and decisions about curriculum and instruction. However, these teachers reported limits to this mentor system, identifying specific areas of deficit ranging from minor concerns about curriculum mapping to more major concerns about how to work with colleagues, including the mentor teachers themselves, who often offered inappropriate and unhelpful critique under the guise of support.

Significantly, each of these first-year teachers also made an explicit decision to engage in the professional community beyond the walls of the school, preparing for and presenting at conferences, including a national conference, and writing this piece, thus providing additional layers of induction extending from the local community into the larger professional community.

When these new educators were asked, “What have attending conferences and collaborating on writing projects such as this done for you as a first year teacher? Why were you willing to engage in such tasks? What did you gain from them?,” they first noted the ways in which these out-of-school professional activities created opportunities for professional growth, arguing, “It’s really important to keep exposing myself to new, innovative teaching methods that various people all over the country are using,” and

“The collaboration and resources available at these conferences make me shiver with excitement. I know there will never be a day that I would go to these conferences and come back empty handed. It is all about wanting to spark the interests of all of my kids and be a better teacher.” Secondly, they identified the ways in which these activities provided a validation of their teaching philosophy and related practices, noting, “As a first year teacher, I continually draw upon my professional development experiences as a source of inspiration and as a means to redefine and remind me of my purpose as an educator,” and “The conferences show me that I am not alone in the world with my teaching style.” Additionally,

they expressed gratitude for the opportunity to interact and collaborate with those who share their passion for literature, teaching, and kids, saying, “There is something to be said for simply sitting around with a bunch of other professionals who all have the same goal (to give students the best and most meaningful experiences possible) and talk about what everyone is doing in his/her classrooms. It is so easy to get so caught up in the day to day grind of your own classroom, especially as a first year teacher, that it’s important to take a step back once in a while and reflect on what you’re doing, while sharing your experiences with others,” and “Working on collaborative projects offers a chance to celebrate the literature I love with others who share my passion and so renews my passion. I can bring that back to my students and share it with them.” Finally, engaging in out-of-school professional induction provided these first-year teachers an intellectual challenge, encouraging them to critically reflect upon their work in the classroom, as revealed by these comments: “Participating in conferences and collaborating on articles, such as this, have pushed me in my thinking about educational philosophies and strategies;” “This paper has made me critically evaluate what I have done this year and, in an educated way, back up what I am doing and explain why it is meaningful;” and “Having to continuously reflect on my own writing, my own mission, exploring texts that I might not under other circum-

It is all about wanting to spark the interests of all of my kids and be a better teacher.”

stances, forcing me to feel uncomfortable by revealing my first year practice—these experiences shape me, making me a stronger, more dimensional teacher.”

Conclusions

These beginning teachers assumed the identity of professional educators, leaders in the school community who possess professional knowledge and skills, behave as reflective practitioners capable of using inquiry to elicit change, and believe that enabling children to become successful citizens in a democracy is a moral imperative. Each of these teachers willingly approached her respective department head, for example, and found a receptive audience willing to provide requisite funds or permissions to enact changes to the existing curricula. These first-year teachers possessed both the expertise and confidence

necessary to bridge the power differential inherent in a faculty member-department head relationship.

Yet, their reach has extended beyond the four walls of the school building. They recognize that it is their professional duty to engage in the larger conversation around schooling, to remain abreast of best practices and materials that might support those practices, and to actively live as scholar-teachers willing to reflect upon, write about, and share their own professional growth and development with their colleagues working in diverse settings. Beginning teachers who work with same-subject mentors and engage in collective

induction experiences (including collaborative work with other teachers) are less likely to leave their schools and leave teaching than those who did not

(Smith & Ingersoll, 2003). In this case, these beginning teachers embarked on a collaborative venture that allowed them to work as peers with the support of an English education mentor. They took it upon themselves to devise, implement, reflect upon, and share in a process of authentic professional development. They have found a voice in the professional community beyond their individual school settings, suggesting the value of fostering cross-school collaborations with real audiences and the value of professional organizations that value the voices of the new, allowing them to spread their wings in a safe environment.

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Erica Berg is an English teacher at Rockville High School in Vernon, CT. Originally from Cheshire, CT, she received her Master's degree in English Education from the University of Connecticut. She is passionate about the incorporation of multicultural and young adult texts into the curriculum. In her spare time, she is writing a young adult novel.

Katie Heintz is a second-year teacher of freshman, sophomores, and juniors at Lyme-Old Lyme High School in Connecticut. She weaves contemporary young adult literature into the traditional curriculum through a department-embraced independent reading program. Beyond the classroom, she is currently working with her department to receive a grant from a local education foundation to further promote and enhance each English teacher's classroom library.

Danielle King is a second-year English teacher at East Hampton High School in East Hampton, Connecticut. She graduated with her Master's Degree in Education from the Neag School of Education at the University of Connecticut in 2007 and completed Honors research related to eighth-grade reading habits along gender lines.

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Fundamental Middle School in St. Petersburg, FL. Her middle school students truly enjoy the YA literature that she brings into the classroom. They can often be found swapping books and debating favorite characters. Jill's goal is to draw on her students as inspiration for her own YA novel that will someday provide fodder for more meaningful discussions in the classroom.

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Appendix A

Name _____ Date _____

Reader's Workshop Focus Points

Focus Point: _____

Title: _____

Author: _____

Definition of Term/ Current Knowledge:

Author's Use of Element in Focus Point:

Effectiveness of Author Use:

Appendix B

Time of Day	Reading Location	Pages Read	Total Read
<i>Afternoon</i>	<i>By the pool</i>	<i>1 - 32</i>	<i>32 pages</i>

Reader's Workshop Log

Marking Period #1

Name: _____

Period: _____

Novel Roles for Books:

Promoting the Use of Young Adult Literature with Students at a School for Pregnant and Parenting Teens

Destiny Greer, an eleventh grade student at Eastview School for Pregnant and Parenting Teens* clicked away intently on her computer. Earlier in the class period, her English teacher, Bob Schaefer, had introduced a new unit, and Destiny was one of the students who appeared particularly excited about it. The goal of the unit was for students in Mr. Schaefer's class, ranging in age from twelve to nineteen, to create "wish lists" for books they were interested in reading. After compiling all of the students' wish lists, Mr. Schaefer's intent was to purchase two books from each student's list, adding to the classroom collection of books.*

*As Destiny searched websites for books to put on her wish list, I noticed that she had started her search by finding books she was already familiar with or had previously read. The book titles that she looked for, including *Caucasia* and *Fly Girl*, led her, through features on the booksellers' websites, to books of the same nature/ topic area. As Destiny scrolled through the new book choices and read each book's synopsis, she leaned forward with increasing interest. At one point in her search she turned to Bob and said, "We never got to do this at our old school."*

Proponents of using young adult literature with teens, particularly with young females, have identified the ways that young adult literature "speaks" to students who have similar interests and life experiences as the characters within the texts (Doyle, 2002; Hughes-Hassell, 2002; Miller, 1993). Other researchers concerned with the use of young adult literature in the secondary English language arts classroom (e.g., Bintz, 1993; Lenters, 2006; Worthy, 1998) have shown how young adult literature that relates to teens who are deemed "at risk" of school failure provides these young people with an ongoing forum from which to explore their identities as teenagers and students. In

this article, I contribute to this ongoing inquiry about the use of young adult literature in classrooms for students who are labeled as being "at risk" learners by exploring how teen mothers at Eastview School for Pregnant and Parenting Teens were involved in the selection of books for their own classroom. Through vignettes of poignant moments at Eastview and through interviews with Eastview students, I illustrate the ways that young adult literature influenced how teen mothers think about themselves as students, mothers, and adolescents.

Because pregnant and parenting teens, as a population of students, have typically been "hidden" from mainstream education, little has been written about these teens' literacy and literacy development and how this, in turn, affects their identity. As documented in this article, teen mothers perceive that reading does make a difference in their lives. During the time of my study at Eastview I became particularly interested in the way books that Eastview teens selected assisted these students in talking about who they were and how they constructed a sense of self. I found the link between reading and identity to be a key element of the success of using young adult literature with students who may be otherwise labeled as "at risk" students.

Constructing Identity: Who Is the Pregnant and Parenting Student?

Many studies focusing on pregnant and parenting teens have done an exceptional job of challenging the

stereotype that teen mothers are “deviant” as compared to the “normal” adolescent. As a result, in part, of Wendy Luttrell’s (2003) and Wanda Pillow’s (2004) research with pregnant teens, we do know that simple representations of the teenage mother are faulty and often present false unidirectional correlations between early childbearing and school/ economic success. Several other researchers (e.g., Luker, 1996; Zachry, 2005) have documented results that appear contradictory to the early pregnancy/ lack of success model so frequently assumed by the American public. Dominant portraits of the pregnant teen as “abnormal” have been contested and researchers (Luttrell, 2003; Pillow, 2004) have posed important questions about the teen mother’s “at risk” position. Nevertheless, many questions remain concerning what actually happens inside schools for pregnant and parenting teens. There have been, to date, few studies (Hallman, 2007; Luttrell, 2003) that document programs for this group of students that promote separate schools for teen mothers as potential providers of meaningful and/ or challenging curriculum. Exploring the successful use of young adult literature at Eastview School for Pregnant and Parenting Teens contributes to this search for knowledge about such programs.

Connecting *Identity Work* to the Use of Young Adult Literature in the Classroom

Throughout this article, the concept of *identity* and the development of one’s “self” is situated within a sociocultural lens of literacy and learning (Gee, 1996, 1999). This means that *identity* is viewed as constructed through interactions between people and *identity work* is accomplished by individuals staking claims about who they are in relationship to others. Identity is intimately tied to literacy, as literacy is positioned as a vehicle by which individuals can make such claims. Further, one’s identity is always connected with one’s use of *Discourses* (Gee, 1999; 2001), which act as “identity kits and come complete with the appropriate costume and instructions on how to act, talk, and often write, so as to take on a particular role that others will recognize” (Gee, 2001, 526). *Discourses* become conceptual forums from which individuals assert their affiliations and undertake identity work. Through such a view, one’s “self,” or identity, doesn’t exist as an individually created entity,

but rather is formed within a nexus of social relationships and affiliations.

Moreover, one’s identity, because of being situated within a social context, is subject to change over time. As contexts and affiliations change, so does one’s identity. *Identity* as Hall (2000) asserts, is something which is “not already ‘there’; [but] rather, . . . a production, emergent in process. It [identity] is situational—it shifts from context to context” (xi). As a consequence, identity work is undertaken as a fluid process—one is never finished with constructing his or her identity.

Throughout my work at Eastview School for Pregnant and Parenting Teens, I witnessed Eastview students’ desire to construct a “self” that extended beyond the identity of “teen mother,” a label they believed others viewed as their primary role. Teens with whom I spoke asserted that their conception of their identity encompassed much more than their role as “mother” and directed me to considering how their reading choices were an important tool in exploring the multiple facets of their identity. I learned that teens at Eastview consistently viewed young adult literature as a site from which they were able to stake claims about their identity as well as craft their sense of self.

The way teens at Eastview spoke about the young adult literature that engaged them also included a desire for the “place,” or setting, of the books to be familiar to them. Place was just as integral to teens’ reading choices as was character, and I highlight, in Figure 3, books that Eastview students selected because of their affiliation with the place of a book. In her outline of characteristics of fiction for African American urban teens, Doyle (2002) notes that books

Dominant portraits of the pregnant teen as “abnormal” have been contested and researchers (Luttrell, 2003; Pillow, 2004) have posed important questions about the teen mother’s “at risk” position. Nevertheless, many questions remain concerning what actually happens inside schools for pregnant and parenting teens.

In an interview with Krystal Berns, a twelfth grade student, I learned that she had “never read until coming to [Eastview]. [She] never read a book cover to cover before.”

conflicts presented in the books were an essential part of the reading experience for Eastview students. Students’ quest for young adult literature with authentic situations surfaced often. Researchers Hughes-Hassell & Guild (2002) discuss the urban experience in recent young adult novels and emphasize how the characters, setting, and situations in these novels appeal to teens “just like them.” The students at Eastview clearly bore out this assertion.

Eastview School for Pregnant and Parenting Teens

Eastview provides students with an alternative to the mainstream high school about parenting and pre-natal care. The school’s mission to provide an alternative environment for pregnant and parenting teens is undergirded by the passage, in 1972, of Title IX, a federal law that, in part, established the legal existence of schools such as Eastview. Bob Schaefer, a veteran English teacher who has worked at Eastview for over twenty years, invited me to participate in the classroom and multiple field trips, including a trip to the city zoo and the local children’s museum. Though the discussion in this article does not directly draw on these experiences, I feel it is important to note that my participation in these out-of-school venues assisted me in understanding the students and the school in deeper ways.

During the 2005-2006 school year, there were between thirty and forty students between the ages of twelve and nineteen enrolled at any one time at Eastview. The students involved in this study self-identified as African-American, Hmong, Mexican-

that appeal to this particular population of students frequently feature an urban, inner-city environment. In my findings concerning Eastview teens’ understanding of place I found similar patterns.

Finally, Eastview students expressed a desire to relate to “what the characters were going through” in the texts they read. The plotline and

American, Latina, and White. Enrollment was limited to three semesters (approximately one and one-half years), so I interacted with many of the students throughout part of their pregnancy as well as after the birth of their children. Other students enrolled at Eastview for only one quarter. At the end of the school year several students graduated, while others returned to their “regular,” or “home,” high school, the high school they attended before enrolling at Eastview.

Selecting Young Adult Literature

For many students, reading had never been a desired activity. In an interview with Krystal Berns, a twelfth grade student, I learned that she had “never read until coming to [Eastview]. [She] never read a book cover to cover before.” Krystal elaborated more on her recent interest in reading by claiming that Mr. Schaefer was a teacher “who lets us read what we like to read. Not boring stuff like *Of Mice and Men*.” Krystal then told me that she was currently waiting for her favorite author, Omar Tyree, to write additional books because she had “read all of them. Maybe ten or eleven books.”

One week after beginning to put together book wish lists, new books started arriving in Mr. Schaefer’s classroom. He had been able to purchase books from each student’s wish list through utilizing the funds that were designated for new classroom materials. The books featured in Figure 1 list all the books that students put on their wish lists.

Throughout the duration of the wish list activity, Mr. Schaefer encouraged students to make reading a meaningful part of their lives. Instead of isolating reading as a “boring” activity only done in English class, he prompted students to expand their view of reading and start checking out books in the classroom to take them home to read.

Mr. Schaefer was positioned largely as the mediator in making students’ book choices become a reality. Throughout the unit, he also considered the consequences for the use of some of the texts listed in Figure 1. Some of these considerations about the content of the books exceed the scope of this article. However, the key aspect of featuring all of the books students put on their “wish lists” is to reinforce students’ agency in the selection of texts for their classroom. Figures 2, 3, and 4 move forward from this

Book title	Author	Copyright Date	Annotation
<i>Every Thug Needs a Lady</i>	Wahida Clark	2003	sequel to <i>Thugs and the Women Who Love Them</i> sexual content
<i>Tears of a Tiger</i>	Sharon Draper	1996	male-female relationships drinking and driving teen athlete's experience
<i>Holler If You Hear Me:</i>	Michael Eric Dyson	2002	relationship issues: family/ friends story of celebrity fallen rapper, Tupac Shakur
<i>The Skin I'm In</i>	Sharon Flake	2001	(Flake's books): African-American female experience
<i>Money Hungry</i>		2003	
<i>Begging for Change</i>		2004	
<i>Who am I without Him?:</i>		2004	
<i>The First Part Last</i>	Angela Johnson	2004	Coretta Scott King award teen father's experience
<i>Lost in the City</i>	Edward P. Jones	2004	African-American Experience triumph over struggle
<i>Whispers from the Dead</i>	Joan Lowery Nixon	1991	the supernatural female protagonist
<i>The Republic of East L.A.</i>	Luis J. Rodriguez	2002	gang violence triumph over difficult circumstances
<i>Push</i>	Sapphire	1997	female protagonist incest
<i>No Disrespect</i>	Sista Souljah	1996	(Souljah's books): female protagonists
<i>The Coldest Winter Ever</i>	Nikki Turner	2000	male-female relationships
<i>A Hustler's Wife</i>		2003	female protagonist triumph over difficult circumstances
<i>A Project Chick</i>	Omar Tyree	2003	male-female relationships teen mother's experience
<i>Flyy Girl</i>		1997	(Tyree's books): African-American experience
<i>Single Mom: A Novel</i>		1999	relationships
<i>For the Love of Money</i>		2001	triumph over difficult circumstances
<i>Leslie</i>		2002	
<i>Diary of a Groupie</i>		2003	
<i>Boss Lady</i>		2005	
<i>Girls from Da Hood 2</i>	K. Williams, J. Turner N. Turner, and Joy	2005	African-American female experience
<i>Like Sisters on the Homefront</i>	Williams-Garcia.	1995	teen pregnancy setting of the rural south

Figure 1. Books on Eaatview student's Wish Lists

“Sometimes you see these characters in these books [LaShaundra was holding the book *The Skin I’m In* by Sharon Flake] as real people. They are teen moms like us [students at Eastview] sometimes but they are not just that. And sometimes I think people just see us as teen moms.”

larger compilation of books to highlight texts that students noted, when speaking to me in interviews, as especially influential to them.

Educators who use young adult literature in their classrooms may observe that some of the titles featured in Figure 1 blur the lines between what might be considered young adult literature and what may be labeled as adult fiction. I have intentionally featured these “adult” books because the reality of Eastview students’ reading habits suggest that these books were highly influen-

tial in students’ lives. However, it would be a worthwhile investigation at a later time to consider how some of these texts challenge what has typically been considered to be young adult literature and how such texts may be valuable to students.

It is also important to note that Mr. Schaefer considered how to best meet the needs of his students through the book wish list activity. Although his original plan was to purchase two books from each student’s list, he eventually purchased most of the books featured in Figure 1 for the classroom library.

Constructing the “Self” through Young Adult Literature

LaShaundra Goodwin, a twelfth-grade student at Eastview, provided me with a summary of why young adult literature was so valuable to her not only as a teen mother, but also an adolescent, a student, and a daughter.

Sometimes you see these characters in these books [LaShaundra was holding the book *The Skin I’m In* by Sharon Flake] as real people. They are teen moms like us [students at Eastview] sometimes but they are not just that. And sometimes I think people just see us as teen moms. And, these books [young adult novels], they are like an inspiration. You know, like you can overcome.

LaShaundra’s comments about the book choices featuring characters who have “overcome” resonates with Doyle’s (2002) criteria for books that appeal to African American urban teens. Doyle emphasizes that characters in such books “must overcome one or more obstacles, whether it’s poverty, drugs, rape, teen pregnancy, HIV, violence, incest, or some other trauma” (174). Because all of the students at Eastview have been or currently are pregnant, they feel strongly that teen pregnancy is positioned by society as “an obstacle for them to overcome.” The characters who are portrayed as being successful teen parents are particularly strong characters and models for Eastview students. A few of these books were featured in Taneka Graff’s comments during an interview with me:

Taneka: “I like these books with teen moms in them . . . like LaShaundra said. They are “real.”

Heidi: “What are some of those books?”

Taneka: “Um, I just read *A Project Chick*. And then there’s the book about the teen dad. It’s called *The First Part Last*, I think. And *Imani all Mine* but that book is about more than just being a teen mom.

Taneka’s identification of books that featured teen parents was poignant and her comment about the book *Imani all Mine* was especially so. *Imani all Mine* (1999) features a teen mother who loses her baby due to a stray bullet and is a book that several of the students passed along to one another after they were finished reading it. LaTasha Jones, a twelfth grade student, summed up the books that spoke to teens’ concept of “self” as featuring not only a teen mother, but featuring a teen mother, who at the end of the book, is changed from who she was at the beginning of the book. LaTasha said, “I’ve learned who I am more as he’s [her baby, Aaron] gotten older. Like the moms in the books [books that feature teen mothers].”

Finding a Familiar “Place” through Young Adult Literature

In addition to characters who were teen mothers, several students expressed a desire for familiar settings. Although students recognized place in various ways, an environment that they could relate to

Book title	Author	Copyright Date	Annotation
<i>A Project Chick</i>	Nikki Turner	2003	teen mother's experience
<i>The First Part Last</i>	Angela Johnson	2004	Coretta Scott King award teen father's experience
<i>Imani all Mine</i>	Connie Rose Porter	1999	teen mother's experience violence death of a child
<i>The Skin I'm In</i>	Sharon Flake	2001	African American female experience relationships: female/ female

Figure 2: Book Choices that Students Spoke of as Challenging “Self” and/ or their Identity as a Teen Mother

resonated with them. Star Pates, a freshman, told me that she liked books that reminded her of Midcity, a large city she had lived in before moving to Lakeville, the smaller city in which Eastview was located. She noted that, “the scenes of the city seem real to me and I miss that.” Lakeville, a considerably smaller city than Midcity, was not “home” yet to Star (She had only lived in Lakeville for a little over two years). When I asked Star what books particularly reminded her of home, she noted books by Sharon Flake. She told me that she was excited about Flake writing more books because they “reminded her of home.”

Doyle (2002) identifies an “urban, inner-city environment” as one of the characteristics of fiction that appeals to African American urban teens. Many of the students at Eastview told me that they had moved from larger cities, such as Midcity, in recent years. Their search for books that featured more urban environments often reflected the place of the life they had before moving to Lakeville. *Like Sisters on the Homefront*, a book set, in part, in the rural south, was

also a favorite of students. LaTasha told me that she visited her grandmother who lived in Georgia each summer and she felt that the books reminded her of being there. Ayanna Bemis, a sophomore, commented that the “place” of a book matters because it “makes you feel like you’re there. The people in the book might be like you but the setting of the book is where it all happens.”

Figure 3 features books that students spoke of as being strong for the way they featured “setting,” or “place.”

The Quest for Authentic Situations as Portrayed in Young Adult Literature

Many students, like Destiny Greer, the student who was featured at the beginning of the article, were extremely excited about getting books they had selected by searching booksellers’ websites. In the process of selecting such books students were not afraid to express their opinions. One day, Jessi, a tenth

<i>The Skin I'm in</i>	Sharon Flake	2001	(Flake's books):
<i>Money Hungry</i>		2003	African-American
<i>Begging for Change</i>		2004	female experience
<i>Who am I without him?:</i>		2004	Relationships: family/ friends/ male-female
<i>Short Stories about Girls and the Boys in their Lives</i>			Relationships
<i>Like sisters on the Homefront</i>	Williams-Garcia	1995	teen pregnancy Setting of the rural south

Figure 3: Book choices that students spoke of as finding a familiar “place” through young adult literature

grade student in Mr. Schaefer's class, exclaimed, "I want a book about baby daddy drama. You know, like some fights and some jealousy. I like reading that kind of stuff."

Immediately, Mr. Schaefer responded to Jessi's statement. He rolled his eyes playfully and said, "Yeah. I knew that would be a big topic. Any of you find any baby daddy drama books?"

Mr. Schaefer's question was met with some looks from other students, but a more central force gave an

answer to his question. Ms. Bickmore, the school principal, was visiting Bob's classroom during that class hour and gave her own response to Jessi. As she put her hands on Jessi's shoulders, Ms. Bickmore asked Jessi why she wanted to read a book about fighting. Why didn't she prefer reading a book about men loving their wives and caring for their children?

Jessi remained still and looked down at her paper as Ms. Bickmore questioned her. I wondered at that moment how Jessi

would proceed with her book search.

This vignette raises a few key questions about Eastview students' reading choices: namely, "What is appropriate reading material for teens?" and "What content should pregnant and parenting teens be engaging with?" Although the principal, Ms. Bickmore, clearly shows her preference for guiding students toward reading material that affirms particular values concerning the relationship between men, women and children, Mr. Schaefer had a different method for encouraging students to become readers. His method was to provide what can be thought of as "high interest" reading material for students. High interest material did not have to match his agenda for what students read; rather, it had to speak to the lives and experiences of students. Mr. Schaefer shows in his answer to Jessi's question that his interest lies in

reaching out to find topics that engage his students and inspire them to read.

It is important to note that the identity work students have undertaken through reading does not always mean a desire to emulate characters or situations. Jessi, who wanted to read a book about "baby daddy drama," revealed how her understanding of finding books that related to her and her life was about much more than emulation. She told me in an interview:

"I mean, Ms. Bickmore [school principal] thinks we [students at Eastview School for Pregnant and Parenting Teens] just want to read these books for the drama and that's not true. We read them because we identify. And sometimes these people [the characters in the books] do stuff that's bad and make bad choices. But it's not like we don't know that."

Jessi's comments about the role that reading plays in students' lives reveals an understanding that young adult literature provides an important forum from which students engage in critical thinking, learning to critique elements of the books they read. As *identity*, through a sociocultural lens of literacy and learning, is always contextual, students are also able to recognize the contextual nature of characters' lives and identities. Jessi, in the comments above, shows her ability to not just relate to characters, but to also critique them.

One of the most essential features of books that students searched for was a mark of authenticity. In many interviews with students, this aspect of texts was described as "being real." Ayanna Bemis told me that, when searching for books that she thought she would like, she most looked for books that "were real. You know, like you could really see what was happening in the books happening in real life." Ayanna's choices of books that particularly struck her as "being real" are listed in Figure 4.

Promoting *Identity Work* as an Important Part of the Curriculum

Throughout this article, I have featured the voices of students at Eastview School for Pregnant and Parenting Teens and their perceptions of how young adult literature exists as a site for them to engage in identity work. Teen mothers' narratives speak to the ways that texts help them not only craft a sense of

Mr. Schaefer's question was met with some looks from other students, but a more central force gave an answer to his question. Ms. Bickmore, the school principal, was visiting Bob's classroom during that class hour and gave her own response to Jessi.

<i>Tears of a Tiger</i>	Sharon Draper	1996	drinking and driving teen athlete's experience relationship issues: family/ friends
<i>The skin I'm in</i>	Sharon Flake	2001	African American female experience relationships: female/ female
<i>The first part last</i>	Angela Johnson	2004	Coretta Scott King award teen father's experience
<i>Push</i>	Sapphire	1997	female protagonist incest

Figure 4: Book Choices that Students Spoke of as Reflecting “Authentic” Situations

“self” and relate to a familiarity of “place,” but also how these texts assist them in being critical thinkers. The benefits for teen mothers in selecting young adult literature for their classroom are featured in Figure 5.

Students at Eastview had a central part in selecting the books they read and this proved to be an essential component of providing authentic literacy instruction for this population of students. Since we already know through extensive research (e.g., Gamoran, Nystrand, Berends, & LePore, 1995; Nystrand, Gamoran, Kachur, and Prendergast, 1997) that instruction for adolescents labeled as “low ability,” or “at risk,” tends to be less authentic than instruction for higher-achieving students, it is especially important that English language arts teachers strive to incorporate principles into their pedagogy

- Students’ perspectives about text are validated (as opposed to just the teacher’s perspectives).
- Students are engaged in *identity work* when relating to characters in a text.
- Meaning-making through reading is encouraged and readers can take this skill into their future reading.
- Readers are actively encouraged to shape texts based on their own experiences. Because readers are encouraged to interact with text, the context of a text is not just the text itself, but also the extra-contextual (that which encompasses the reader’s experiences) is in relationship to a text.
- Students’ literate competencies that they bring to a text are validated.

Figure 5: Benefits for Teen Mothers in Selecting Young Adult Literature for their Classroom

and curriculum that allow students to be positioned as agents in their learning. And, it is especially important that convincing portraits of these possibilities are documented. To combat characterizations of “remedial” teaching for students who are labeled “at risk,” it is necessary to discuss how teaching and learning for students like those attending Eastview School for Pregnant and Parenting Teens is based on curriculum that invites students to interact and engage with texts and other learners.

Heidi L. Hallman is an assistant professor in the Department of Curriculum & Teaching at the University of Kansas, where she teaches graduate and undergraduate courses in the English Education program. Dr. Hallman’s research interests include the social and cultural dimensions of “at risk” students’ literacy learning and the preparation of prospective English teachers. Her work has appeared in the Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy, Equity & Excellence in Education, and English Journal (forthcoming). Before working in higher education, Dr. Hallman taught high school English.

*All names of people and places are pseudonyms.

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Literacy Letters:

Comparative Literature and Formative Assessment

As teachers who appreciate adolescent literature, we have often asked ourselves how we can include the amazing collection of books written for young adults into our classrooms. However, as high school English teachers, we feel pressured to assign classics such as *Romeo and Juliet* (Shakespeare) or *To Kill a Mockingbird* (Lee, 1960) to our students. Of course we know that simply assigning a book for students to read at home is ineffective. Many of our students cannot read these texts independently and others are not interested in them. Despite many attempts, we have yet to find a single book that will engage all of our students at the same moment in time. In the past, when we assigned a classic to the entire class, we invariably ended up orally summarizing the assigned reading so that we could have a class conversation about the content. The result was obvious; over time students did less reading because they knew we would do the thinking for them.

We are also university professors, so we see the long-range effects of this kind of disengagement. According to the National Survey of Student Engagement, an annual study of college students' learning experiences at 769 campuses, 20% of college freshmen reported that they "often" or "very often" come to class without reading assigned texts (NSSE, 2008). We believe the habit of failing to assume responsibility for their learning by completing reading assignments is first established in high school.

We are not alone in this dilemma. Teachers across the country struggle with motivating adolescents to read books they did not choose. In response, teachers

attempt to differentiate instruction such that all students read the same book at the same time (e.g., DeCourcy, Fairchild, & Follet, 2007). Others assign worksheets and give pop quizzes to enforce compliance. Still others give up completely and assign contemporary adolescent literature exclusively in hope of increasing the amount of reading their students do.

Each of these choices proved limiting in some way for our English classes. For one thing, we wanted to increase the amount of time students spent reading. We understood that increasing choice was an important component of increasing reading volume. We also wanted to be sure that we developed our students' understanding of the state content standards. And finally, we wanted students to experience literature as a force that can help them answer questions about themselves and the world. As such, we decided that we would no longer assess students' understanding of a single text, but, rather, that we would design prompts and other assignments that would encourage them to compare texts. This would allow us to teach from the classics, while actively making connections to a host of titles from which they could select. We theorized that comparative literature tasks would result in better learning outcomes, as opposed to the writing tasks we had assigned over the years that weren't much more than plot summaries. We designed our English classes using several research-based curricular design elements: 1) an essential question to encourage convergent thinking; 2) a common text to use as a platform for instruction; 3) a range of student-selected texts to differentiate and to broaden their

perspectives across cultures and experiences; and 4) a formative assessment task to allow for ongoing measurement of each student's progress.

A Single Focus: The Essential Question

The basis of our class would be essential questions. Consistent with the professional literature on essential questions, we wanted to focus on questions that did not have clear-cut answers (McKenzie, 2005). We wanted these questions to spark interest and wonder, and ultimately, original and meaningful answers. After much discussion, we reached agreement on the four questions that would guide our school year (one per quarter):

- What sustains us?
- If we can, should we?
- Does age matter?
- How do people attend to their health?

We also agreed that these questions would serve us for one year and that each year we would develop new questions that would allow for us to integrate new ideas and new books into our classes. Our plan was to create text pairings that would invite students to contemplate the essential question across time and genres. Therefore, we identified common texts, both classic and contemporary, to be read in class with the teacher. In this way, we would be able to marry the literary canon with adolescent and young adult literature.

Another important consideration was in choosing a range of texts that would allow for differentiation based on interest and skill. By offering a menu of titles, students could exercise their choice. Books were nominated for the list based on two criteria—we had to have read it ourselves and we had to be able to articulate a connection to the question. We prepared a list of titles grouped by relative difficulty (see Figure 1) and shared each title with the students as a brief book talk. Because the adult who read a particular book couldn't always be physically present, we bought copies of *500 Great Books for Teens* (Silvey, 2006) and other respected lists and wrote our names next to each book we had read. Students could consult the lists and find the adult who could discuss his or her recommendations. In addition, we made sure that the selected books represented several genres, including informational texts, graphic novels, and collections of shorter pieces.

With choice, however, comes responsibility. Therefore, we knew we needed to develop assignments that caused students to become aware of their rationale for selecting (and occasionally, for abandoning) a title. In addition, we wanted students to link their books to the literary instruction occurring in the class. Because students would be reading a broad range of titles, we also knew that we would need to confer on a regular basis with each of them. Inspired by Atwell's (2007) letter-essays that her students write once they have finished a book, we developed a weekly literacy letter assignment. In this way, we hoped that students would consider how his or her chosen book converged with other literature, and what this meant to them as readers. The weekly literacy letter assignment became our chief formative assessment tool for gauging the progress of each reader.

Multiple Expressions: The Literacy Letter

We introduced literacy letters to students during the first week of school as a means for journaling directly with the teacher. Each Friday, students wrote a letter about their selected text to the teacher that consisted of three parts. We asked them to include the title and author of the book in the introductory paragraph to help us recall what they were reading, and to update us on the plot developments thus far. For the last section of the letter, we invited students to comment on how they were feeling about the book to this point, and to give it a rating from 1 to 10. Our intention was to elevate their awareness of the rhythms of a reader's response as it ebbs and flows across a book so as to prevent early abandonment of a book. In addition, we reminded them that they needed to tell us why they were assigning a particular rating—not just that “it's a perfect 10” but also to pay attention to the ways in it appealed to their reading sensibilities. At times these took on a confessional tone, as when one student candidly told us, “I did not read [over winter break] because I had chores and I was lazy.” Figure 2 contains a peer-editing checklist used by students for the format of the letters.

The middle section of the letter served as the centerpiece each week and allowed us to tailor each assignment to fit the week's instruction. Sometimes we asked students to think about their own reading habits:

What sustains us? Common Texts for Entire Class		<i>Stuck in Neutral</i> (Trueman) <i>Lord of the Flies</i> (Golding)
High Interest Books You Can Read Easily <i>Al Capone Does My Shirts</i> (Choldenko) <i>Becoming Naomi León</i> (Ryan) <i>Chew on This</i> (Schlosser) <i>Esperanza Rising</i> (Ryan) <i>Fever 1793</i> (Anderson) <i>Lizzy Bright and the Buckminster Boy</i> (Schmidt) <i>Phineas Gage: A Gruesome but True Story About Brain Science</i> (Fleischman) <i>Cruise Control</i> (Trueman) <i>Among the Hidden</i> (Haddox) <i>Gathering Blue</i> (Lowry) <i>A Child Called It</i> (Pelzer) <i>Fahrenheit 451</i> (Bradbury) <i>Habibi</i> (Nye, 1997)	Young Adult Books That Might Challenge Your Thinking and Reading Skills <i>Define “Normal”</i> (Peters) <i>Mountains Beyond Mountains</i> (Farmer) <i>The House on Mango Street</i> (Cisneros) <i>The Life of Pi</i> (Martel) <i>The Outsiders</i> (Hinton) <i>The Pigman</i> (Zindel) <i>The Secret Life of Bees</i> (Kidd) <i>To Kill a Mockingbird</i> (Lee) <i>Twilight</i> (Meyer) <i>Tuesdays With Morrie</i> (Albom) <i>When Plague Strikes: The Black Death, Small Pox, AIDS</i> (Giblin) <i>Silent to the Bone</i> (Konigsberg) <i>Things Fall Apart</i> (Achebe)	Complex but Very Interesting Books that Require Thought and Perhaps Effort <i>Best American Science Writing of 2006</i> (Gawande) <i>Guns, Germs and Steel</i> (Diamond) <i>Into Thin Air</i> (Krakauer) <i>Love in the Time of Cholera</i> (Marquez) <i>The Great Influenza: The Story of the Deadliest Pandemic in History</i> (Barry) <i>Siddhartha</i> (Hesse) <i>My Stroke of Insight</i> (Taylor) <i>The Bluest Eye</i> (Morrison) <i>Romeo and Juliet</i> (Shakespeare) <i>One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest</i> (Kesey) <i>The Awakening</i> (Chopin) <i>Catcher in the Rye</i> (Salinger) <i>The God of Small Things</i> (Roy)
If we can, should we? Common Texts for Entire Class		“The Lottery” (Jackson) 1984 (Orwell)
High Interest Books You Can Read Easily <i>The Skin I’m In</i> (Flake) <i>Eleanor Roosevelt: A Life of Discovery</i> (Freedman) <i>The First Part Last</i> (Johnson) <i>A Step from Heaven</i> (Na) <i>A Tree Grows in Brooklyn</i> (Smith) <i>Inkheart</i> (Funke) <i>The Heart of a Chief</i> (Bruchac) <i>Hoot</i> (Hiaasen) <i>Patrol: An American Soldier in Vietnam</i> (Myers) <i>Mud City</i> (Ellis) <i>Spirited Away</i> (Mizuyaki) <i>Shipwreck at the Bottom of the World</i> (Armstrong) <i>A Children’s Story</i> (Clavell) <i>Touching Spirit Bear</i> (Mikaelsen) <i>Wringer</i> (Spinelli)	Young Adult Books That Might Challenge Your Thinking and Reading Skills <i>Feed</i> (Anderson) <i>Speak</i> (Anderson) <i>Whale Talk</i> (Crutcher) <i>Like Water for Chocolate</i> (Esquivel) <i>A Lesson Before Dying</i> (Gaines) <i>Frida: A Biography of Frida Khalo</i> (Herrera) <i>Blue Diary</i> (Hoffman) <i>Girl with a Pearl Earring</i> (Chevalier) <i>Soldier’s Heart</i> (Paulsen) <i>Maus</i> (Spiegelman) <i>Joy Luck Club</i> (Tan) <i>The Boy in the Striped Pajamas</i> (John) <i>In Code: A Mathematical Journey</i> (Flannery) <i>The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time</i> (Haddon)	Complex but Very Interesting Books that Require Thought and Perhaps Effort <i>Best of the Brain from Scientific American</i> (Bloom) <i>My Antonia</i> (Cather) <i>The Hours</i> (Cunningham) <i>Catch-22</i> (Heller) <i>Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress</i> (Sijie) <i>Native Son</i> (Wright) <i>Persopolis</i> (Sartrapi) <i>Beowulf</i> (trans. Raffel) <i>Opening Skinner’s Box</i> (Slater) <i>Madness: A Brief History</i> (Porter) <i>Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting by in America</i> (Erhenreich) <i>Hamlet</i> (Shakespeare) <i>Beloved</i> (Morrison) <i>Amazing Grace</i> (Metaxas) <i>Savage Inequalities</i> (Kozol) <i>The Prince</i> (Machiavelli) <i>A Personal Matter</i> (Oe) <i>The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down</i> (Fadiman)

Figure 1. Companion books for “What sustains us?” and “If we can, should we?” essential questions.

Name _____	
Date _____	
Literacy Letter Peer Edit Check List	
1. Literacy Letter Format	/2
• Date	
• Greeting	
• Body – indent 1st line of paragraphs	
• Closing – not indented	
• Signature – name capitalized?	
• Rating	
• Two paragraphs	
2. Paragraph #1	/2
Name of book, author, update on your book (where are you in the book and what is happening?)	
3. Paragraph #2	/2
Answer the prompt for the week using complete sentences.	
4. Mechanics	/2
Typed, double-spaced, 12 Times New Roman font, black ink	
Spelling – spell check?	
Capitalization	
There are no run-on sentences	
There are no incomplete sentences	
Do your sentences make sense?	
5. Letter turned in on time	/2
Total	/10

Figure 2. Peer editing checklist.

What do you like as a reader during school? Be honest with yourself as you reflect on your reading. Do you spend your time during independent reading engaged in a book? Are you focused? Distracted? Do you like talking about your book with a teacher? Do you ever read during lunch, before, or after school?

Knowing that skilled writing requires close reading of the works of other writers, we structured some letters to focus attention on the craft employed by their authors:

This week you will not write a second paragraph. Instead, we would like a bulleted list of 5 sentences in your book where a transitional word is being used. Remember, these are words like consequently, moreover, furthermore, nonetheless, etc. These words can also be found in the middle of sentences with a semi-colon and a comma. Please include the sentence and the page number where this sentence was found.

And of course, many of the literacy letter assignments invited students to make connections between the

common and selected texts. This lies at the heart of comparative literature, and a critical approach to what is read. Consider the following literacy letter assignment that refers to the common text at that time, *Rash* by Pete Hautman (2007), a dystopian novel set about subjugating male aggression in the United Safer States of America:

The setting of a book can be very important to understanding what is happening. There is a reason why the author chooses a particular setting. Choosing an alternative setting could greatly affect what the characters do and say.

Think about *Rash* (Hautman, 2007) for a minute. There is a reason why the author chose to have the penal institution located in the cold climate of Canada. The story would be very different if the prison was located in sunny southern California. The inmates would have an easier time playing football in the sunshine without the threat of polar bears. Clearly, the author wanted to create as harsh conditions as possible.

Now think about your book. What is the book's setting?

- (1) Include where the book takes place AND the time period.
- (2) Explain if the book has multiple settings or just one.
- (3) Finally, write whether you think this was a good choice for the setting or if you think the author should have written about a different place and time. If you think so, be sure to write exactly where and when you think the book should take place.

The letters were designed to build upon one another each week, so that students engaged in a form of dialogic journaling about each book (see Figure 3 for other assignment examples). During weekly individual conferences with students, we invited them to look over previous letters to notice patterns in their thinking and motivation. For instance, Ray, who was reading *Into Thin Air: A Personal Account of the Mt. Everest Disaster* (Krakauer, 1999) read over his literacy letters and said,

At first I was bored by all the technical stuff—like, I didn't really care about learning all that junk about how you climb a mountain. But I kept reading and I started to figure out why he [the author] added all that. I could see that you really had to have these skills to climb, and that some of the people didn't have that knowledge.

Our students surprised and delighted us with the range of responses in their literacy letters. Patrick, for example, among the most struggling readers in the school, said that he “never read a book in middle school.” He selected *A to Z Mysteries: The Bald Bandit*

Literacy Letter 1:

In your letter this week, write about the book's genre and any connections you may have with the book. Can you connect and identify with the characters? Does this book remind you of any other book you have read? Does this book make you think of anything that is happening in the world? This prompt can be answered no matter what the genre is! Don't forget to rate your book 1-10!

Literacy Letter 2:

In your letter this week start with "I didn't agree with . . ." or "I don't understand . . ." Explain why you feel this way or what you didn't understand. Don't forget to share how you rated the book!

Literacy Letter 3:

This week start your letter by writing "If I were the author . . ." As you write you might want to think about what you like or dislike about the characters, the decisions they've made, the sequence of events, the setting, and style of writing.

Do not forget to write this in the FORM OF A LETTER! That means with a date, a greeting, a body, and the closing! As always, remember to rate your book!

Literacy Letter 4:

In this week's literacy letter, please write about the theme of your book. What is the dominant idea the author is trying to convey? Stick to this prompt! Support your answer with specific quotations from the book. Be sure to write the page number. For example, on page 72, the author writes "She wept uncontrollably at the sight of the limp, bloody, dog. The thought of this loss in her life was too much to bear." This is one example of how the author is writing about death.

Do not forget to write this in the FORM OF A LETTER! That means with a date, a greeting, a body, and the closing! As always, remember to rate your book!

Literacy Letter #5:

In your letter this week please write about the author's purpose. Why do you think the author wrote this book? Some reasons authors write are to inform or teach, entertain, persuade, or convince. Use direct quotations and page numbers to support your answer. For example, in *Stuck in Neutral*, author Terry Trueman writes to entertain and inform the reader about cerebral palsy. I know this because on page 45, he writes "I love the feeling of escaping from my screwed up, worthless body. I love my seizures!" Of course, you will add many more details. Be sure to write the name of the author and the title of the book (and don't forget to underline the title). As always, rate your book!

(Roy, 1997). While this is a very easy book to read, it helped Patrick think about the question "if we can, should we?" His response to analyzing the setting surprised us, given his lack of experience with reading. Patrick wrote:

This book takes place like outside in a regular neighborhood, maybe in the front lawn. I haven't got too far in the book, but I think it is going to have multiple settings because right now they are in the front lawn, but maybe they will end up in a bank, because on the cover of the book there is a bald guy buy a bank and money. I think this is a good place for the setting because where else could you set up a bank robbing, so I think this setting is good. They could rob other things, but not in this book because this is a bank robbing book.

Sean also surprised when he reflected on his own behavior while reading *Flowers for Algernon* (Keyes, 2005). Sean wasn't always the nicest person to have around and some of his peers were giving him feedback about his behavior. In talking about Charlie, from the book, Sean considers his own behavior:

Charlie is starting to speak for himself and be far more independent. He also is becoming a little rude and arrogant towards the people who are trying to help him. I guess I'm like that sometimes. I don't mean to be rude, but they tell me I am. When I know the answer, sometimes I get mad at people who don't know. It makes the class go slow.

When I knew the math answer yesterday, I made fun of Martha because she didn't. Then her friends turned on me. I guess it wasn't right for me to do that. Charlie also sees the old Charlie and doesn't want to go back. He feels as though the old Charlie is waiting for the perfect time to take control again and take him back into the darkness. I can see how that can happen.

Importantly, an analysis of the weekly literacy letters led to teaching points for small groups of students or the whole class. As such, the literacy letters became an authentic formative assessment tool useful in lesson planning.

Letters As Formative Assessments

Importantly, an analysis of the weekly literacy letters led to teaching points for small groups of students or the whole class. As such, the literacy letters became

Figure 3. Sample literacy letter assignments.

an authentic formative assessment tool, useful in lesson planning. By reading the letters, we were able to identify instructional needs related to grammar and mechanics. When we noticed a pattern, such as the misuse of their, there, and they're, we met with a small group of students who made the error and guided their learning accordingly. The whole class did not need this particular lesson given that only a few students still struggled with this information.

The literacy letters also allowed us to check for understanding of state content standards. For example, while studying the setting, several students identified wildly inappropriate alternative settings for their

books. This told us that our whole class lessons on setting were not effective and that we needed to review this content. When students started noticing literary devices such as personification, symbolism, metaphor, foreshadowing, and flashbacks, we knew that they had developed increased understanding of

this standard and that our instruction was headed in the right direction.

The literacy letters repeatedly proved an excellent means of formative assessment. Useful information was provided, for example, when Lexie identified the following three sentences for a prompt that requested five sentences in which the author uses transition words:

- And then the man was out the door. [pg. 35]
- And this time Nina was sure the boys were whispering to Alia, telling her not to say anything else. [pg. 42]
- And when they were thirsty, they had to go to the dampest part of the cave and lick the wall. [pg. 55]

Given that Lexie only provided three examples (out of five requested) and that they each started with “and,” we knew that she wasn’t quite sure what transition words were. If there were other students whose letters indicated the same level of understanding, we would have met with a small group. If lots of students demonstrated that they were unsure of this content, we could have addressed this as a whole

class. But in this case, it was just Lexie who needed additional instructional support to learn this content. And the literacy letter, written based on book she had chose to read (*Among the Betrayed*, Haddix, 2003), provided us insights into a student who might have otherwise been missed.

Future Focus: Expanding Comparative Literature in High School

Our interpretation of comparative literature for ninth grade students was to introduce them to a broader range of western and non-western literature that would reach across time, especially through the use of contemporary titles. In addition, we wanted to expose them to writers from other countries, and to familiarize them with authors who in the past had not been widely represented, especially female and nonwhite authors. A major challenge with this age group is in locating international, and especially non-western literature that is also accessible to high school students. Therefore, many of the titles chosen represent experiences of people from other cultures, but are written by western authors. We hope to continue to expand our repertoire of appropriate international literature over time. As well, because we expected that most of them would not be widely read in titles from the canon, we understood that eliminating those would be to do a disservice to our students. Therefore, we attempted to balance our lists with these considerations in mind.

We have found that the use of essential questions, pairing common texts with student-selected pieces, and ongoing formative assessment in the form of literacy letters has proved invaluable to our students. The volume of reading has increased, as evidenced by the number of titles students are now asking about. In addition, the teacher recommendation logs have expanded to include students as well. We regularly find student names inked into the margins of the class book lists, alongside ours. By inviting a comparative literature approach for high school students, we believe we are preparing them to assume greater responsibility for their own learning. And in a few years, when some of them are students in our university courses, there will be no excuse for showing up to class without having read!

If lots of students demonstrated that they were unsure of this content, we could have addressed this as a whole class.

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2009 NCTE Excellence in Poetry Award

Lee Bennett Hopkins is the 15th winner of the NCTE Award for Excellence in Poetry for Children.° A distinguished poet, writer, and anthologist, Lee has created numerous books for children and adults throughout his career.

NCTE recognizes and fosters excellence in children's poetry by encouraging its publication and by exploring ways to acquaint teachers and children with poetry through such means as publications, programs, and displays.° As one means of accomplishing this goal, NCTE established its Award for Excellence in Poetry for Children in 1977 to honor a living American poet for his or her aggregate work for children ages 3–13.

Lee Bennett Hopkins will be honored at the Books for Children Luncheon and at°a Poetry Session during the NCTE°Annual Convention in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, in November.

Social Upheaval and Psychological Scarring:

Exploring the Future in Meg Rosoff's *How I Live Now*

It would be much easier to tell this story if it were all about a chaste and perfect love between Two Children Against the World at an Extreme Time in History but let's face it that would be a load of crap. (Rosoff 46)

Daisy, the sardonic narrator of Meg Rosoff's *How I Live Now*, knows the tale she shares is going to trouble the waters of her audience's sense of normalcy. She knows it, flaunts it, and demands it. She wants to stir her audience out of any sense of complacency, lest we miss the significance of her story. Her tale is one of survival in the midst of war, a familiar theme in young adult literature. This novel, however, explores not the past experiences of war, but the ways in which war might impact life in the future. *How I Live Now* is a critically acclaimed novel that has won several awards, including the Printz award and the Guardian Children's Fiction Prize. Reviewers have praised the novel as "sweet and sinister, innocent and irreverent, implausible but not impossible" (Faust 31) and a "likely future classic" (Guardian). The recognition the novel has received makes it a compelling case for analyzing how young adult literature envisions life in the future. What picture does *How I Live Now* paint? What is the meaning in the implied contrast between the life lived now and the life lived before? The issues presented in *How I Live Now* engage the reader in speculation about the conditions resulting from armed conflict in the age of global terror. Although the novel shares similarities with other young adult literature about the trauma of past wars, *How I Live Now* offers a distinctly contemporary view of war and its impact on youth.

The war that sets the context for the novel reflects the global age of terror in which warfare is not the exclusive prerogative of nation states. In the global age of terror, collectives of ideologically aligned individuals wreak destruction and engage in prolonged warfare. In contrast to "traditional warfare" wherein war "has meant a clash of wills between opposing military forces on the field of battle, from which one side usually (though not always) emerged as a recognizable winner" (Mazarr), war in the global age of terror has become something altogether more amorphous. Combatants may be nation states but may also be a small band of extremists; warfare may involve guns and bullets, but may also involve bioweapons, psychological warfare, information warfare, and technological warfare. Most significantly, the prospect of future warfare invokes the radical possibility of the end of civilization. Living under the specter of such potential devastation proves not easy. Part of our work as humans is to come to terms with the very real circumstances of our current situation. One way we do this, of course, is through exploring literature that considers issues which face us. Understanding the nature of the social and psychological dimensions of the global age of terror offers readers of *How I Live Now* a way to see the novel as more than the story of one individual character and, instead, to view it more fully as a means of speaking to, for, and about a generation of readers who must come to terms with the social and psychic consequences of living in an age of such uncertainty.

Before exploring the social and psychological dimensions of life in the future as presented in *How I*

Live Now, a brief summary of the plot provides a necessary base for discussion. The novel is set in England in the indeterminate future. Life does not seem so different from life today until the violence of global conflict erupts, setting the context for the plot of the story. Rosoff employs a first-person narrative voice in which Daisy addresses the reader as she gives an accounting of what has led her into her current circumstances. In an interesting stylistic move, Rosoff allows Daisy to use unconventional capitalization to emphasize strong and often sarcastic sentiments. Daisy also shifts tenses as she tells her story, thus lending immediacy to the storytelling event.

The novel is divided into two sections. The first opens with a brief chapter in which Daisy introduces herself and sets the context for her narrative. Daisy, a world-weary, 15-year-old New Yorker, has been sent to England to stay with her cousins as her father and stepmother adjust to life with a new baby. Daisy's subsequent resentment toward the circumstances is unequivocal. However, she is fascinated by the apparent inversion of social control she finds in the world her cousins inhabit. It is a strange world to Daisy (and, indeed, perhaps to many readers) in which 14-year old Edmond smokes without censure, animals and kids live together in a peaceful menagerie, and adults abdicate the responsibility of managing daily living to the children. The setting that Daisy encounters is reminiscent of the particular strand of British children's literature in which rural living is romanticized as country houses with hidden passages, fecund landscape, and children left to play with little adult supervision. The situation suits Daisy, and she quickly feels safe and secure in the house and imagines she has belonged there for a long time (9). This is significant because it is clear that Daisy has long had deep feelings of alienation and depression. This is

Understanding the nature of the social and psychological dimensions of the global age of terror offers readers of *How I Live Now* a way to see the novel as more than the story of one individual character and, instead, to view it . . . as a means of speaking to, for, and about a generation of readers who must come to terms with the social and psychic consequences of living in an age of such uncertainty.

most clearly illustrated in her eating disorder in which self-starvation symbolizes her emotional hunger.

Daisy's inner battle to find security mirrors the external global conflict. From the start of the narrative, the shadowy threat of war hangs over Daisy and her cousins. Shortly after Daisy arrives, Aunt Penn departs for Oslo to give a speech on the threat of war. Aunt Penn never returns, setting the stage for the children's forced independence. It is not long before the threat of war morphs into the presence of war, as bombs go off in London. Soon war expands to a global scale, though it is still unclear exactly who is at war with whom. Initially, the crisis of the war seems to have little impact on the lives of the children. They go about their daily lives, albeit in the context of uncertainty. As the war escalates and rumors about its cause abound, Daisy avows little interest in it. Ironically, Daisy comes to find a renewed interest in

life despite the erupting chaos around her. It is not the international crisis that fuels Daisy's new-found energy, but the intense sexual and emotional relationship she develops with her cousin Edmond. Daisy recognizes that her relationship with Edmond is unconventional, but she rationalizes the relationship as an event beyond her control, much like the war. In her typically over-the-top manner, she narrates:

Let's try to understand that falling into a sexual and emotional thrall with an underage blood relative hadn't been on my list of Things to Do while visiting England, but I was coming around to the belief that whether you liked it or not, Things Happen and once they start happening you pretty much have to hold on for dear life and see where they drop you when they stop. (47)

Daisy casts her concern about the war strictly in terms of how it affects her. Recognizing that she ought to feel compassion and interest, she boldly declares, "No matter how much you put on a sad expression

and talked about how awful it was that all those people were killed and what about democracy and the Future of Our Great Nation the fact that none of us kids said out loud was that WE DIDN'T REALLY CARE (43).” Soon the war does impact her, however, as unrest and confusion sweep from the cities to the countryside. The cousins’ house is sequestered by the military and the children are separated by gender. Daisy and nine-year-old Piper are sent to live with a family while Edmond, his twin Isaac, and sixteen-year-old Osbert are sent to a camp facility. Daisy realizes that in order for them to survive, she and Piper must be reunited with the boys. Through a difficult and dangerous journey accentuated by war’s brutality and horror, Daisy leads Piper back to their house where they marginally survive. The first section of the novel concludes with the phone ringing and Daisy recognizing the voice at the other end.

The second and briefer section of the novel begins six years later. Daisy narrates this section with a more mature voice, one deeply rooted in her will to survive. She had been sent back to New York, she reveals, where she was hospitalized. Finally released, she

worked at the library and waited for the war to end. Now, some six years later, she is journeying back to England to reunite with Edmond, Piper, and the rest of her cousins. The novel ends with Daisy attending to a psychologically-scarred Edmond. “I have no idea how damaged Edmond is,” she writes. “I just know that he needs peace and he needs to be loved. And both those things I can do” (193).

How I Live Now inscribes the ultimate

power of love as a healing force. Toward the end of her story, Daisy reflects, “I was dying, of course, but then we all are. Every day, in perfect increments, I was dying of loss. The only help for my condition, then as now, is that I refused to let go of what I loved” (168). Daisy’s love for Edmond and the rest of the family saves her, and, presumably, will eventually save Edmond. The reader, however, is left with the implied

question: Will such love be enough to save the world? By juxtaposing the power of love against the power of global terror, *How I Live Now* pushes readers to acknowledge the twenty-first century demand that society act to avoid the catastrophic loss of life and meaning.

Along with the message about the enduring power of love, a close examination of the depiction of war and its social and psychological impact on the characters reveals that adolescents in this future will bear a heavy burden. The novel paints a bleak picture of the social breakdown that accompanies war in the age of global terrorism. Adults are remarkably distracted, displaying little ability to actively care for the welfare of the young. Early in the story, Aunt Penn departs for anti-war work in Norway and never returns. Daisy learns much later that Aunt Penn had been shot when she tried to return to her family. The symbolic importance of Aunt Penn’s absence illustrates the preoccupation adults have with the business of war, a theme that recurs in the novel. After weeks of the children living alone and “carrying on our happy little life of underage sex, child labor and espionage” (57), a doctor comes to the house. He visits not to check on the welfare of the children but to see if the household has any prescription drugs which can be contributed to the war effort. It is only when the military sequesters the home that adults make a move to shelter the children. Ironically, Daisy and Piper are sent to live with a family, Major McEvoy and his wife, who seem to provide information rather than protection. It is from Major McEvoy that Daisy learns about the numerous infrastructure problems crippling the country. “Later Major M told us you’d be amazed at the number of things that can go wrong for civilians in a war,” Daisy recounts. “Once you start thinking about all that stuff that wasn’t working it’s kind of hard to know where it all ends” (84).

The chaos that ensues in the social fabric—disease, technology failures, food shortages, fuel shortages, vigilante groups—echoes the chaotic nature of the information Daisy learns about the war. From the first mention of the possibility of war, it is clear that Daisy does not understand the specific causes of the conflict. What becomes increasingly clear as the novel unfolds is that neither do the adults. Shortly after the first bomb attacks, the adults in the village spout contradictory “crackpot theories” about the cause and conditions of the war (41). Later, when

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Daisy is with the McElvoys, she observes, “I didn’t really understand The Occupation because it didn’t seem like the kind of War we all knew and loved from your average made-for-TV miniseries” (86). When, toward the end of the novel, she describes a ceasefire of sorts, the war is not a political event but a catastrophic social event: “It was only a few months ago that there was finally a pause in the thousands of wars being waged all over the planet. Or was it one big war? I forget. I think everyone has.” (171). The lack of clear information about the war symbolizes not so much the failure of the information infrastructure but the nature of conflict in a terrorist age. When there are no clear demarcations between the “good guys” and the “enemies,” when battlefronts are not empty fields but shopping malls, when weapons are as likely to be bullets as germs, the control and flow of information is also subject to confusion and chaos.

While the social conditions of future war depicted in *How I Live Now* are disturbing, the psychological consequences of life in times of terror are equally troubling. Living in this age necessitates psychological adaptation to the possibility that the narrative of human life—perhaps all life—may be destroyed. Psychologist Robert Jay Lifton argues that the threat of nuclear annihilation has become “a shadow that persistently intrudes upon our psychology” (3). While nuclear weapons are not specifically named in *How I Live Now*, the psychology of the characters, Daisy in particular, exemplifies what Lifton terms *radical futurelessness*—a concept that acknowledges the possibility that war and/or industrial technology has the potential to extinguish life and sever the biological narrative. This possibility is so grave, so unimaginable, that while we hold that possibility to be true, we simultaneously engage in thinking and behaviors that shield us from the enormity of potential destruction. This theme is woven throughout the novel as Daisy displays multiple ways of denying the extreme conditions in which she lives.

One way of coping with this potential threat to human culture is through cynicism that masks Daisy’s utter detachment from meaningful human interaction. We see this in her sarcasm toward every potential source of disruption in her life. She reminisces, for example, about her stepmother: “Davina the Diabolical, who sucked my father’s soul out through his you know what then got herself knocked up with the devil’s spawn” (11). Just as she greets the coming of

her step-sibling with sarcasm and detachment, she professes disinterest in the brewing global conflict: “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). Placing such cynicism in the context of the global age of terror situates it as part of an array of psychological responses to genuine threats to humanity’s future and past. Given the number of potential sources of threat and the minimal influence many individuals feel they can exercise against such threats, cynicism can serve as a powerful psychological defense mechanism. Daisy’s character illustrates this in ways that may chafe some readers but nonetheless reminds us of how difficult it can be to cope with the psychological realities of modern society.

Another such mode of psychological response to the threat of potential extinction is the seeking of transcendent states. Lifton points out that humans have long sought transcendent states as a means of enlightenment and that the pursuit of intense highs is not a result of living in the nuclear age (76-77). However, with the intensity of crisis as experienced in the global age of terror, transcendent states are especially powerful as a means of experiencing an alternative to extinction (77). Daisy’s experiences with Edmond create such a transcendent state. Edmond’s first kiss fills Daisy with strong pleasure: “And after a little while of this my brain and my body and every single inch of me that was alive was flooded with the

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feeling that I was starving, starving, starving for Edmond. And what a coincidence, that was the feeling I loved best in the world” (45). She describes the intensity of their sexual attraction: “And sometimes we had to stop, just because we were raw and exhausted and humming humming humming with something we didn’t even have the strength left to do anything about” (54). The connection between Daisy and Edmond was spiritual as well as physical. From the

While the romantic overtones of this bond have a natural teenage appeal, the powerful psychosexual characteristic of the relationship between Daisy and Edmond exemplifies her search for escape from the realities of her world.

first time they meet, Daisy senses that Edmond can read her thoughts. Later, when they are separated, she draws upon their psychic connection by achieving a transcendent state: “I had to be in a certain state of mind—quiet, distracted, sometimes half asleep—and then I might feel a kind of aura, a lightening of the space behind my eyes and I’d know he was there” (89). The intensity of their connection is such that he can read her mind and she can, at times, see what he sees. While the romantic

overtones of this bond have a natural teenage appeal, the powerful psychosexual characteristic of the relationship between Daisy and Edmond exemplifies her search for escape from the realities of her world.

At the other end of the spectrum from the seeking of transcendent states is the tendency for humans to cope with the psychological burden of global terrorism through psychic numbing. Numbing occurs when feeling is suppressed because the intensity is too difficult or overwhelming to reconcile (Lifton 100-105). Daisy exhibits psychic numbing on multiple occasions early in her narrative. For example, when the first bombs hit London, she remarks that “something like seven or seventy thousand people got killed” (24). Her indifference to the number of casualties is indicative of her deadened sense of connection to others. This is apparent, too, in her admission to Edmond that she thinks about dying in the context of making other people feel guilty (44). As Daisy’s relationship with

Edmond becomes a source of life for her, she awakens to the presence of life all around her. In the midst of war, she sees that England was “drowning in fertility” (52) as roses bloomed and animals roamed free. She counters this recognition with her awareness that the personal security she is feeling is threatened by the war: “I didn’t know if we would be taken prisoner, tortured, murdered, raped, forced to confess or inform on our friends” (56). Perhaps the intensity of such threats enables her to connect so deeply with Edmond and his family. This connection serves as a source of life for Daisy: “The only thing I knew for certain was that all around me was more life than I’d ever experienced in all the years I’d been on earth” (56).

It is this sense of life that propels Daisy onward and eventually surfaces in her ability to replace the falsely imposed hunger for psychological alienation with an intense hunger for life. Daisy reflects that “somewhere along the line I’d lost the will not to eat” (159). A powerful hunger for life accompanies this renewed appetite for food: “By saving Piper I saved myself, and all the things that might have killed us were also the things that saved us. Saved from the ravages of war by stubbornness and ignorance and an insatiable hunger for love” (193). Daisy’s reengagement with living resonates in part with characters Millicent Lenz terms *biophiles*. In her study of nuclear-age children’s literature, Lenz argues that a deep commitment to life beyond oneself sets apart successful protagonists in nuclear-age fiction:

I believe a new heroic voice must be found to address the human predicament meaningfully in a world permeated by fear of global catastrophe. Survival itself is now the first condition, but mere physical survival cannot suffice. We need to survive with our specifically human qualities of choice, love, and reverence for the dignity of all life still intact if life is to continue to be worth living. (xv)

While Daisy’s affirmation that life is worth living is demonstrated through her complete devotion to Edmund, their garden (itself symbolic of life), and their extended family, it is not clear whether her commitment to nurturing life encompasses the global community. It seems more likely that—given Daisy’s steadfast devotion to life as she experiences it with her cousins—the love that provides healing and hope is one circumscribed by her immediate relationships. Christine Wilkie-Stibbs suggests the garden at the end of the novel represents a separation of the characters

from the world:

The novel ends with the damaged survivors cultivating a garden, removed once again from the outside world but with the violence it has inflicted on them inscribed in their seemingly seriously curtailed subjectivities and emblemized in the eponymous way they live now (254).

The reader can certainly appreciate Daisy's desire for isolation from the world when the forces of global terrorism impinged upon their world. Contemporary society has little to offer them, it seems. It is easier, safer, and altogether saner in the context of this novel to isolate oneself from the reach of global terror. The problem, of course, is that the possibility for such isolation does not exist in reality. Daisy and her cousins may tend their garden and sow seeds of love, but in the world outside the novel, real predicaments exist that threaten the security of today's youth. In a review of the research on the psychological consequences of children's exposure to war, Paramjit Joshi and Deborah O'Donnell describe the impact of war on those most vulnerable:

Any war or act of terror, as a sudden, unpredictable, and dramatic event has a tremendous negative impact at various levels including the community, family, and individual. War encompasses exposure to trauma-related events, which may become chronic . . . often leading to marked disruptions in the contextual and social fabric within which one lives. Children are usually affected most by these experiences (276).

Daisy's story is the story of one character. Grim numbers tell a different story: according to a study done in 2000, an estimated 12 million children around the world had been displaced in the previous decade as a result of conflict (Shaw). The violence, environmental stress, and social upheaval these children have been exposed to is shocking. Faced with the knowledge that children are in such peril, that the world is far from being a safe place for all of its inhabitants, many youth may feel similar to Daisy. They may feel numb, depressed, cynical, and disengaged. This is precisely why a close reading of *How I Live Now* matters. Peeling back the layers on Daisy's story, we see the enormous cost youth must bear as they come to terms with the fragility of the social and ecological order. As dystopic literature, the novel does more than offer a vision of the future; it offers an interrogation of the present (Bullen and Parsons). It is not just the "now" in Daisy's life that matters; it is the now in

every reader's life. Thoughtful dialogue with young readers of *How I Live Now* opens the possibility for imagining a different future. It is with imagination that change can begin. As Joshi and O'Donnell assert, "Averting future conflicts will require not just caring for the youngest victims of war, but also educating them for peace" (289). Our work as educators calls us to help today's youth consider the kind of future they can thrive in and to work with them to make that happen.

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Issues of Physical Disabilities in Cynthia Voigt's *Izzy, Willy-Nilly* and Chris Crutcher's *The Crazy Horse Electric Game*

Against her better judgment, fifteen-year-old Izzy let Marco drive her home from the football team's post-game party even though he had been "swilling beers" all night. Once she got into the car with him, Izzy realized that Marco's driving was impaired—the car was in the middle of the road swerving from side to side, and suddenly she "felt the weight of the car swing out of control before I heard Marco's voice, cursing, and I watched the tree—an elm—rise up at me" (Voigt 26).

When Izzy woke up in the hospital: "I moved my toes back and forth. At the end of my left leg the blanket twitched, but nothing happened under the flat white blanket on the rest of the bed. I looked at my legs and one of them had been cut off short forever" (61).

In both *Izzy, Willy-Nilly* (Cynthia Voigt, 1986) and *The Crazy Horse Electric Game* (Chris Crutcher, 1987), the teen protagonists face the life-altering consequences of a sudden physical disability after an accident. Twenty years after their publication, these books by highly acclaimed authors Voigt and Crutcher continue to be recommended for young adult readers as realistic portrayals of characters with disabilities, and both continue to be read and used widely in secondary schools (Landrum 284-290).

The issue of disability even further complicates the already complicated path of adolescent development and the search for identity. Good young adult fiction can provide a foundation for adolescents to face crises and to forge new identities. Young adult literature, "in which characters encounter conflict and violence, face its consequences, and assume responsi-

bility for their actions," can provide teachers and students with a positive form in which to "wrestle with complex problems" (Brown and Stephens). For adolescents with disabilities, the characters portrayed in books tend to influence how they develop their own identities and autonomy (Carroll and Rosenblum 620-630). Young adult literature can be effective in promoting understanding, awareness, and acceptance of those with disabilities and in creating positive attitudes towards others (Andrews; Myracle; Smith-D'Arezzo and Thompson 335-347).

Both *Izzy* and *Crazy Horse* take the reader on the journey of transformation that Izzy and Willie experience after they suffer accidents that leave them suddenly disabled. Izzy's right leg is amputated after her drunken date crashes his car into a tree, and Willie suffers brain injury from a waterskiing accident that leaves him with a speech impediment and a loss of movement and control on his left side. Both novels show how self images are shattered as well as the expectations that families and communities hold for them. Izzy's adjustment to the loss of her leg is narrated over the period of six months, and half the novel relates her emotions directly after the accident while she is still in the hospital. *Crazy Horse* takes place over two years as Willie winds up leaving his community to seek a new life and to recover elsewhere. The sudden physical disabilities unleash a host of reactions for the main characters and for family members and friends, including guilt, fear, avoidance,

pity, anger, depression, and rage. These reactions reflect societal perceptions of disabilities and influence the formation of Izzy's and Willie's new identities as disabled youth. This article looks critically at the assumptions and beliefs about disabilities and ideal body images that form the characters' identities and how these identities are forged and challenged within their social worlds.

Ideal Images

Both *Izzy* and *Crazy Horse* explore physical disabilities as well as the physical ideals held up for teens. In establishing ideals and norms, society ranks our intelligence, weight, height, and many other bodily dimensions, especially emphasizing physical beauty and athletic prowess. This ideal, unobtainable for most people, is constantly present in the media and especially influences young people. Fear of not being able to meet the standard (normal *or* ideal) is the source of anxiety for many teenagers, especially girls.

To understand how it feels to be disabled, it is important to understand how normalcy is constructed. The concept of a norm implies that the majority of the population must or should somehow be part of it. The concept of the norm also implies the concept of deviations or extremes, and often people with disabilities have been thought of as deviants (Davis 1-28). On the other extreme is the ideal body, something that is strongly wished for, but rarely attained. *Izzy* and *Crazy Horse* reveal the attitudes and beliefs that the characters hold about both extremes and how they define themselves and others in those terms.

Physical attractiveness and appearance play a central role in *Izzy, Willy-Nilly*. Voigt's protagonist, Izzy, begins the novel as the "ideal" high school student—successful, attractive, and athletic. Izzy has always been particularly concerned with how she looks and describes herself and her friends in terms of their physical appearance, e.g., Lauren's "ash blonde hair . . . , arched eyebrows she plucks carefully . . . , little Clara Bow mouth . . . , even at slumber parties her face is perfectly made up" (Voigt 43). Izzy tends to downplay her own sense of physical perfection before the accident, however: "boys would like me better if I didn't show off" (47); rather, she emphasizes what a nice person she is and how she will always try to do what is expected of her by others, especially family members.

Izzy describes herself repeatedly as a "nice" girl:

Nice suited me: pretty but nowhere near beautiful; popular enough, with girls and boys; although no jock, I could give somebody a respectable game of tennis, and I was one of only three sophomores on the school cheerleading squad. A B student . . . , I did the work I was told to do and didn't mind school: just a nice person, easy to get along with, fun to have around. (1)

Although Izzy views herself as an average, normal type of person, other characters in the book look at her as an ideal. This comes out most clearly when Rosamunde, her less attractive but more studious friend, refers to her as being part of the "in-crowd," coming from an almost Brahmin-like family, and being the object of great interest from boys: "You're used to people looking at you and envying you, wishing they were you" (241). There is a tension between craving and emphasizing physical beauty and downplaying it or not talking about it explicitly as well as trying to please people and being compliant.

In *Crazy Horse*, Willie also represents an ideal of adolescence: that of the athletic hero. Willie's reputation as a baseball hero has assumed mythic proportions after his winning game as the pitcher against the Crazy Horse Electric team. Coho, Montana, is a town with a long history of supporting athletics, and Willie's family has played a major role in establishing the tradition. His grandfather donated the land for the baseball team and was a legendary athlete in town and as a football, basketball, and baseball player at the University of Notre Dame. His father was also a hero, one who was voted most valuable football player at the University of Washington and played in the Rose Bowl. "In Coho, they had a day in his honor, with a parade down Main Street" (Crutcher 22). Willie is following in his father's and grandfather's illustrious footsteps. He wants his dad to be proud of him, but "there was a vague, uncomfort-

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able feeling that Big Will lived through Willie. Willie's successes were Big Will's too; and likewise his failures" (22). Crutcher sets up the psychological pressure and tension right in the beginning of the novel. Big Will is Willie's role model, but Big Will is also living vicariously through Willie.

Willie's performance in the Crazy Horse Electric baseball game comes at the height of his physical perfection. He feels like he could do anything, and his body is getting bigger and stronger every day. The game is important to him, to his dad, and to the town. They need to defeat the team that won a place in the championships three years in a row. Willie feels that he cannot let anyone down. At the bottom of the ninth inning, Willie catches the hard line drive that would have snuffed out his team's dream of the Eastern Montana American Legion championship, and they win. With the game as history, "Willie Weaver becomes a minor legend" (32).

Disability and Identity

Adolescents are in the process of coming to realize who they are and where they stand in terms of family and community. They want to belong, to fit in, and to find their place in the larger whole (Steiner 20-27). As soon as Izzy becomes aware of the consequences of the accident, she starts to talk about herself in the past tense: "I liked myself pretty much exactly the way I was" (Voigt 3). Her new body is difficult for her to acknowledge, and she tends to discuss herself in the third person, as if the real Izzy is somewhere else. She even imagines a "little Izzy" within herself, who is able to express the emotions that Izzy cannot show to the world.

Izzy's accident almost cancels out her self-image, which has been built largely on physical appearance. She has been part of a circle of friends who are "perfectly made up," stylishly dressed, always dieting to keep their figures in shape, and who base their

conversations with each other on shopping and boys. Izzy characterizes herself after the accident as being differentiated from others, as well as her former self based on her physical characteristics. The labels that she applies to herself are ones that have tended to arouse strong feelings in others and are negative in connotation: "The words hammered on the back of my neck. *Crippled*. *Amputated*. 'Not me,' I answered each one of them. *Handicapped*. 'No, not me.' *Deformed*. 'Not me, please'" (54).

Izzy depersonalizes her body as a means of coping with her accident. When the physical therapist arrives in her hospital room, she likens the massage of her body to the kneading of pizza dough, and describes herself in terms of her physical deficit: "[T]hat's what I was, a thing, a messed-up body" (57). She describes the personal consequences of her accident as resulting in deficits, or loss of "normalcy":

I wasn't normal anymore. I was abnormal. I wasn't going to be able to be a cheerleader, or even to walk around. I couldn't ride my bike or play tennis—I don't think crippled people could drive cars, not with only one leg. Not to mention dances . . . ,who would ask me to dance with him now? Who would want to go out with a cripple? (61)

The kind of language used in *Izzy* to discuss disabilities shows that she *is* her disability. She defines herself in terms of what she is not, how she is deficient, how her life will be constricted, and how she is suddenly abnormal. The language she uses tends to reinforce a deficit view of disability, which assumes that those who are different from the perceived norms are missing something or are sick, helpless, or invalid (McDermott and Varenne 324-348; Gartner and Joe 2).

Willie also has a similar reaction to the changes in his body shortly after his accident. He describes his body as being "cooperative" or "not cooperative." Before the accident, his body was "his friend" and would do anything he asked of it: "He felt so fast and strong and confident that nothing could touch him" (18). His identity was tied very closely to his performance as an athlete, his father's expectations of him, as well as his community's traditions. After the accident Willie "can't get used to his body; hauling his left side around is like dragging small sacks of concrete . . . [H]e feels like a circus freak" (80). Willie also feels an uncontrollable rage at his circumstances. He is angry and resentful at friends who are able to do things that he is not longer able to do. His therapist

Crutcher sets up the psychological pressure and tension right in the beginning of the novel. Big Will is Willie's role model, but Big Will is also living vicariously through Willie.

tells him: “[I]t just taps into what you’ve lost and you get angry at yourself and the world. . . . That golden boy isn’t you anymore, and as long as you keep measuring yourself up against him, you’re gonna be mad as hell at everybody” (70).

Willie, like Izzy, views his changes as losses in relation to the ideal self he was before the accident. He, too, uses derogatory terms, such as “cripple,” in describing himself. His whole identity and history as well as his place in the community have been tied up with his performance as an athlete. After the accident, he no longer feels that he fits in anymore and must go out of his community in order to heal.

Izzy’s Social World

Izzy and Willie’s views of themselves as disabled are shaped strongly by the reactions and attitudes of the people around them. Directly after the accident, Izzy is shunned by her friends. Although they visit her, it is clear that they feel awkward and uncomfortable. They stare at her face, trying to avoid looking at her amputated leg: “[T]hey didn’t have anything to say. . . . They just stood there saying nothing” (Voigt 47). One of her friends, Lauren, who is aspiring to be a model, avoids entering the hospital room fully and never actually speaks to her. Her best friend, Suzy, calls her on the phone to convince her that she should not bring charges against Marco, the boy responsible for the car accident. Izzy finds out later that Suzy has started dating him.

Marco never apologizes or even speaks directly to Izzy, and although Izzy inflicts a form of mild revenge on him later in the book, she never confronts him directly about the accident or feels enraged about what happened. Her parents also do not want to press criminal charges against Marco, because that is not the “kind of people” they consider themselves to be.

Izzy’s family fosters dependency in Izzy, which is a continuation of their behavior towards her before the accident. Her mother is an organizer and the smoother-over of problems. Her reaction to Izzy’s accident is to redecorate the house so that Izzy has easier access to the ground floor while she is wheelchair-bound. Her father is portrayed as the family provider. For example, he announces that he will have a swimming pool installed so that Izzy can continue her physical therapy in the privacy of her own home.

Izzy’s younger sister is jealous and resentful of the special attention that Izzy is receiving, and her older twin brothers, star athletes and college students, are unable to discuss openly Izzy’s disability with her.

Izzy’s sudden disability does not seem to bring about significant changes in her family members. Her family tries to preserve appearances in the face of change and to hold desperately onto the status quo. Part of it comes from a stiff-upper-lip mentality. They believe that people should not complain about adversities but rather deal with them as well as possible. Much of their behavior is built on maintaining the facade of an upper-middle-class lifestyle. Their attitudes do not allow Izzy to express any conflicts about her situation or to develop independence in spite of physical limitations.

Izzy does not make waves, does not ask questions, and accepts everything but then suffers in silence. Izzy’s isolation and negative self-image cause her to sink into a deep depression. Not only has she been shunned by her friends, but also her family members are unable to discuss her feelings of despair and confusion with her. None of the professionals involved with her treatment is portrayed as providing information, advice, or therapy that contributes to her acceptance or understanding of her disability.

The one ray of hope and help in her life is Rosamunde, a brainy acquaintance from Latin Club. Rosamunde is the only person who actually speaks what is on her mind and asks Izzy the questions that no one else dares to: “Nobody . . . was talking about what had happened, as if everyone was pretending everything was normal and all right” (82). Rosamunde, on the other hand, encourages Izzy to express herself: “C’mon, Izzy, you can have a negative thought” (89).

Rosamunde’s directness, honesty, and intelli-

Izzy and Willie’s views of themselves as disabled are shaped strongly by the reactions and attitudes of the people around them. Directly after the accident, Izzy is shunned by her friends. Although they visit her, it is clear that they feel awkward and uncomfortable.

gence, however, are somewhat devalued by her physical appearance and social status, “sort of lumpy and badly dressed and not pretty” (191). Although Izzy is grateful for Rosamunde’s companionship, her parents seem to disapprove of Rosamunde, especially Izzy’s mother, who comments several times on her physical appearance: “She probably feels uncomfortable because of the way she looks . . . with that nose? And that hair? And her figure?” (125). Izzy’s mother also comments unfavorable about the profession of Rosamunde’s father: “The city police are lower on the respectability scale than the state police” (171).

Still, Izzy realizes that Rosamunde has been more of a genuine friend than the friends who are now shunning her: “She wasn’t the kind of person who I had for friends . . . [S]he was different. . . . Except I knew I like talking to her. . . . [W]hen she came to see

me I had a better time than when my friends came to see me” (176). Rosamunde is the only person in the book with whom she can talk about her problems and her feelings of depression. Her family wants to pretend that nothing has changed, her friends have shunned her, and the professionals at the hospital never even break the surface of real conversation. Rosamunde, on the other hand, is the only one who encourages Izzy to be independent,

when she is at home and when she eventually returns to school.

Izzy struggles with issues of social acceptance, class values, dependence, and public attitudes versus private beliefs. Like Willie, her sudden disability brings to the surface the values, expectations, and assumptions about the physical and behavioral attributes that people ought to possess. Society places a high premium on physical and behavioral capabilities for mastering the environment, and sudden disability violates important cultural norms and values. In Izzy’s case, she engenders what Hahn has termed “aesthetic anxiety,” which are fears raised by persons “whose appearance deviates markedly from

the usual human form or includes physical traits regarded as unappealing” (42). The fears are expressed by a tendency to shun those with undesirable bodily attributes, which are used to differentiate them from the rest of the population. Those people are placed in subordinate positions within society, elicit serious discomfort, make others feel anxious, and are viewed as inferior and threatening. These anxieties are prevalent in a society that places “extraordinary stress on beauty and attractiveness” (Hahn 43).

Izzy’s friendship with Rosamunde serves to emphasize the theme in *Izzy* about how surface appearances can be misleading. Rosamunde explains to Izzy that, if you look different, “you have to face up to people’s preconceptions right away. . . . You can’t hide it” (138). Rosamunde has been marginalized because of her appearance, her open and direct behavior, and her social status, yet Izzy comes to realize that Rosamunde’s friendship and support are more genuine than what she has been receiving from friends who only appear to be “perfect.”

Willie’s Social World

Willie’s interactions with others evolve as the novel progresses. After his accident, Willie is seen by others and views himself as a pathetic victim of circumstances and somewhat pitiable. His friends, however, do not desert him. Willie feels that he is a burden to them and that brings on the breakup with his girlfriend, Jen, and the added tension between his parents. He tends to view himself as his own worst enemy. Willie’s accident takes the lid off unspoken problems and tensions that have been simmering in his family since the death of his baby sister two years earlier to Sudden Infant Death Syndrome. His father has been playing the role of stoic and trying to hold his family together. He has had a great deal of his own identity invested in Willie’s success as an athlete. When Willie is injured because of his father’s carelessness, he is unable to keep the facade from crumbling.

In Willie’s hometown, his identity is so wrapped up in his image as a sports legend that he feels he must leave and start a new life elsewhere. On his trip to Oakland, California, he is beaten up by a street gang. He realizes, as the novel unfolds, that he has been advertising himself as a victim, and he is determined to change.

Her family wants to pretend that nothing has changed, her friends have shunned her, and the professionals at the hospital never even break the surface of real conversation.

In his new environment, many of the students attending One More Last Chance High School are also facing difficulties and obstacles in their personal lives. Willie is not the only student to struggle with a physical disability or emotional difficulties. He is given shelter by Lacey, an estranged father who is responsible for the disfigurement of his own son. Lisa, the gym teacher at his new school, who is also studying physical therapy and sports medicine, teaches him visualization and movement techniques. Willie joins a health club and Sammy, a Tai Chi instructor, teaches him to harmonize both body and mind. Willie realizes that a large part of his body's "cooperation" with him is mental.

In contrast to Izzy's situation, many people in Willie's environment help him to achieve greater independence and autonomy by giving him encouragement, friendship, skills, and opportunities for talk and reflection. Both novels reveal that the restrictions of a disability do not lie solely within the disabled individual but rather may be located more powerfully in the social world in which people live. Neither Willie nor Izzy is able to continue with an unchanged identity. Willie needs to escape a community that has turned him into a sports icon; Izzy finds genuine friendship outside a circle of friends who have shunned her. Both become outsiders and, with the help of other outsiders, are able to transform themselves.

Victim and Survivor

Not only do *Izzy* and *Crazy Horse* reveal certain societal attitudes and beliefs towards persons with disabilities; they are also both reflective of a literary tradition that has portrayed characters with disabilities as either victims or survivors. As a victim, a character is portrayed coping with a disability either by suffering self-blame or by denying that he or she is really suffering. The disability becomes central to the person's self-concept, self-definition, social comparisons, and reference groups (Fine and Asch 3-21). This person assumes a role of helplessness, dependence, and passivity. People with disabilities, therefore, are seen as the recipients of help or pity. The role in literature of these victims soothes middle class values, because he or she refuses to accept the disability as a source of rage (Kriegel 31-46).

For most of the novel, Izzy is characterized as a victim. She admonishes herself for causing discomfort to others: "I minded the guilty feelings I was having, for causing all the changes" (Voigt 146). She blames herself "as if I was being punished, as if it was my fault" (71). She tries to excuse the behavior of her friends: "probably it made them sick to look at me. . . . [T]hey had more interesting things to do" (75). Other people convey to her their pity: "We all feel so bad for you, it seems so cruel and unnecessary and . . . it's a terrible thing" (75).

In real life, there is rarely anyone to blame for a disability. Kent states that most disabilities occur as the result of natural causes, such as genetic conditions or illnesses. Izzy's disability, however, is not the result of natural causes. She is portrayed as a victim, someone physically damaged by the actions of a man. Images of disabled women in literature as victim "serve to heighten the sense that she is inadequate and helpless, [and] more vulnerable than her disabled peers" (59). Women tend to be portrayed as victims in literature much more often than men, to be shown as the lonely outsider, judged unattractive due to her impairment. By the end of the novel, however, Izzy begins to make her first strides towards independence.

In *Crazy Horse*, Willie is portrayed as a survivor. Although he is initially the object of pity and even violence from others, his character undergoes considerable transformation in coping with his disability. In modern literature, protagonists often lack a sense of wholeness or are victimized by the limitations of humanity (Kriegel 31-46). The image of the modern character with disabilities is often one who endures, and as a survivor, discovers that he is an outsider in a world that possesses growing doubts about its insiders: "He has been ennobled not by his condition but by his willingness to accept the condition as his own. To endure is to outlast circumstance, to step into, if

In contrast to Izzy's situation, many people in Willie's environment help him to achieve greater independence and autonomy by giving him encouragement, friendship, skills, and opportunities for talk and reflection.

not beyond, the pain of one's existence" (38). Outside of the town where he has grown up, Willie is able to accept his disability and change. His return home at the end of the novel shows an environment that is not only intolerant of Willie's disability but of others' personal shortcomings, as well.

Willie leaves the environment where he is seen only as a sports icon and joins a group of teenagers who are struggling with their identities as outsiders. The story focuses not only on Willie's adjustment to his disability, but on the lives of the other characters who also undergo transformations. Willie has helped Lacey, the man who took him in, to accept the hospitalization of his son. The story of Willie's disability is interwoven with themes that every adolescent faces—issues of independence, identity, friendship, physical appearances—as well as other subplots, such as street gang violence.

Willie makes a speech at his high school graduation and credits the people he met at the alternative high school for helping him to achieve autonomy once again: "This school . . . saved my life. . . . Nobody here preached at me. . . . They let me figure it out for myself, demanded that I figure it out for myself" (Crutcher 200). Willie gained insights that his "mind and body are just different parts of the same thing, and there are not limits for either, that most of the really important answers are already inside me" (200). With this statement, the focus is shifted from Willie's struggles with his disability to larger issues that every adolescent seeks to learn.

One criticism of Crutcher's complex and realistic portrayal of Willie is perhaps an overemphasis on how much Willie was able to return to "normal." He measures his recovery by how well he is able to play basketball with nondisabled peers, and his physical therapy regime is so successful that it is "nearly impossible to tell there was anything wrong with him" (195). Even his best friend Johnny does not immediately recognize him when he returns home to Montana: "God, I can't believe how you look. I thought

you were crippled for good" (213).

Part of Willie's transformation, however, has been achieved through the support of his new friends in an environment where difference is accepted and strengths are developed. In his home environment, Willie quickly reverts back to feeling only limitations: "[H]e feels crippled here, like he did before he left" (223). Willie has accepted his disability and has been able to create a new self out of his accident, rage, courage, and resourcefulness, but he needs an environment that will mirror his new self rather than reflect what he is not.

Discussion

Izzy, Willy-Nilly and *The Crazy Horse Electric Game* accurately portray the emotions that young people would face in dealing with a sudden physical disability, which attests to the popularity of these novels over the years. A close analysis reveals that many positive, but also some negative messages, about disabilities are embedded within the texts. Izzy questions the world of appearances after her accident. She realizes that her friendships are based on the superficial concerns of physical appearance and are not able to stand up to a crisis. The book provides many insights into the feelings and thoughts of Izzy as she deals with a sudden disability. However, there are many stereotypes about disabilities that are not sufficiently challenged in the novel. Izzy is portrayed, for the most part, as a passive victim of her circumstances. Derogatory language is used to describe her in terms of her disability, such as "crippled." She is viewed as the object of people's pity, someone who needs to be protected, and dependent on others, and incapable of independently participating in everyday life.

Willie, at the beginning of the book, is also presented as a victim, his own worst enemy, pitiable, pathetic, and the object of violence. *Crazy Horse*, however, evolves beyond this state. Throughout the book, information about his disability and ways in which to cope with it are provided through a series of conversations with therapists. Willie's story becomes interwoven with the stories of the other characters who are attending the alternative high school. The focus shifts away from the disability and shifts towards Willie's maturity and transformation with the help of others in the story.

The story of Willie's disability is interwoven with themes that every adolescent faces—issues of independence, identity, friendship, physical appearances.

The complex, realistic portrayals of physical disabilities in both of these novels can help young readers to think critically about their personal views and can play an important role in the evolution of a young person's sense of self. Young people, especially, need to develop critical faculties in order to look beyond the surface of stories in order to understand which values and beliefs are being conveyed. If young adult fiction is to provide a forum for discussion of differences, it is important that literature does not serve merely to perpetuate myths and stereotypes about disabilities but rather to provide a foundation with which to face crises and forge new identities (Brown and Stephens).

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Critiques and Controversies of Street Literature: A Formidable Literary Genre

a friend of mine gave me the book to read and it took me a day and a half to finish. i could not put it down. i love the characters and the storylines. i got so caught up in them it felt like a movie happening in my head. i could not believe 3 educated strong women would fall for men with those types of jobs and all of them had a happily everafter ending, it goes to show you that love is a mystery. i cannot wait to read more of wahida clark's novels, keep them comin lady. (Amazon, "PP Thugs")

Who is Wahida Clark? According to Wendy, the writer whose criticism appeared on Amazon.com, Clark is an exceptional author who crafts entertaining, thoughtful and engaging stories. In fact, writers such as Wahida Clark, Nikki Turner and Teri Woods represent only a few authors of "Street Literature" (street lit/fiction), a genre permeating the African American literary tradition in surprising ways. Chain bookstores such as *Borders* and *Barnes and Noble* now incorporate street fiction within literary sections designated for "African American Interests." Some public libraries as well as Black-owned bookstores have increased the number of books they own to include writers like Clark, Turner, and Woods (Morris, Hughes, Hassell-Agosto, and Cottman 20; Young 22).

Street lit readership appears to be on the rise, and this growth brings into question some disturbing research findings. Results of a National Endowment of Arts' study (Bradshaw and Nichols 26) indicated a sharp decline in the number of young adults who engage in literary reading, yet, a proliferating and possibly unprecedented increase in African American

adolescents who read street fiction may currently exist. As a contemporary trend, however, this arguable increase in reading has not surfaced statistically but continues to reveal itself anecdotally to those of us working among teenage populations in both urban and suburban areas (Morris et al. 20). We noticed initial evidence of the genre's appeal at least two years ago. Street fiction began flooding local bookstores and showing up in the hands of urban high school students participating in a community, after-school arts and literacy program near our university. Since that time, empirical data such as the high rankings given to some street fiction books on Amazon.com confirmed our suspicions. Further, while some books falling within this genre are not written explicitly for adolescents, the proprietor of a Black owned bookstore in Philadelphia, PA recently explained that the readership extends as low as middle and upper elementary school students. When asked about the increasing appeal of these narratives, she reasoned, "You don't have to live the life to get wrapped up in the storylines" (Anonymous).

To provide insight about this literary trend, throughout we highlight street fiction as a formidable, contemporary genre that has grown in popularity throughout the past decade. We begin by offering a definition, a brief literary and production history, general characteristics and a view on the controversial nature of the genre. This section is followed by a discussion that incorporates theory, related research and excerpts from electronic book reviews (inspired by street fiction) to illustrate how readers actually

interpret the narratives. Specifically, we examine a range of reader responses to varied street texts extracted from Amazon.com (a website that permits readers to upload electronic book critiques). We conclude with practical and research-based implications.

Definition, History, Characteristics

The genre of street fiction is grounded in the tradition of urban literature novelists from the 1960s and 1970s like Donald Goines and Robert Beck (Hill, Perez, and Irby 77). These writers crafted ultra-realistic tales of urban living rife with explicit language and street slang told through characters who were often pimps, prostitutes, and drug dealers. According to Ghose (106), eventually the appeal of the urban novel faded but was revived in 1999 with the publication of best-selling novel *The Coldest Winter Ever* (Souljah) and subsequent increased popularity of *Flyy Girl* (Tyree) and *True to the Game* (Woods). One library in Madison, Wisconsin describes these books in the following way:

Called street literature, urban drama, and hip-hop literature, this exciting genre features fast-paced action, gritty ghetto realism, and social messages about the high price of gangsta life. Following in the tradition of Iceberg Slim and Donald Goines, the new generation of street lit writers speaks to the experiences of a wide range of characters—from the ordinary people trying to get by in the projects to hard-core drug dealers, prostitutes, pimps, and gangbangers. (“Street Lit”)

Despite the recent recognition, street lit has not been eagerly embraced by major publishing houses, although this trend is now changing (see Young 22). Therefore, in order to initially get their books into the hands of readers, street lit writers often self-publish (Hill, Perez, and Irby 77). Independent publishing houses like Triple Crown Publications and Urban Books have created another avenue through which authors can have their work printed. The books are then sold wholesale to street vendors and bookstore owners or the authors themselves sell the books directly to consumers. The Internet boom has also provided an additional outlet for publicizing and selling street fiction, which has added to its popularity and success (Spavlik 65).

The genre typically consists of stories centered on African American protagonists between the ages of 16-

24 who struggle to survive despite immense obstacles including but not limited to abject poverty, overt and institutional racism, as well as violence in its various forms. The protagonist’s saga is conveyed through heavy use of African American Vernacular English and quick-moving storylines. The novels are typically set in urban locales with hip-hop culture serving as a prominent backdrop. Themes such as young women who fall in love with the wrong men and plots that revolve around premarital sex, violence, crime, abortion and illegal activities such as drug dealing are common (Morris et al. 19). Despite these characteristics, street lit authors Vickie Stringer and K’wan Foye consistently refer to their stories as a means to warn readers of the pitfalls of illegal activity (Reid 11). In other words, these narratives might be classified as cautionary or redemptive tales.

An excerpt from a popular street narrative titled *True to the Game* (Woods) reveals some of these characteristics. Narrated by Gena, who is a young adult, the following events describe her first meeting with Quadir, “a millionaire associated with the [drug] cartel.” (Woods back cover)

She said goodbye to Quadir and pocketed his number. Even though he wasn’t driving, he was nice and he was dark-skinned, and that was definitely a plus. Not to mention the diamond bezel Rolex watch he had on. *Damn*, she thought, *the man is dark as night, but his beard and his moustache was so sexy*. She would definitely be trying to see him tomorrow, which for her was a lifetime away. (Woods 4)

A few chapters later, we learn more about Quadir’s cartel activities as well as his associates. Readers are privy to a dialogue between Rasun and Reds, two young men employed by Quadir:

Back in Philly, the summer heat had driven everyone outside onto the sidewalks, porches, corners and streets. There were open fire hydrants with bursts of water spraying children . . . Rasun drove back down to North Philly. . . .

Called street literature, urban drama, and hip-hop literature, this exciting genre features fast-paced action, gritty ghetto realism, and social messages about the high price of gangsta life.

“What’s up?” he said as he pulled up on the corner of 25th Street.

“Nothing, man. What’s up?” asked Reds.

“You got the money?”

“Yeah,” Reds said, pulling a knot of paper out his pocket. . . .

“Is everybody out here tonight or what?” Reds asked.

“Most definitely,” Ra said. . . .(Woods 45-46)

“What you need the gun for?” Reds asked.

“Man, what you need it for? You’re going to a party, right?” Reds didn’t want to give up the gun. “What the f*** (*expletive in original*) you need it for?

“We’ll, take that s*** (*expletive in original*) up with Quadir when he comes back,” Ra said, knowing Qua wasn’t giving them no guns like that. Mentally, they couldn’t handle a gun . . . and Quadir knew it and wasn’t taking any chances . . . (Woods 47)

As the storyline evolves, the relationship between Gena and Quadir develops. In the next passage, Gena reflects on men, in general, and especially those like Quadir whose elevated financial earnings appeal to young women despite the emotional costs:

The majority of the brothers that were out had woman at home. The funny thing about it though, was that even though you might be with a guy and really call him your man, you knew in the back of your mind that he wasn’t your man. . . . the brothers were socially acceptable whoremongers inheriting the earth. Gena’s girlfriends all knew this, but it didn’t make a difference. As long as they were spending money, nothing really made a difference. Nothing else mattered. (Woods 44-50)

In these brief selections, we generally capture street fiction’s essence. Although deeply rooted in a familiar young-adult storyline that depicts the ebbs and flow of a new romantic relationship, this narrative also embodies the potential to valorize infidelity, criminal activity and a wide range of unprincipled and even stereotypic behaviors. This potential (whether realized or not) undergirds a good deal of the controversy encasing street fiction.

Canons and Controversy

Throughout history, competing claims have existed about whether high brow, canonized, western or classical literature ought to give way to the types of books some have argued will diminish our society’s cultural standing because of an over-emphasis on popular and folk culture or our presumed base desires, (e.g., controversy over romance and graphic novels). Within the focused area of African American literature

(for adults, young adults and children) an analogous type of canonization occurred over the past forty years as literary theorists and scholars identified characteristic elements of these texts (see, for example, Bishop 273) and selected writers, for a variety of reasons, gained prominence over others. Esteemed African American young adult and adult writers who have received this canonized sanctioning include, among others, Walter Dean Myers, Toni Morrison, Mildred Taylor, James Baldwin, Alice Walker, Jacqueline Woodson, Virginia Hamilton, Ernest Gaines, Christopher Paul Curtis, and Walter Mosley. These authors composed compelling narratives that make up the list of middle and high school African Americans literary texts frequently read in today’s classrooms.

Books by the above writers receive high literary honors, such as Newbery and Coretta Scott King awards. They are repeatedly selected for school district curriculum because their stories convey the themes, ideologies, illustrations and literary qualities deemed up to standard by teachers, librarians, and parents. The cultural messages and representations embedded in the fiction often correspond with a long-standing literary tradition in which novelists compose stories with particular purposes in mind. According to literary critic Bishop:

African American literature has been a purposeful enterprise, seldom if ever art for art’s sake. . . . Across genres, in poetry, picture books, and contemporary and historical fiction, Black authors and artists have created a body of children’s literature that 1) celebrates the strengths of the Black family as a cultural institution and vehicle for survival; 2) bears witness to Black people’s determined struggle for freedom, equality, and dignity; 3) nurtures the souls of Black children by reflecting back to them, both visually and verbally, the beauty and competencies that we as adults see in them; 4) situates itself through its language and its content, within African American literary and cultural contexts; and 5) honors the tradition of story as a way of teaching and as a way of knowing. (273)

Since the well-regarded African American writers of whom Bishop refers frequently situate their narratives within realistic urban contexts (Walter Dean Myers and Jacqueline Woodson are two noteworthy examples), some might wonder how street lit compares in literary legitimacy, sustainability and quality to other well regarded African American literature (Venable 25). Currently, two perspectives exist.

Rightly or wrongly, values of nihilism, misogyny,

homophobia, physical abuse toward women and violence circulate within and around a number of artists (i.e., rap) who claim membership in the hip hop culture, such as some street lit writers. Critics of the genre have made these hip hop life-text associations (Young 22). To them, the narratives likely intensify a growing cultural disconnect between today's poor, African American urban adolescents and our larger society. Voices largely within the African American community are weighing in and questioning the denigrating cultural messages, ideologies, stereotypes and moral values that they contend street lit reifies, not to mention the presumed lack of literary quality (Stovall 56; Venable 25; Young 22).

On the other hand, a range of folks now consider street literature a viable genre to discuss and debate (Hill, Perez, and Irby 78; Wright 42). They contend that street fiction symbolizes neither a fad nor an oddity in African American culture. Rather, as a literary production, it should be situated within the long-standing debate about high brow and popular culture that has vigorously reemerged as largely self-taught and self-published writers, sometimes identifying themselves as members of the hip hop generation, began publishing, promoting, and lucratively distributing this genre of literature (Morris et al. 17). Unlike in the past, the self-publishing, hip hop ethos of these writers has positioned their stories within postmodern sensibilities that mitigate constructs of power and authority. As a result, assigning a cultural hierarchy of either high or low to this emerging genre becomes rather complicated (Young 23). As scholars have argued with respect to the criticism aimed toward the musical genre of rap as well as other non-traditional text sources like spoken word, these books may be nuanced and varied across a continuum, not unlike any collection of texts falling within a particular literary genre or other popular culture medium (Fisher 365; Morrell 74; Wright 42).

Reader Appeal and Interpretations

Notwithstanding literary merit, the appeal of street fiction books has received minimal attention. A senior editor at One World/Ballantine (a major publishing house) recently said the following about street lit readership and the genre's appeal, "You can't force them (readers) to read James Baldwin. There is a

reason why people are choosing these stories and maybe we should look at what is causing this hunger" (Young 22). Reader response criticism validates the rationale driving this editor's argument. If well-established writers of African American young adult and adult fiction are, in some instances, being de-centered by street lit authors, what compelling meanings are youth and young adults deriving from these narratives?

Because studies within the field of literacy exploring reader responses to texts have revealed that despite what is embodied in any piece of fiction, readers interpret stories in highly complex and often unanticipated ways, reader response criticism and research can shed some light on how to examine the street fiction trend (Beach 8). While not a unified theory, many scholars writing within the field of reader response criticism do share a common belief in the distinct influence and transactive nature of the reader, text and socio-cultural context within any reading experience (Rosenblatt 135; Tompkins ix).

Drawn to titles such as *Project Chick* (Turner), *True to the Game* (Woods) and *Thugs and the Women Who Love Them* (Clark), African American adolescents and young adults (a percentage of whom likely resist or struggle with reading in school) make-up the largest population currently reading street fiction in non-school contexts or as unofficial curriculum during school hours (Morris et al. 20). Indeed as customer reviews on Amazon.com suggest, a significant proportion of those attracted to the books are adolescent girls and young adult women. One example Amazon.com reader review posted by 'Sha' about the book *Thugs and The Women Who Love Them* (Clark) reads:

Unlike in the past, the self-publishing, hip hop ethos of these writers has positioned their stories within postmodern sensibilities that mitigate constructs of power and authority. As a result, assigning a cultural hierarchy of either high or low to this emerging genre becomes rather complicated (Young 23).

I am from Trenton NJ and I can relate [relate] to this book.

This book is how it is on the street and also describes [describes] passion a lot.

Ms. Clark is a wonderful writer.

This is the second book of hers that I have read.

(Amazon "PP Thugs")

Commenting on the urban novel some have coined a classic, *The Coldest Winter Ever* (Souljah), which received a commendable ranking in the Amazon best selling books category (# 2,164) and boasts more than 1000 customer reviews/responses on the website, another electronic critic, 'school marm', wrote:

For a responsible adult, this is an entertaining novel. For a teen, it is a map to destruction. This is a popular book for teens because of all of the sex, profane language and crime. We wonder why our teens are so out of control! Teens are not responsible enough to read this.

The main character is spoiled, extremely audacious, and headstrong. She thinks she's street smart and ahead of the game. But her character has flaws that demonstrate her weakness and vulnerability. This book leads you on a journey that wakes you up to the realities of your own life through this character and her support cast of characters. Each one of them along with the various events of this novel will help to define why this is, in my opinion, one of the "Best Reads Ever". (Amazon "The Coldest")

As these responses reveal, the appeal of street lit narratives derives, at least in part, from readers' perceptions of literary quality (e.g., characters, storyline, theme) as well as the writer's ability

to depict a reality that resonates with her readership (e.g., "this book is how it is on the street"). However, the depth and range of critiques found on Amazon certainly stand out as noteworthy, as a post by "chocolate" about Wahida Clark's *Thugs and the Woman Who Love Them* (which is ranked # 249, 389 on January 12, 2009 on Amazon's best selling category) suggests:

I am not sure if I read the same book that all the other reviewers read. I really wanted to love this book, but it wasn't my cup of tea. . . . But for the most part, I was never on the

edge of my seat. The story never developed into what I thought the book was about. The three friends in the book didn't seem like they had their own heads on straight, but were supposed to have such "high inspirations". . . please. The pimp portion of the story was garbage. . . . It made no sense. Wahida didn't show the girls to be ambitious and doing something with their lives. I just couldn't get into the book. (Amazon "PP Thugs")

Along with literary criticism, adult street lit fans aware of the teenage readership voice real-world concerns. Reacting again to *The Coldest Winter Ever* (Souljah) (ranked #3,464 on January 12, 2009, by amazon.com), 'loni' cautioned:

What can I say that hasn't already been said about this acclaimed novel? I can say that I would be upset if it were recommended reading for classroom assignment. There is too much careless promiscuous behavior, crime, drugs and other ingredients in the gumbo mixed story. For a responsible adult, this is an entertaining novel. For a teen, it is a map to destruction. This is a popular book for teens because of all of the sex, profane language and crime. We wonder why our teens are so out of control! Teens are not responsible enough to read this. They generally are copycats. Let your teens read it at their and your own risk. (Amazon "The Coldest")

As evidenced by the reviewer stances above, street literature exists on a continuum, and Amazon critics evaluate the books across this range. These nuances may not be readily apparent to an outsider to the genre, however. Looking closely at the types of approaches readers take while engaged in street fiction literary interpretation should assist with illuminating these variations. Beach (8) contends that five groupings of theoretical foci best depict the range of reader response theorists and, thus, approaches to reading stories: textual, experiential, psychological, social and cultural. Each of these foci contributes to a fuller understanding of how readers construct meaning from literature.

For example, textual response theorists such as Rabinowitz and Smith (54) discuss the ways readers rely on text-based narrative and genre conventions when making sense of fiction. Adolescent street lit readers taking this stance might, then, pay close attention to how the realism of the genre is constructed, perhaps stating an interest in how writers bring readers along through plot construction. An example of this stance emerges in the following comments by 'chocolate' who describes *Thugs and the Women Who Love Them* (Clark):

The story didn't have a moral or even a followable storyline to me. One page will talk about one of the girls going to the club, shooting heroine and then the next page she will be a aspiring doctor. (Amazon "PP Thugs")

Rabinowitz writes about rules of signification; among these are narrative conventions in which the "authorial audience and the narrative audience must share some beliefs about reality in order for the situations and actions to have the consequences they do and for the plot to get from point A to point B" (100). The reader above appears quite troubled by the inconsistent rules of plot structure coupled with characters' seemingly unbelievable hopes and dreams.

From experiential (Rosenblatt 22) or psychological (Holland 29) reader response stand points, readers of street lit might become engaged because the storylines allow them to vicariously and emotionally live through experiences that resemble their own lives. Research has shown that, at times, African American girls and adolescents do identify with stories about others who look like them racially and with respect to gender, but identification represents neither a static nor uncritical reading of a text (Brooks, Browne, and Hampton 665; Davis 260; Sutherland 391). For instance, Radway (71) studied a group of women who avidly read romance novels. She found that even when texts rhetorically and discursively depicted patriarchal ideologies, romance readers reinterpreted the ideologies. The women viewed their reading purposes as resisting the text as well as re-imagining life circumstances. Street literature may be for some readers, therapeutic and empowering as J. Brea, an Amazon critic of *The Coldest Winter Ever* (Souljah), points out:

First Off this Book is a must buy no Questions Asked! As a hispanic female born in harlem raised in Yonkers I can relate to many "Black" girls in the neighborhood. This Novel Not only Spoke the truth but gave you front seat to the same world we live in only through the eyes of someone from the "hood". You will Notice how most of the things that happen to Winter are self fulfilled prophesies and sometimes what we think we need is just what we want, not a necessity nor an asset. Will Have you thinking twice about the route you're taking. A real Eye opener! (Amazon "The Coldest")

Here the story helps the reader answer subconscious or unanswered questions about her own life because she lives through the protagonist's experiences.

Lastly, from social (Lewis and Fabos 482) or cultural (Beach 87) reader response stances, adolescent girls and young women might opt to read these books because they provide a forum for discussion amongst their family and friends, either through face to face communication, posting messages to sites such as Amazon, written messages via e-mail or by text messaging. These interactions can also provide feelings of group membership and define cultural practices of reading in out of school settings as the next post indicates:

While at work on a Saturday I stopped at my friends desk and she just so happened to be reading this book. She told me I just had to read it since she wasn't able to put it down. Right then and there I left the building, walked across the street, and purchased the book immediately. I started reading that Saturday and didn't put it down until Sunday night. YES, I FINISHED IT THE ENTIRE BOOK IN A LITTLE OVER 24 HOURS!!! I then passed it to my mom & she couldn't put it down. Then to my cousin and then her gentleman friend. I am an avid reader and this book tops my top 3 books of ALL time. It's been 5 years since I read it and now I'm dying to read it again. So after buying a couple of copies for gifts, I'm back to buy another for myself. (Amazon "The Coldest")

Moreover, because these texts often flourish outside of the school curriculum, an unusual blurring has occurred. An out-of-school literary pastime encourages its readers to come together socially around books. Learning transference across contexts appears to be taking place.

Practice and Research Implications

Notwithstanding the explosion of this emerging genre, a search on the Ebsco Host ERIC Database, using the

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following terms: “street lit,” “hip hop lit,” “ghetto lit,” “gansta lit” and “urban fiction” returned one research article based on a public library program and a mere six articles focusing on genre descriptors and unmethodical summarizations of these texts. Rather than research- or practitioner-based literacy or literary journals, writers for magazines, newspapers and web sites sit at the forefront of this literary trend. On the whole, literary scholars, educational researchers and classroom teachers remain at the periphery of emerging debates surrounding street fiction’s popularity although the demand for these books continues to increase. For instance, nine years after the release of the best seller *The Coldest Winter Ever*, Souljau’s newest tale, *Midnight: A Gangsta Love Story* has already been reviewed by a *Washington Post Newspaper* columnist (Valdes C05). To date, 113 comments/responses on Amazon.com (just two months after the release) have been posted about *Midnight* (Souljau) along with five active links on the discussion board (Amazon “Midnight”).

How might practitioners, literary critics and educational scholars attend to the growing street fiction phenomenon? A recent article by Hill, Perez, and Irby (79) represents a step forward. The authors suggest ways English teachers might incorporate these texts in their classrooms. The article provides a thoughtful list of possible approaches, such as allowing students to edit the street fiction narratives, to conduct literary analysis on the stories as they are bridged to the analysis of canonical and contemporary literature, as well as to compose their own version of a street lit saga.

Because we reside in the infancy stage of this dialogue, we suggest examining these stories more closely to uncover some of the underlying areas of appeal for readers as we generally attempted through this article. Since reading this genre manifests largely as an out-of-school reading practice, scholars and practitioners involved with youth in these capacities (e.g. after-school clubs, sports leagues, community groups, etc.) have been given an unusual opportunity to explore the nature of engaged reading outside of school as Smith and Wilhelm (182) recently documented with young adult males. Studies focused on close reads of these narratives coupled with analysis of readers’ interpretations through a wide variety of

response forms such as electronic, oral, written, poetic and artistic might prove valuable. We also argue for the importance of discussing street fiction with youth in out of school settings where fewer restrictions guide the solicitation of reader interpretations. Results of these types of studies might eventually inform wide-ranging ideological discussions about the social constructions of ethnic groups, cultural shifts as well as the heterogeneity of gender construction, sexuality, urban life, and adolescence.

To conclude, because educators often encourage youth to spend time engaging in literary pursuits for leisure, giving increased attention to this genre and its readership appears to be justified and needed. Scholarly input will be invaluable to practitioners who continue to gauge whether and how literature influences or subverts the literacy, cultural and moral development of youth, particularly those identified as “resistant” or “disengaged” learners.

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<p><u>The Adventurous Deed of Deadwood Jones</u> by Helen Hemphill Front Street, 2008, 228 pp., \$16.95</p> <p>Prometheus Jones has won a fine horse fair and square in a town raffle. It's too bad no one is happy for him except his cousin, Omer Shine. After all, just because blacks are free in these post-Civil War times doesn't mean blacks should have things those whites, like the Dills, have.</p> <p>These are just some of the troubles young Prometheus and Omer face as they traverse away from the Dills and onto a cattle drive to the Dakota area. They battle new biases from whites, Hispanics, and even the Indians. Along the way, Prometheus learns how to fend for himself and how to battle for the truth, whatever that truth may be.</p> <p>Even though this book is set in the post Civil War era, this has so much to offer young people of all backgrounds. Hemphill takes a tall tale and makes it applicable in today's society.</p> <p>Mary Schmutz Junction City, KS</p>	<p><u>Audrey, Wait!</u> by Robin Benway Razorbill, 2008, 320 pp., \$16.99</p> <p>When Audrey breaks up with her boyfriend, Evan, it's because she feels he isn't paying much attention to her. She never considers the breakup will come back to bite her because he is a songwriter. Oh, does it ever.</p> <p>Evan writes a song about the breakup called "Audrey, Wait!" which his band performs at their gig later that night. Everything goes just a little bit crazy after that. The song immediately hits the radio, Evan's band suddenly has a hit record, and Audrey is in demand. Papatrazzi stalk her, reporters call, girls begin dressing like her, and suddenly, people are coming out of the woodwork, trying to be her new friend.</p> <p>This book will make you laugh out loud, as you read about Audrey and everything that she has to put up with. Full of realistic dialogue and believable characters, <i>Audrey, Wait!</i> is a quick read that will have you wondering what that song really sounds like.</p> <p>Jennifer Lee Louisville, KY</p>
<p><u>The Book of Jude</u> by Kimberly Heuston Front Street, 2008, 217 pp., \$17.95</p> <p>The reader follows Jude through her attempts to cope when she reluctantly moves with her family to Czechoslovakia.</p> <p>Judith Grace Wheelock is a 15-year-old girl who goes by the name of Jude. Her Mormon family moves to Czechoslovakia unexpectedly when her mother receives a Fulbright scholarship to study there. Jude is upset by this drastic change and cannot seem to understand why her mother, father, twin sister, and younger sister seem to adjust to their new lives so well. Jude's incapability to cope with the move leads her into a series of uncontrollable episodes that culminate with her stealing and wrecking the family car.</p> <p>This lands her in a psychiatric hospital where she learns she has Borderline Personality Disorder, which means she does not react well to trying times because she is unable to draw support from her past fond memories. She finds hope in the comfort of a loving family, a secure belief system, and wise old friends.</p> <p>Rachael Gatewood Fayetteville, AR</p>	<p><u>The Cabinet of Wonders, The Kronos Chronicles, Book 1</u> by Marie Rutkoski Farrar, Strauss, Giroux, 2008, 263 pp., \$16.95</p> <p>ISBN-10: 0-374-31026-2</p> <p>A romping fantasy that follows 12-year-old Petra Kronos on a quest to find and take her father's stolen eyeballs, this book was a joy to read. Rutkoski has delivered a fantasy heroine to join the ranks of Harry and Percy Jackson.</p> <p>When Petra's father returns home from Prague minus his eyeballs, Petra leaves home with only her pet tin spider, Astrophil, and her father's secret journal. Petra discovers she has magic powers, along with meeting many new friends, all while working in the palace for the evil Prince Rodolfo. Will Petra make it home with her father's eyes? Or will the prince discover her plan to save the world by destroying his precious clock?</p> <p>This book is a real page-turner, and Petra is so lovable, you are rooting for her all the way. A fantasy book, set in historical Bohemia, <i>The Cabinet</i> is a very interesting and enjoyable read. Sixth-graders and up will love this story, and parents will love the excellent vocabulary.</p> <p>Stephanie Stidham Fayetteville, AR</p>

<p><i>Daughter of War</i> by Marsha Forchuk Skrypuch Fitzhenry & Whiteside, 2008, 210 pp., \$14.95 ISBN: 1554550440</p> <p>Historical Fiction/War/Friendship/Family</p> <p>Set in Turkey in 1916, this novel plunges the reader into the little known episode of genocide in Turkey during the first World War. Told from the dueling perspectives of Marta and Kevork (two Armenian teenagers, forced into hiding, yet who are engaged to each other and desperate to find one another) this gripping novel tells the story of suffering and the atrocities of war from two very different perspectives. While Kevork is in Syria, attempting to make his way back to Marta, Marta is in Turkey, pregnant and afraid. The quest both of these characters are on attests to the difficult times of war, the pain of genocide, and the true commitment and loyalty they have for each other.</p> <p>While this book is not intended for younger readers, mature readers (10th grade and up) will appreciate the reality of this novel. The novel forces readers to think about the war from a new perspective, can be easily connected to ideas about history, and may be used to discuss context in current political events.</p> <p>Katy Moore Fayetteville, AR</p>	<p><i>Dead is the New Black</i> by Marlene Perez Harcourt, 2008, 190 pp., \$7.95 ISBN: 978-0-15-206408-2</p> <p>Vampires</p> <p>Daisy Gordano, a Nightshade High School junior, is the only “normal” member of a family full of psychics. Her mother often contributes her unique abilities to help solve crimes with the town sheriff. One day, her mother enlists the help of Daisy’s older sister to investigate a young girl’s death. Meanwhile Samantha, head cheerleader and Queen Bee of Nightshade, returns from summer vacation with a less-than-fashionable makeover – one that includes pale, ghostly skin, lots of black clothing, and a peculiar charm around her neck.</p> <p>Soon girls start dropping like flies, and vampire rumors begin to surface. Nightshade is a breeding ground for supernatural happenings and strange behavior, so it comes as no surprise. Daisy begins snooping around with a little help from her friend Ryan. As she succeeds in solving the mystery, Daisy learns a few new things about herself and those around her. Aside from discovering a few budding talents, Daisy realizes the importance of getting to know people and giving second chances.</p> <p>Jessica Kenner Tallahassee, FL</p>
<p><i>Ever</i> by Gail Carson Levine Harper Collins Publishers, 2008, 244 pp., \$16.99 ISBN: 978-0-06-122962-6</p> <p>Romance/Fantasy</p> <p>Kezi, a mortal teen-aged girl who lives in the city of Hyre, and Olus, the god of the wind, fall in love and are forced to endure extreme challenges in order to attain their hope of marriage.</p> <p>Kezi is an amazingly talented dancer and rug-weaver sentenced to sacrifice her life to the god Admat in 30 days for the sake of saving her Aunt Fedo. Olus longs to befriend mortals his own age. While herding goats for Kezi’s father Senet, Olus is stricken with desire for Kezi at a marriage celebration for Kezi’s cousins. After admiring Kezi from afar, Olus becomes increasingly enthralled with her beauty and seeks to help her overturn her fate as a human sacrifice. In the extreme efforts to save Kezi’s life and be together forever, they are forced to overcome unbeatable odds and daring challenges.</p> <p>This book is recommended for ages 12 and up, and it could be used as an individual or small group read to accompany lessons about ancient mythology.</p> <p>Rachael Gatewood Fayetteville, AR</p>	<p><i>Farworld: Water Keep</i> by J. Scott Savage Shadow Mountain, 2008, 432 pp., \$17.95 ISBN: 159038962X</p> <p>Magic</p> <p><i>Farworld</i> is the story of a girl, Kyia, who wishes she had the use of magic in a world filled with spells, charms, and potions; and Marcus, a crippled boy who escapes his cruel surroundings by dreaming about another world. Together they take on the Dark Circle of the Thnathkin S’Bae and Bonesplitter. Prepared to keep Master Therapass’s secret and protect Farworld, while seeking the first of the Elementals—water—to convince them to open a draft between the worlds that will save both the children’s lives, Kyia and Marcus find their own magic and discover the secrets of their past.</p> <p>Fantasy fans will love the story because, like Harry Potter and his friends, these two likable protagonists are able to handle anything in a fresh and exciting way. Savage brings us characters with depth in a book well-suited to read aloud. Now is the time to start this delightful series.</p> <p>Lu Ann Staheli Payson, UT</p>

<p>Found by Margaret Peterson Haddix Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers, 2008, 314 pp., \$15.99</p> <p>At the beginning of this book, the first in a new series by Haddix, an unscheduled airplane arrives with a mysterious cargo: babies fill every seat on the plane, but no pilot or crew is aboard. After the babies are taken off the plane by gate personnel, the plane vanishes.</p> <p>Thirteen years later, Jonah, one of the babies who had been adopted, and his friend Chip begin receiving mysterious letters. They aren't sure what to think when the first one arrives saying, "You are one of the missing." Is someone at school just playing a mean joke on them? Then there are other strange happenings, and it seems like everything is related to that airplane full of babies, which no one wants to talk about.</p> <p>Jonah, Chip, and Jonah's sister, Katherine, set out to solve the mystery. Where had the babies come from? Who was writing the mysterious letters? This promising new series from Haddix will keep even reluctant readers turning the pages.</p> <p>Jennifer Lee Louisville, KY</p>	<p>Headlong by Kathe Koja Francis Foster Books, 2008, 195 pp., \$16.95</p> <p>After attending an elite private school her entire life, suburban Lily Noble falls into an unexpected friendship during her sophomore year at Vaughn. Hazel Tobias, an eccentric scholarship student, was raised in the city by her artist brother and his gay partner. Despite repeated concerns of Lily's parents and school administrators, the two girls form an unexpected and dynamic bond of friendship. Mirrored by their differences, each girl is able to explore untapped possibilities in her own identity. Beautiful, free-spirited Hazel learns what it means to belong. Lily breaks through the confines of performing as a model student to explore her untapped creative potential.</p> <p>Koja's realistic prose illuminates the struggles of adolescent identity. By contrasting conservative and liberal family expectations, this author skillfully navigates her characters through a process of self-discovery. The complexities of adolescent relationship and identity are illuminated through Lily and Hazel's emotional journeys.</p> <p>Patricia Ackerman Salina, KS</p>
<p>Hurricane Song: A Novel of New Orleans by Paul Volponi Penguin Group, 2008, 136 pp., \$15.99</p> <p>News stories reported the devastating experiences of the citizens of New Orleans as they sought refuge in the Superdome during Hurricane Katrina. In <i>Hurricane Song</i>, Paul Volponi gives us a more intimate look at this tragic event through the eyes of Miles, a sophomore focused on his future with the football team who is ambivalent to his father's career as a jazz musician. When their plan for evacuating New Orleans fails, Miles, his father, and his uncle head toward the Superdome to ride out the storm and then return to their home. What Miles witnessed and experienced there caused him to question his faith in his fellow man and strengthened his commitment to his father and family.</p> <p>Volponi's frank descriptions and characterization give the reader a taste of what it was like for those waiting for rescue and relief, as well as those who returned home to find nothing. Despite the devastation, Miles and his family exemplify the spirit of New Orleans: the spirit of hope.</p> <p>Vicki Sherbert Wakefield, KS</p>	<p>The Invasion of Sandy Bay by Anita Sanchez Calkins Creek, Imprint of Boyds Mills Press, 2008, 147 pp., \$16.95</p> <p>Lemuel Brooks is a 12-year-old-boy who is literally like a fish out of the icy cold waters of New England. He and his mother moved toward the coast of Massachusetts when Lemuel's father passed away. Try as he may, Lemuel cannot manage to have the local fishermen treat him like the only man of the Brooks' house.</p> <p>While out on a fishing expedition with a town leader, Lemuel and Bill Tarr come upon a British frigate closing in on the small town of Sandy Bay. The two fishermen must now guide the frigate into the choppy bay, knowing full well they will be considered traitors to this new beloved country of theirs. The people of Sandy Bay have other ideas, though.</p> <p>Follow history as a young boy helps lead a town's people through another revolution during the War of 1812.</p> <p>Mary Schmutz Junction City, KS</p>

<p><i>Jenny Green's Killer Junior Year</i> by Amy Belasen and Jacob Osborn Simon Pulse, 2008, 284 pp., \$8.99</p> <p>Dating/Crime ISBN: 1-4169-6792-3</p> <p>This quirky and suspenseful account of a junior year gone horribly wrong is sure to engage readers with its exploration of crime and punishment among teenagers.</p> <p>After an embarrassing end to her sophomore year, the protagonist Jenny Green hopes to start over at her new boarding school in Montreal. A self-described “Jewish American Princess,” Jenny is used to being treated well, but the boys she dates aren’t worth their weight in Juicy Couture shorts. Their lies, ruses, and general bad behavior provoke Jenny to fashion a plot for revenge. How far will she go to make them pay? And will she ever feel like her old self again?</p> <p>This book’s frank exploration of sex, violence, and drug culture will interest older teen readers in the complex world of dating and criminal ethics.</p> <p>Amy Hodges Fayetteville, AR</p>	<p><i>Jimmy's Stars</i> by Mary Ann Rodman Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008, 257 pp., \$16.95</p> <p>World War/Family ISBN: 0-374-33703-9</p> <p>A World War II tale of soldiers’ family and friends on the homefront, this coming-of-age story will move readers with its poignancy and unexpected beauty.</p> <p>Eleven-year-old Ellie Mckelvey knows what it’s like to do without. It’s 1943, and Americans are making incredible sacrifices for the war effort. But, Ellie reminds herself, it’s only “for the duration.” Then, Ellie’s brother Jimmy receives his draft notice from the War Office, and suddenly everything changes. Though everyone insists Jimmy won’t come home for a long time, Ellie never stops believing that Jimmy will be back for Christmas – even when her friend’s brothers are reported missing and killed.</p> <p>Readers from sixth grade and up will be drawn into a world not unlike our own – a world of uncertainty and conflict, and a world where family is still an unbreakable bond.</p> <p>Evelyn Baldwin Williams Fayetteville, AR</p>
<p><i>Kendra</i> by Coe Booth Scholastic, 2008, 304 pp., \$16.99</p> <p>Coming of Age/Relationships ISBN-13: 978-0-439-92536-5</p> <p>Growing up in the South Bronx isn’t easy, and no one knows that better than 14-year-old Kendra Williamson. This is her story, an urban coming-of-age tale that is not afraid to expose the challenges of growing up female amidst the hard-edged realities of inner city life. It is in Booth’s concrete, gritty realism, as seen in schoolgirl rivalries, skanky outfits, and hushed sex, as well as her emotional landscapes blighted by absence, rejection, and betrayal, that readers will find characters with whom they can connect and lives as complicated as their own.</p> <p>While <i>Kendra</i> can be characterized as a problem novel with an attitude, and one that will no doubt appeal to high school readers, it can also be characterized as a testament to humanity. While Booth’s world is a dark and problematic one, it is not without hope, and she does not leave her readers without a guide.</p> <p>The explicit language and sexual content of this novel suggest that it is geared toward high school students.</p> <p>Phyllis Thompson Johnson City, TN</p>	<p><i>Lizard Love</i> by Wendy Townsend Boyds Mills Press, 2008, 200 pp., \$17.95</p> <p>Adolescence/Moving /Individuality ISBN: 1-932425-34-9 978-1-932425-34-5</p> <p>This is the story of a seventh-grade girl going through puberty and dealing with the changes in her life.</p> <p>Grace loves the outdoors and all of the animals at her grandparents’ pond in the small country town of Mooresville. Her mother moves her to New York City, where Grace meets Walter, the son of a pet store owner. Walter gives Grace a lizard named Spot who proves to be Grace’s comfort during this turbulent time in her life. Through Grace’s eyes, we see her struggle with growing up, becoming a woman, and dealing with the fact that everything is changing for good.</p> <p>Female readers fifth grade and up will relate to Grace’s troubles with puberty and will appreciate Grace’s strange attachment to her animals and her own lizard love.</p> <p>Kelli Cole Fayetteville, AR</p>

<p>Looks by Madeleine George Penguin Viking, 2008, 240 pp., \$16.99</p> <p>Body Image/Friendship/High School ISBN: 978-0-670-06167-9</p> <p>A glimpse into the unconventional friendship of two lonely 14-year-old girls, <i>Looks</i> sends readers on an emotional roller coaster ride with its protagonists during their first year of high school.</p> <p>The moment Meghan Ball sees Aimee Zorn in the nurse's office the first day of school, she senses that this is a girl with whom she can be friends. However, despite her size, Meghan rarely appears on her classmates' radars, and she finds it more difficult than expected to befriend the guarded Aimee, an aspiring poet who suffers from anorexia. When Aimee forms a friendship with duplicitous teen queen Cara Roy, Meghan redoubles her efforts to reach Aimee, knowing that only she has the secret that can save her.</p> <p><i>Looks</i> is a vivid, painful, and honest story that will have junior high students, especially girls, suffering and celebrating along with the characters.</p> <p>Brittany Beck Fayetteville, AR</p>	<p>My Summer on Earth by Tom Lombardi Simon & Schuster, 2008, 246 pp., \$8.99</p> <p>Science Fiction/Romantic Comedy ISBN-13: 978-1-4169-5563-4 ISBN-10: 1-4169-5563-4</p> <p>In covering a diverse range of topics and surely reaching interests of a parallel student population, this book delivers. It is a unique take on the alien-visiting-Earth concept. What's different here is that the alien, Clint, uses unfiltered language as if he were not an alien at all.</p> <p>On a mission to find and take home a human of his own, Clint experiences many trials and tribulations associated with just such a challenge. Once Clint gets to Earth, he feels something that he has never known—love and attraction for a girl named Zoe. He has only heard about sex and never experienced it because reproducing in his world is all done through technology. He has an overwhelming urge to experience earthling love with her, if he could just figure out how.</p> <p>A note of caution: Adolescents uncomfortable with profanity should be steered away from this book. Even with the language and suggestive content, Lombardi captures the essence of sweet innocence in a coming-of-age love story suitable for 10th through 12th grades.</p> <p>Tonya Seaton Fayetteville, AR</p>
<p>Newses from the Dead by Mary Hooper Roaring Book Press, 2008, 246 pp., \$15.95</p> <p>Fiction/England ISBN-13: 978-1-59643-355-7 ISBN-10: 1-59643-355-8</p> <p>This novel is based on the true story of Anne Green, a servant who survived her own death after being sentenced to death by hanging for infanticide.</p> <p><i>Newses from the Dead</i> takes place in 1650 England during the civil war between King Charles and Parliament. After being hanged for the murder of her new born baby, Anne Green wakes up on a lab table wondering if she is in Heaven, Hell, or somewhere between the two. Through the help of a shy young medical student named Robert, doctors discover that Anne survived her own death. This story is beautifully written and includes a large number of historical events. Hooper concludes the novel with an author's note that shares more historical content and includes the actual facts behind the true story of Green's medical miracle.</p> <p>This is a great book for readers 14 and up who love realistic and eerie storylines.</p> <p>Lindsay Smith Fayetteville, AR</p>	<p>The Otherworldlies by Jennifer Anne Kogler HarperCollins Children's Books, 2008, 385 pp., \$16.99</p> <p>Adolescent Identity/Fantasy ISBN: 978-0-06-073960-7 ISBN: 978-0-06-073959-1</p> <p>Fern McAllister and her twin brother, Sam, are as close as any set of twins can be. Fern, as well as everyone at her private school, wonders why she and Sam don't look alike nor do they act alike. Her skin blisters in the California sunlight, and she wears sunglasses every morning. She also has this weird ability to understand the family Maltese. When Fern has had enough of the name calling and bullying, she finds some odd strength within her to fend off the bullies.</p> <p>This strength opens up a huge new world for Fern and her family. Fern was used to hearing how freaky she was. Now, she's being called another name, an Unusual.</p> <p>This novel tells the story of adolescent identity. Kogler uses the hot vampire trend but gives the readers new twists and turns not read in current novels. <i>The Otherworldlies</i> left me craving more.</p> <p>Mary Schmutz Junction City, KS</p>

<p><i>Outside Beauty</i> by Cynthia Kadohata Atheneum Books for Young Readers, 2008 265 pp., \$16.99</p> <p>Shelby Kimura and her three sisters live with a mother who believes that everyone judges you on your beauty alone. Their mother is what they call a sexpot, collecting money, jewelry, and men along the way.</p> <p>The only thing Shelby and her sisters share is their mother. Each is the product of their mother's failed relationships. This commonality is what keeps the girls strong and united. In a sudden turn of events, the girls must learn how to live separately from each other with their fathers when their mother is injured.</p> <p>Cynthia Kadohata portrays the four young girls as strong and smart people who have learned to adapt to situations that they have no control of. The book is a quick and easy read, leaving you feeling good that outside beauty isn't as good as inner beauty.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Stephanie McNemar Junction City, KS</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">Beauty/Family ISBN-13: 978-0-689-86575-6</p> <p><i>Owning It: Stories About Teens with Disabilities.</i> Disabilities/Fiction/Short Stories edited by Donald R. Gallo Candlewick Press, 2008, 224 pp., \$17.99</p> <p>A teen creates a school video explaining his Tourette's syndrome; a girl finally finds friends who accept her immobilizing migraines, and another teen's friends scare him sober. These short stories by Gall Giles, Julie Anne Peters, and David Lubar, respectively, are in this ten-story anthology featuring teens with disabilities. Various authors, topics and plotlines appear, but all stories portray ordinary teens living with conditions and end positively. Quality is somewhat uneven; although Alex Filmer's brain-injured former honor student and Robert Lipsyte's militaristic cancer ward expertly blend tragedy and comedy, a few resemble public-service announcements.</p> <p>Bonuses include revisiting Olivia in Ron Koertge's "Good Hands," originally in "Calle de Muerte," from Gallo's 2006 <i>What Are You Afraid Of? Stories about Phobias</i>, and finding Eddie Proffit from Chris Crutcher's <i>The Staddling Hill</i> in "Under Control." Author notes include each writer's connection to the disability portrayed, plus facts and contact information about each condition.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Lisa A. Hazlett Vermillion, SD</p>
<p><i>Planet Pregnancy</i> by Linda Oatman High Front Street, 2008, 197 pp., \$16.95</p> <p>Sahara is waiting, rather impatiently, for the results of a test. This is the test of her lifetime. She counts down the remaining time for the results in seconds and memories. In three minutes, she has now joined the ranks of the thousands of unwed teenage mothers. Now that she knows, she had to decide the fate of this egg's life and her own life.</p> <p>Sahara shares her thoughts in free verse that sometimes sounds like a rap. She lets the reader in on all her thoughts about the baby's father, the choices that Sahara must make, and how she gets through the various days in a nine-month cycle. She finds out more about her own life such as actually meeting her own father and what makes a parent.</p> <p><i>Planet Pregnancy</i> walks the reader through what a teen mother thinks, feels, and wonders. It's a quick but thorough must-read.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Mary Schmutz Junction City, KS</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">Teen Pregnancy/Free Verse Novel ISBN-13: 978-1-59078-584-3</p> <p><i>Pretty Like Us</i> by Carol Lynch Williams Peachtree, 2008, 183 pp., \$15.95</p> <p>Beauty McElwrahn lives in Florida with her strong-minded mother and grandmother. Beauty wants to make friends, but her efforts always resulted in disaster. The fact that her mother is dating her teacher doesn't help, and Beauty is certain she's destined to be a social outcast.</p> <p>Then Alane Shriver moves into town. Before she comes to class, Beauty's teacher asks everyone to be kind to the new girl who suffers from a rare aging disease known as Progeria. When Beauty first sees Alane, she thinks there's been a mistake. No one in sixth grade could look <i>that</i> old. But Alane does. She sits right next to Beauty, just what Beauty doesn't need, until she discovers that beauty <i>is</i> more than skin deep.</p> <p>This is truly a must-read book. All girls worry about being accepted, and Beauty and Alane's story will give them lots of laughs, as they see themselves.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Lu Ann Brobst Staheli Payson, UT</p>

<p><i>The Revolution of Sabine</i> by Beth Levine AIn Candlewick Press, 2008, 214 pp., \$16.99</p> <p>This novel of love and self-realization takes place in France during the beginning of the American Revolution.</p> <p><i>The Revolution of Sabine</i> is a wonderful portrayal of a young girl battling societal rules, especially those enforced by her aristocratic mother. Sabine's journey to find love and friendship concludes with her finding the most important relationship of all. This is a wonderful story for young girls. Moreover, this novel sends a brilliant message to all women, mothers, and daughters. The novel also does a fine job of giving historical context about the new America and Ben Franklin during the American Revolution. <i>The Revolution of Sabine</i> references and explains <i>Candide</i> by Voltaire and would act as a wonderful bridge to the classic novel.</p> <p>A great book for young girls 13 and older with an interest in historical fiction or well-told love stories.</p> <p>Lindsay Smith Fayetteville, AR</p>	<p><i>Searching for Yesterday</i> by Valerie Sherrard Dundum, 2008, 224 pp., \$12.99</p> <p>ISBN-13: 978-1550027884 ISBN-10: 1550027-883</p> <p>Most people know who their parents are, but Annie Berkley is different. Unlike the other students in her classes, she is withdrawn and has a negative outlook on life. This is because she was abandoned by her mother and has had several foster families, all of which give up on her. Things soon change when Shelby Belgarden thrusts herself into Annie's life and leads them on an adventure that changes both of their lives, in which the reader can gain insights into the ups and the downs of friendships.</p> <p>Valerie Sherrard's <i>Searching for Yesterday</i> is a mystery story filled with twists and turns that ultimately leaves the reader wanting to read more. This is the sixth book in a series, but it can stand alone because it has a great plot.</p> <p>Sherrard has the ability to bring her readers into the minds and hearts of all of her characters.</p> <p>Jennifer O'Brien Tallahassee, FL</p>
<p><i>Sister Wife</i> by Shelley Hrditschka Orca Book Publishers, 2008, 269 pp., \$12.95</p> <p>A fictional story set on a polygamist compound and told through the eyes of three adolescent girls, <i>Sister Wife</i> is an instantly engaging novel that offers insight into the pressures and struggles young girls in polygamist communities face.</p> <p>The fictional town of Unity is a highly structured community where young girls are expected to care for siblings, be married to a man as old as their fathers, and live in a household with multiple wives and their children. The last thing they are supposed to want is to leave. Celeste, her sister Nanette, who is strictly and steadfastly committed to following the ways of her faith, and Tavana, a young girl welcomed and then ostracized from Unity, alternate as the narrator.</p> <p>After Celeste begins to discover a desire for independence through a series of clandestine meetings with a local artist, experiencing romantic feelings for a boy of her own age, is faced with the choice of staying to honor her family and their traditions or leaving to forge her own way in the world.</p> <p>Tara Griner Fayetteville, AR</p>	<p><i>Something to Blog About</i> by Shana Norris Amulet Books, 2008, 246 pp., \$15.95</p> <p>ISBN: 978-0-8109-9474-4</p> <p>A modern-day teenage love story, Libby Fawcett has terrible luck. She burns her hair on a Bunsen burner, and her mother is dating her archenemy's father.</p> <p>Things start to look up for Libby when her crush of two years, Seth Jacobs, asks for her help in chemistry class. Libby is hardly passing chemistry herself and is distracted by thoughts of a different type of "chemistry." Things take a turn for the worst when Libby's rival, Angel, posts her private blog around school.</p> <p>When all of the secrets that Libby's friends have shared with her become common knowledge for the school, Libby must make important decisions that will alter her future, the future of her friends, and the happiness of her mother.</p> <p>Readers from seventh grade and up will enjoy reading this book and learn an important lesson about privacy and the Internet.</p> <p>Grace Pendergrass Fayetteville, AR</p>

<p><i>The Sorcerer King</i> by Frewin Jones Harpers Collins Publishers, 2008, 324 pp., \$17.89 ISBN: 978-0-06-087109-3 Fantasy/Family</p> <p>This book is the perfect read for fantasy lovers. The Sorcerer King is <i>The Lord of the Rings</i> meets <i>A Midsummer Night's Dream</i>. Classic language, faerie princesses and evil magic combine to make this quest an adventure from beginning to end.</p> <p>The immortal realm of Faeries is in danger from the evil Sorcerer King of Lyonesse. The court of King Oberon and Queen Titania of <i>A Midsummer Night's Dream</i> fame is in danger. It is up to their seven daughters to invoke the Power of Seven to vanquish the Sorcerer King. Tania, the seventh daughter, has been living in modern London, and has just returned to her former Faerie Life, only to discover she must lead the mission to rescue Oberon. Each faerie princess owns a gift that aids the king, but one princess turns traitor. Without the Power of Seven, the princesses have no hope against their nemesis. Tania must find a way to reunite her sisters and her parents and save the immortal realm.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Stephanie Stidham Fayetteville, AR</p>	<p><i>Tweaked</i> by Katherine Holubitsky Orca Book Publisher, 2008, 179 pp., \$9.95 ISBN-13: 978-1551438511 ISBN-10: 1551438518 Murder/Addiction</p> <p>The story follows the struggles of 16-year-old Gordie Jessup, as he tries to deal with his family's breakdown. Gordie's 17-year-old brother is addicted to methamphetamine, has stolen valuables and money from him and his parents, and has taken to the streets. Their parents are heartbroken and barely speak to one another or even to Gordie. The only friend Gordie has is Jade, whose situation at home is not much better.</p> <p>Holubitsky's book contains issues on murder, drug addiction, family relations, and severe illness. It encourages adolescent readers to consider the consequences and damages drug addiction can cause, not only in the individual using the drugs, but also in the struggles, pain, and abuse in a family of a drug addict. Gordie and his friend Jade put on this front while in the company of others, when in reality their lives are full of suffering. Keeping in mind the content of the story, this book, although easy to read, should be considered for mature readers.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Katie D'Souza Tallahassee, FL</p>
<p><i>Zombie Blondes</i> by Brian James Feiwe! and Friends Book (Macmillan), 2008, ISBN-13: 978-0-312-37298-9 232 pp., \$16.95 ISBN-10: 0-312-37298-1 Bullying/Supernatural</p> <p>Hannah Sanders's father is running from small town to town, trying to escape the mysterious events of his past as a police officer in the city. In each new town, he takes a new job and tries to start a new life, but each time he fails. When the money is almost gone, Hannah comes home from school to find all of her possessions loaded in the car, and she and her father are off once again to a new town.</p> <p>As much as Hannah thinks she knows everything there is to know about starting at a new school, Maplecrest is different. The popular girls in this school are all blonde cheerleaders, and there is something sinister about them. Hannah's new friend in the school, Lukas, warns her about the cheerleaders, but Hannah wants to be popular.</p> <p>Brian James' newest novel is a contemporary re-telling of the familiar zombie tale.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">F. Todd Goodson Manhattan, KS</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>

Reaching Reluctant Readers (aka Books for Boys)

As a teacher of high school English, I feel it is my job to be well read in young adult literature. I have read a plethora of novels that deal with teenagers and the many problems they face. I remember in high school reading *Ronnie Finkelhof, Superstar*, by Alan W. Livingston, and then actually buying my own copy so I could read it again and again. I lost it in my university years and finally found a copy a few years ago. The novel is about a shy young boy who accidentally becomes an overnight sensation as a rock star but keeps his success a secret by hiding behind a façade. The novel becomes a satire about high school as everyone loves Spartacus (his alter-ego), yet no one knows Ronnie exists. The themes of fitting in and being true to yourself become abundantly clear as the novel progresses; the ending is surprising and honest as it concludes realistically with a far from rosy finale. When I was in high school, I related to this book on many fronts: I was a bit of an outcast, I wanted to date the hot cheerleaders and I wanted to be a rock star. The book allowed me to fantasize the what-ifs of life and love. Of course, that is what good books do; they make a connection to the reader.

The must-read “Connecting with Reluctant Readers” by Patrick Jones, Maureen L. Hartman and Patricia Taylor states that 43% of boys don’t read or only read what they have to, while 57% enjoy reading. Such numbers disprove the stereotype that boys won’t read. The fact is boys

will read if we put the right book in their hands. They need books with male protagonists, honesty and, most of all, books with characters and stories they can relate to. Teen author Laurie Halse Anderson says, “Teens are not ‘reluctant’ readers; they are ‘discriminating’ readers.” Thus the real problem is most boys (and yes I know I am stereotyping here) will not go searching for a book they will enjoy; they often don’t believe they will find a book they like because they have bought into the propaganda that boys don’t read, or they have been force-fed outdated classics for years and have long ago given up. This is where teachers and librarians come in. We need to know our students and have a vast variety of literature available for them to read. As you get to know your students’ personalities and needs, you can match a book to their individual interests. The following novels are especially well-suited to this matching.

If you can only stock your classroom with one book, it should be author and social therapy consultant Chris Crutcher’s masterpiece *Whale Talk*. Although all Crutcher’s earlier works are great, gritty,

honest stories, *Whale Talk* is the novel of novels. The complex story tackles racism, the high school sports hierarchy, child abuse, battered wife syndrome, forgiveness, bonding of father and son, standing up for one’s beliefs, the thrill of victory, and the understanding of people who are different than the so-called popular crowd. No summary

Although all Crutcher’s earlier works are great, gritty, honest stories, *Whale Talk* is the novel of novels.

can do justice to this multifaceted, multi-themed book, but I will try. The story revolves around Tao, a multi-racial, athletic, confident, stubborn young man who refuses to play school sports because he hates the politics of the sports hierarchy, even though he is an amazing athlete who could letter in a variety of school sports. But when a handicapped boy is picked on by a school jock, Tao decides to create a swim team of outcasts so they can get the “precious jacket” all school athletes receive when they letter in a sport. What follows is an intricate plot that involves colorful characters, numerous intriguing plots and, in the end, a thought-provoking commentary not only about the high school pecking order, but on society and its many flaws. The end leaves the reader with as many questions as answers, but also with a whole new understanding of life, love and loss. I should warn that the novel uses foul language and authentic scenes to bring to life the harsh realities of life. Crutcher does not apologize for the powerful, raw story he tells, instead stating:

When a high school or middle high school teacher looks out over the classroom he or she sees one in three girls who has been sexually mistreated, and one in six or seven boys, depending on which statistics you want to take. One in ten is struggling with sexual identity and will be homosexual. If you're a student in the classroom and you're not one of those kids, you are seated among them. You eat among them. A little understanding usually turns to compassion. (Personal Interview)

For more on the thoughts of Chris Crutcher in regards to censorship and student's rights go to his website at www.chriscrutcher.com.

Canadian Dennis Foon is best known as a playwright, yet his novel *Skud* is an amazing Canadian work that candidly brings to life the difficulties of being a young man in today's society. The book has four separate male narrators whose lives are woven together and will never be the same again. Tommy, perceived as Mr. Perfect, has a life goal to join the Air Force, yet simmering underneath the calm exterior is a rage held in check for 17 years. His best buddy Brad is a hockey jock and the team thug but has been demoted to the fourth line by a girl because the game is becoming a speed game; Brad's anger gets the best of him and begins a downward spiral for those around him. Shane is a bad boy, a tough, ruthless gang leader who is rumored to have pushed a teacher down the

stairs. The students and teachers fear him, but no one actually knows him. Lastly, there is Andy, an actor who dreams of making it big; he is also the accidental catalyst for all three of the other boys as life changes quickly and dramatically.

The novel brings out some of the real problems teen boys face including pressure from parents, unrealistic expectations, and fear of failure. All these pressures are linked together by one universal theme—“boys must be boys.” To prepare to write the novel Foon interviewed over a hundred teens in public and alternate schools, group homes, and drop-in centers. Foon was inspired by the book *The Rites of Man* by Rosalind Miles and the quote “Manhood training by its very nature creates the climate in which violence can flourish, and a society in which, despite its pious protestations, a level of violence is always tolerated, indeed expected” (235). Foon explains further:

the pressure ‘to be a man’ is universal. Boys put it on boys, fathers put it on sons, men place it on men: repress feelings, be overly competitive, aggressive, invulnerable. This imperative was a common denominator linking all the males I interviewed. It skewered their ability to see themselves and the people around (particularly women) clearly. It creates an environment where violence can flourish. I wrote this book because we have to start looking at this; questioning it, challenging, trying to understand its effect on all of us in hopes that we can end this vicious cycle. (Personal Interview)

The novel takes a frank look at these unrealistic expectations and the endings for each of the four boys stays with the reader long after the story ends.

Friday Night Lights by H.G Bissinger, *Bump & Run* by Mike Lupica, and *Crackback* by John Coy are just a few of the many great football books out there. The most recent in this genre is Robert Lipsyte's shock-

Foon explains further: the pressure ‘to be a man’ is universal. Boys put it on boys, fathers put it on sons, men place it on men: repress feelings, be overly competitive, aggressive, invulnerable. This imperative was a common denominator linking all the males I interviewed.

ingly realistic portrayal of high school football in *Raiders Night*. This novel focuses on Matt, co-captain of his high school football team and all-around good guy. The novel depicts the all-consuming impact football has on a town and the unique life teen football players have. Matt “gets the girls,” is in the “in” crowd and is well on his way to an all-expenses-paid ticket to college. Yet, when a team hazing goes extremely wrong, Matt has to question his perfect life. Lipsyte is critical of what football has become in high school:

I’ve been amazed as high school sports has evolved into a bush-league version of the intense, commercialized, drugged big-time college culture. When naming rights for high school fields in Texas go for more than a million dollars, kids are scouted in sixth grade, dads are accomplices in steroid use and hazing becomes a rite of group solidarity, YA fiction has an obligation to reflect it. (Personal Interview)

The novel realistically portrays the pressure society, parents, coaches and teammates puts on teen

boys. The response in football circles has been mixed (as all controversial calling-out stories are), but the overwhelming reaction has been that these issues are prominent in many high schools across America. The most interesting reaction has been from the football players, themselves. After many discussions with players Lipsyte states: “I’ve talked to them individually, and in several cases with teams, one consistent thread is their distrust of coaches, who they think exploit them, play them hurt, mess with their minds and set them against each other. But these boys love the game, the contact

and the comraderie, so they stick it out and are angry” (personal interview). Lipsyte’s novel takes a cold, hard look not only at sports hazings, but steroid abuse, peer pressure, and parental expectations. The reality is

we live in a world where winning has become everything, and when that pressure is put on boys at a young age, the results are often catastrophic.

You may know Rob Thomas as the creator of the TV show *Veronica Mars*, a popular teen mystery television show that was cancelled last year. Before Thomas turned to television, he wrote a few young adult novels including the very good *Slave Day* and the amazing *Rats Saw God*. *Rats Saw God* will intrigue the reluctant reader as it tells the story of an academically strong sophomore student from Houston who has become a drugged-out-on-the-road-to-flunking-out senior in San Diego. The story bounces back and forth between his sophomore and senior years to show how this young man’s life has crumbled right before his eyes and he has not even realized it. The story is a coming-of-age story as the main character Steve comes to grip with his past relationships with his astronaut, image-obsessed father and his crushing romantic heartbreak with the quirky and beautiful Dub. To graduate, his counselor makes Steve write a 100-page paper that forces Steve to reflect on who he was, who he is and who he wants to become.

The book also takes a look at some of the outcasts of the school; students who don’t fit in by choice or by status. These students bond together and form a club called GOD (Grace Order of Dadaists) whose goal is simply non-participation in anything that promotes school spirit. Ironically, by creating a club they “found a social network that worked for them.”

The book has a variety of themes and messages, but a few linger in the reader’s mind long after the book is done. One is that a person need self-reflection to really see what is going on in his or her life and what has gone on. Steve must come to grips with his own mistakes and take responsibility for his decisions before any real change can be made. Secondly, Rob Thomas explains “One thing I had, personally, in common with Steve is heartbreak of epic proportions, or at least it felt that way at the time. The message is, we get beyond it. We need to forgive people in order to lead mentally healthy lives” (Personal Interview). In reality high school is only four years of a life and, for better or for worse, the road after high school is the real journey.

Patrick Jones, former teen librarian, has become a successful author of young adult literature with four novels out. The first two have male protagonists with

Lipsyte’s novel takes a cold, hard look not only at sports hazings, but steroid abuse, peer pressure, and parental expectations. The reality is we live in a world where winning has become everything, and when that pressure is put on boys at a young age, the results are often catastrophic.

a variety of problems. While his first novel *Things Change* is a great story about teen anger and dating abuse, *Nailed* is a riveting tale about trying to find your place in the world and overcoming the many obstacles high school and life bring. Bret, Jones's protagonist in *Nailed*, is a social outcast who has long given up trying to fit in. Although he doesn't fit in or feel important in the classroom, he does feel comfortable in the theatre and in his band. Compounding his problems is the lack of communication and understanding with his father whose respect Bret desperately wants to gain. The stubbornness they have in common has left them with a rift that no longer seems possible to mend. As the story progresses, Bret's life goes through a hurricane of change as he falls in love for the first time, is betrayed by a friend, must deal with his father's disappointment and overcome the daily bullying from the 'jockarchy'. Bret's decisions and reactions to his many tribulations are honest, real and sometimes shocking. In the end, Bret does find out who he is and comes to grips with his strained relationship with his father, but at a heavy cost. The novel looks candidly at a side of society that is often ignored.

Jones' explains why he writes about troubled teens (Paul in *Things Change* and Bret in *Nailed*, Christy in *Chasing Headlights* and Mick in the dark *Cheated*) "I'm from Flint, Michigan, so I'm interested in what happens when the so-called American dream collapses. It is partly a reaction to *Gossip Girls* and those novels, just generally all the YA fiction about well off families. That isn't any reality I know" (Jones 2007). This reality Jones that knows and created in *Nailed* is one that most teens can relate to because the majority of high school students are average teens just attempting to find out who they are and what their place in society is.

The cover for the novel *Skate* by Michael Harmon will have boys taking a second look; the intense story will have them reading. The book is about Ian, an angry, frustrated teenager whose rage finally reaches its boiling point and who must then deal with the consequences. With the police looking for him and a mother deep in the depths of drug abuse, Ian takes his younger brother and goes on the lam in hopes of finding his long lost father. The journey across Washington state leads to a shocking revelation that does not solve Ian's problems, but rather complicates

the matter. Ian must come to terms with his past in order to redeem himself and save his brother from a similar fate. Harmon tells an enthralling story that unflinchingly portrays the long-term impact adult drug abuse has on children. Readers will be inspired by the incredible and complex bond between brothers, pulled in by the boys' battle to survive the elements of their journey and awed by the captivating ending, one that clearly presents the many problems our society is currently fighting.

Although the novel makes a clear statement about the flaws our society has in regard to dealing with students with problems much bigger than school life, Harmon stresses the best solution is "the stability of functional and responsible parents." Also, Harmon states: "If a teen on edge is going to take anything away from my work, I would wish it to be an attitude of self-reliance. Through his mistakes, Ian learns that only he can make his life what he dreams it to be, and that even though help is available, the responsibility, and consequences of his actions, rest solely on his shoulders" (Harmon 2007). In the end, Harmon's first novel is a gritty, true and realistic story that often is overlooked in our society.

Although the cover of *Derailed* by Jon Ripslinger has a football on the cover, the novel is not really about football. Rather it is about Wendell Stoneking, "Stony," "a likeable, smart, talented football player who is not living up to his potential" (Lipsyte 2007). Because he is a football star Wendell has a relatively privileged life. That said, Wendell's family background, his poor choices in life and his lack of motivation lead to the fact that Wendell, like his family, will never leave this small town. Then he meets Robyn, an intriguing young woman who quickly has Wendell questioning his life. Wendell grows closer to Robyn, a single mother, and ends up entangled in an intense situation when Robyn's ex-

This reality Jones that knows and created in *Nailed* is one that most teens can relate to because the majority of high school students are average teens just attempting to find out who they are and what their place in society is.

boyfriend returns. The story builds to a climatic ending with Wendell transforming from boy to man. Ripslinger explains why he wrote this novel, “I taught English in public schools for thirty-five years and saw many students like Stony, a kid with tons of wasted potential. The sight always made me sad. I wanted to write a story about such a kid, but this kid finally sees the light” (Ripslinger 2008). To make the message of this novel (we make our own choices in life) more powerful, Ripslinger created Mindy, Wendell’s girlfriend at the beginning of the story, who wants to simply get married, have kids and spend their whole life in this small town. “I created Mindy as a contrast to Stony. Mindy comes from a poor family back-

Ripslinger explains why he wrote this novel, “I taught English in public schools for thirty-five years and saw many students like Stony, a kid with tons of wasted potential. The sight always made me sad. I wanted to write a story about such a kid, but this kid finally sees the light.”

ground, just like Stony, but she can’t shake her family’s influence and keeps making poor choices.” This contrast enhances the two roads Stony could take and the conclusion of the novel gives hope to all teenagers that they too can break the chain of adequacy that their family may have.

I Am the Messenger by Australian writer Markus Zusak is a novel that is difficult to explain. It is a quirky mystery story with more twists and turns than any roller coaster ride. The plot revolves around Ed, a “going-nowhere” underage taxi driver who accidentally foils a bank robbery and then receives the ace of diamonds in the mail. This

card starts a long road to self-discovery for Ed who must for each ace he receives do three tasks. The tasks get harder with each ace and with each ace Ed becomes closer to the truth. Who is sending the aces to Ed, why is he the chosen one, and how were the people he must deal with picked? These mysteries are not resolved until the very last page. Yet, within the intricate mystery lies much more. Ed must deal with his unsympathetic mother, his idiosyncratic friends and his undying love for his best friend Audrey.

Zusak’s compelling story is enhanced by riveting dialogue and subtle humour that allows the story to progress fluidly. Although the novel has many messages for the reader to ponder, Zusak explains it much more simply, “I think Ed exists to rise above his on mediocrity-that is the message” (Zusak 2007). Ed is one of the most believable characters in young adult literature (or any literature for that matter), an underachiever whose life is not really going anywhere, but Ed has the ability to be successful; however, it takes a catalyst, in this case the arrival of a card, for Ed to rise above his mediocrity. Zusak explains his creation of Ed:

I created Ed as a piece of myself. I was a lot like Ed when I was nineteen. There are so many doubts and fears that live side by side with the jokes, the back and forth bickering of friends and everything else. I didn’t want Ed to be a symbol of a generation. I just wanted him to be the quirky, loveable, courageous, cowardly human that I felt I was and possibly that we all are. (Zusak 2007)

I am the Messenger is an addictive tale that will leave the reader with a clear message: Am I really doing all I can do to be the best person I can be? Is there a better question to leave a reader with than that?

Joaquin Dorfman’s solo novel debut (he wrote *Burning City* with his father Ariel Dorfman) *Playing it Cool* is one of the most unique novels written for young adults. The story revolves around Sebastian, an eighteen-year-old, who is famous in his town for being a problem solver. Sebastian is “the man,” but when he leaves home to help a buddy, doubts begin to surface. He has to match wits with “the man” of Wilmington (who may not be as he appears), try to win over the cold Christina, and try to solve an escalating problem from his past. Just when the reader and Sebastian think they know the truth, everything changes and Sebastian’s house of cards begins to crumble. What Sebastian learns by the end is a powerful lesson. Everything Sebastian thought he knew comes into question.

In Sebastian, Dorfman has created an amazingly complex, interesting and insightful protagonist. Dorfman explains:

I came up with Sebastian back when I was sixteen. Upon resurrecting him practically ten years later, I discovered the world to be no more simple and myself no less confused or despairing. The result, I suppose, is a complex teenage character doing all he can to deny his own inner network of

complications and contradictions, as well those of the world. The nearly crippling process of stepping into bigger shoes is something I believe most teenagers do have in common with Sebastian. (Dorfman 2007)

This ultimate coming-of-age novel will appeal to all teens on the doorsteps of adulthood as it honestly portrays the differences between being a man and being a boy. What also makes this novel stand out is the articulate and entertaining dialogue between characters. The conversations reveal insight into the characters that make them real, sincere and complicated. This characterization makes the reader like characters they would usually dislike and thus enhances the end message Dorfman presents. That message, like all great novels, is up to the reader to decipher as Dorfman himself suggests. "I've never given message much thought when it comes to writing. Whatever light those lessons may shine on readers is beyond my control."

Of all the teen novels I have ever read, the most intriguing premise comes from the new novel *13 Reasons Why*. Jay Asher's debut novel is a dark journey through the life of Hannah Baker, who committed suicide two weeks before. Before she died, she made seven cassette tapes, each side with a story; a story that in some way affected her and led to her fatal decision. The tapes are being passed along to each individual that is somehow responsible for Hannah's fatal decision. The novel focuses on the day and night Clay Jensen receives the tapes. Clay is Mr. Nice Guy and does not know how he fits into the big picture. Clay narrates the complex story as he listens to the shocking tapes and slowly learns why Hannah decided to end her life; Hannah also narrates the novel as we hear her thoughts, pains and insecurities as Clay listens to the tapes. The devastation of Hannah's life is heard through each story and the tone is set early as Hannah gives the listener two rules: "Rule number one: You listen. Number Two: You pass it on. Hopefully, neither one will be easy to you" (Asher 8). The double narration is very effective as Asher explains, "I wanted characters who were two sides of the same coin. Hannah has been torn down by a list of people. But, in the end, she alone is responsible for her decisions . . . and she knows that" (Asher 2007). By the end of the last tape, Clay (and all the others who hear the tape) will never be the same. Clay will see Hannah, his peers, and his life in a whole new

light. The novel stays with the reader long after the story is done as the reader realizes that one's actions all have consequences whether we notice it or not. Asher explains, "In the book, Hannah states that no one knows exactly what's going on in another person's life. Yet we like to believe that our 'little' comments or actions won't have a ripple effect. So, if anything, I hope it makes people take notice of those little things we do that tear other people down. And maybe . . . hopefully . . . we'll start to notice before we do those things" (Asher 2007). In the end, Asher has written one of the most provocative debuts in teen literature, a novel that should be required reading for all teens.

Staying with the dark theme comes one of the most compelling reads ever. Debut novelist C.G. Watson has created a shocking and powerful story about the pressures of high school and, like Asher's *13 Reasons Why*, how the smallest of things can have devastating results. Watson's *Quad* chronicles the lives of six teenagers stuck in a quad as a school shooter lurks outside. The story masterfully shifts from past to present as the story slowly unravels how every character is a suspect and every character has motive. Creating characters from a variety of high school cliques, Watson intriguingly blends together jocks, preps, techies, drama queens, freaks, and choir boys in a realistic depiction of the ups and downs of high school life. Watson, a teacher, explains the reason she wrote this riveting novel:

What motivated me to write this book was a situation that occurred a few years ago in one of my classes, as I watched the way my own students psychologically dismantled one of their classmates. My attempts at intervention fell completely flat; they just didn't get it. After one particularly brutal day, I remember driving home and thinking, 'So, what

The result, I suppose, is a complex teenage character doing all he can to deny his own inner network of complications and contradictions, as well those of the world. The nearly crippling process of stepping into bigger shoes is something I believe most teenagers do have in common with Sebastian.

happens to a kid who gets pushed to his limits? And what if the other kids don't see where the limits are—what happens if they push one step past that?' It was from that question that the story of *Quad* evolved. (Watson 2008)

The novel has many themes including bullying, peer pressure and many more, yet Watson explains her novel's underlying theme and the reality of high school life in 2008:

Quad is about bullying and high school relationships, yes, but it's also about the unseen power of our words and actions on others. At the risk of waxing Darwinian here, high school life in 2008 is about survival of the fittest. It's about living every day on the offensive because if you don't, you're the next victim. What's so sad is that, even though kids pretty much have to play along in order to survive, there isn't one kid out there who doesn't hate this game. The good news is, it truly doesn't have to be that way. (Watson 2008)

In *Quad*, C.G. Watson has written a future classic that is maybe best concluded by the words of a boy who thanked her by saying that *Quad* was “the tightest book ever.”

Most of the books discussed are for boys who are grade-level equivalent readers. For boys who are reading substantially below grade level, there are a number of Orca Books that are high interest and low reading level. The books generally have limited character development, but interesting and fast paced plots. Although there are quite a few available, I have found a few to be especially appealing to young readers. *Juice*, by Eric Walters, looks at the pressure to do “whatever it takes” to win; *I.D.*, by Vicki Grant, is a intriguing look at the downward spiral of a boy unwilling to adapt to his current life;

Yellow Line, by Sylvia Olsen, is a racial commentary on what happens when a white girl falls for an Indian boy; *Bang*, by Norah McClintock, is a cautionary tale about what happens when two boys go too far in their

attempt to be cool; *Blazer Drive*, by Sigmund Brewer, is a layered mystery story wrapped up in a hockey novel; and lastly, *Thunderbowl*, by Lesley Choyce, tells the story of a boy who plays a mean guitar and his priorities change as he gets his first success, but at what cost? At a reading level of grade 4 or lower and generally being just over a hundred pages in length, these books will have students feeling a lot less intimidated than if they were given *The Grapes of Wrath*. I cannot finish without mentioning Walter Dean Myers' courtroom novel *MONSTER*. Sixteen-year-old Steve is in jail and on trail for murder. The story is told in diary entries and in movie script form as Steve decides to make his life story into a movie. The unique style makes the novel a smooth and simple read that keeps the reader on the edge of his seat to the very last page.

There are a lot of other books that will fit well for reluctant readers, obviously. Laurie Halse Anderson's first male protagonist novel *Twisted*, Janet Tashjian's funny and satirical *The Gospel According to Larry*; Joyce Sweeney's wrestling drama, *Headspin*; Alex Flinn's vivid account of teen date abuse, *Breathing Underwater*; Will Leitch's coming of age story, *Catch*; Chris Crutcher's portrayal of the ultimate friendship, *Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes*; Rob Thomas' multi-narrated commentary on high school, *Slave Day*; Michael Scott's multi-layered science fiction-end of the world shocker, *The Alchemist*; Gordon Korman's popularity novel, *Jake, Reinvented*; John Green's boarding school drama, *Looking for Alaska*, and road journey comedy, *An Abundance of Katherines*, just to name a few.

Lastly, I started with Chris Crutcher and I will finish with him. His newest novel is *Deadline*. The novel is a powerful story about senior Ben Wolf who learns just before school starts that he has leukemia and has less than a year to live. Instead of fighting the disease, he decides to live his final year as normally as possible and does not tell anyone. He decides to try out for the football team even though he weighs 123 pounds, befriend the town drunk who has a secret of his own, get a street named after Malcolm X in his all white hometown and lose his virginity to the girl of his dreams. On his journey to leaving a legacy and a normal twelfth-grade year, he starts to have doubts and attempts to find answers to many difficult questions. He wonders why teachers often glorify history

For boys who are reading substantially below grade level, there are a number of Orca Books that are high interest and low reading level. The books generally have limited character development, but interesting and fast paced plots.

instead of just giving students the facts; questions why people can't ignore color and judge people based solely on who they are; and ponders if he is crazy as he continually has conversations with an imaginary guy named Hey-Soos. Like all Crutcher novels, there are shocking plot twists, thrilling sports scenes and honest dialogue. The end message is simple and one that all students can live by: "Live every day like you're going to live forever and every day like it's going to be your last" (Crutcher *Deadline* 312).

In conclusion, this list is hardly conclusive, but it is a start. As a lifelong learner, I too am always learning, so if you have novels that you have read that are great for reluctant boy readers (or is just a good novel) please drop me a line; I would love to hear from you.

Dwayne Jeffery is an English and History teacher in Lloydminster, Saskatchewan, Canada. He is the author of the one-act play The Puppet Master (currently under publication consideration) about the impact of gossip in high school. Dwayne loves to read young adult novels, write plays and short fiction and spend time with his wife, Poppy, and their two children: Trinity and Ryder.

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Twayne and Scarecrow:

An Editor's Memoir

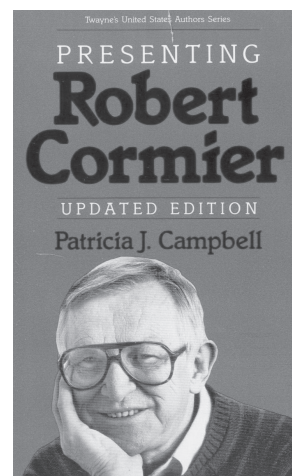
Once upon a time—say 1983—there was almost no serious literature about young adult literature—except, of course, the basic standard work, *Literature for Today's Young Adults* by Ken Donelson and Alleen Pace Nilsen. I had been trying since 1978 to create a body of critical work in my “YA Perplex” column for the *Wilson Library Bulletin*, and other critics like Michael Cart, Betsy Hearne, and Zena Sutherland had done some thoughtful reviews and essays, but all that lacked the dignity of pages between two hard covers. And then I heard that somebody was planning a series of biocritical studies on young adult authors, and the editor was to be a young adult specialist at Boston Public Library, Ron Brown. And I had his phone number.

I stubbed my toe rushing to call him. “Dibs!” I cried. “Dibs on Robert Cormier!” Ron gave me a thumbs-up, and so it began. The “somebody” who was doing the series turned out to be Twayne Publishers, a division of G.K. Hall and a venerable and dignified outfit that had a long history of turning out respectable literary criticism. But could they tolerate the more lively tone I envisioned for a study of a body of work read by teens? All my fears were put to rest when I met my in-house editor, Athenaide Dallett. The daughter of concert duo pianists, she was young, witty, creative, very bright, and eager to learn about young adult fiction. She had already found her beginning point in the works of Robert Cormier and was reading her way through his novels with amazed pleasure.

And “amazed pleasure” was my reaction, too, when the Cormiers graciously invited me to visit them

at their home in Leominster, Massachusetts. There I interviewed Bob nonstop for two days, except for the time we spent having an afternoon beer or two and the hours I happily delved into the riches of the Cormier Archive at the Fitchburg College library. I went home and immersed myself in the subtle complexities and puzzles of his novels, and in 1985 the debut of Twayne's Young Adult Author Series was celebrated with the publication of the first volume, *Presenting Robert Cormier*. The occasion was observed with speeches and a gala presentation at the Boston Public Library Authors Series and a reception and signing (by both Bob and me) at the Boston Bookstore Café. My delight in the display window full of what Bob always called “our book,” and my pleasure at speaking to an audience of distinguished Boston literati was undimmed by the fact that I had come down with the flu and had a fever of 103 as I stepped up to the podium.

Meanwhile, Series Editor Ron Brown had been lining up other people to write about the leading YA authors. In 1985 choosing the subjects was simple—YA lit had a canon of about twenty-five Big Names, and that was it. Ron recruited writers from among his friends and Boston colleagues to tackle his choice of the first six Biggies,



and, encouraged by the critics' grateful applause, settled down to encourage and edit the growing series. The second book to be published was *Presenting M.E. Kerr* by Alleen Pace Nilsen, who was not only already the co-author of the aforesaid *Literature for Today's Young Adults*, but a past president of ALAN, a selection pattern that was to be repeated many times in the series. And then in 1986 Ron had a Thoreau-like epiphany about the shape of his life and moved on to live in the country, while I inherited the editorship of the nascent series.

Athenaide Dallett and I took over the editing of the works in progress. In the beginning we exchanged long editorial letters before we passed our thoughts on to the writers, and from her brilliance as an editor I learned how to spot the places where changes would improve a manuscript—and how to communicate those changes to a writer tactfully, with encouragement instead of criticism. Athenaide became my mentor, my staunch ally in sticky editorial situations, and to this day a valued and admired friend.

Acquisition was now in my lap, so I went straight to the top, to the Godfather of ALAN, Don Gallo. I offered him the biggest fish in my pond—Richard Peck—and he couldn't refuse. But there was a problem. Richard didn't want to be biographized. With becoming modesty, he demurred, explaining that he felt his writing wasn't worthy of a whole book of analysis—an assessment, even at this point in his career, that was obviously dead wrong. Nevertheless, Don and I persisted. I wrote cajoling notes and letters (to this day one does not communicate with Richard Peck by email) and finally he agreed to be the subject of a Twayne study. Don wrote it, but in four years Richard had several more major novels and it was necessary to update the study, and now Don Gallo and co-author Wendy Glenn are about to publish the definitive work on Peck, including all the rich writing of his maturity, for Twayne's successor series.

As I added more authors, I laid down some guidelines for the series' detailed content and style. Our target audience was three-fold—YA librarians, teachers, and students—and so we wanted the books to be lively and readable, but to offer sound critical insights and talking points for class discussion. I also wanted the subject author to come alive as a person in these pages, and so I encouraged my writers to do

personal interviews and even get themselves invited to the author's home. "Find out the dog's name," I told them. "Notice the state of the writing desk. And don't back away from the hard questions."

From my own experience in doing hundreds of interviews for an earlier book, *Passing the Hat*, I wrote detailed instructions for interviewing ("unwrap your tapes before you get there . . ."). Other stylistic and practical matters were also dealt with in the Series Guidelines, such as when to refer to the subject author by first name (only in the preface) and when to use terms like "children" or "youngsters" for YAs (never). A persistent difficulty in the early days was writers' tendency to confuse the instruction to write lively with permission to use slang and inappropriate colloquial expressions. Nowadays, that tendency has faded away and has been replaced with a different fault—stilted academic jargon and feminist rhetoric.

A stylistic problem with legal implications was Twayne's policy of a 400-word limitation on quoted material, even from the works of the subject author. Although I stressed this matter in the Guidelines, nearly every writer exceeded the limit. I spent many tedious hours counting words and adding up the totals—and then shaking my finger at the writer. Holding quotes down was especially difficult for those working with highly quotable authors—like Richard Peck. The better the author, the more difficult it is to avoid picking up that author's apt phrases and colorful descriptions, and to this day, the problem persists with the series. But I hasten to assure writers who grieve at the need to cut that the book will be better with their own carefully considered words.

One matter that I couldn't change was the title format. Some people had even begun to refer to it as "the Presenting series," so name recognition won out over style and grace. But another feature of the first two books that both Athenaide and I joined forces to alter were the clumsy drawings used as illustrations. These were universally deplored by our writers and

Athenaide became my mentor, my staunch ally in sticky editorial situations, and to this day a valued and admired friend.

the critics, so with the third volume, *Presenting Norma Fox Mazer*, we switched to photos supplied by the subject author.

As the series grew, I found that I had to change my preconception that the writers could be drawn from my ALA network of YA librarians. I found that working librarians do not have spare time to write, nor do working teachers, with a very few exceptions.

And as I became more involved with ALAN, I realized that here was a concentrated collection of passionate and articulate supporters of young adult literature who were eager to produce books for Twayne. As I drew on this pool of writers, the series became almost a who's who of excellence in ALAN leadership.

However, it dawned on me that academics are *expected* to write, and their bosses smile on the time and effort that takes. And as I became more involved with ALAN, I realized that here was a concentrated collection of passionate and articulate supporters of young adult literature who were eager to produce books for Twayne. As I drew on this pool of writers, the series became almost a who's who of excellence in ALAN leadership. Of the thirty-five ALAN presidents since 1983, fifteen have written books for the series, and of the fifty-nine titles in the combined Twayne and Scarecrow series, thirty were written by ALAN leadership, including both

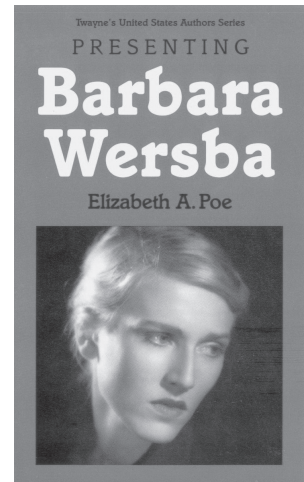
Executive Secretaries. Old ALAN hands will recognize many familiar names in the bibliographies that accompany this piece.

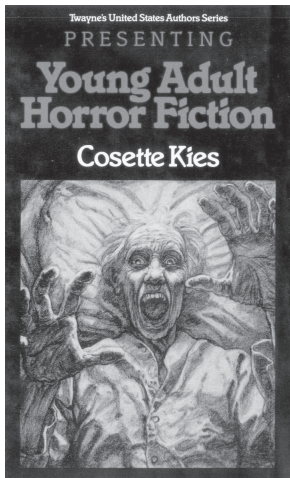
One of the great pleasures in editing the Twayne series was matching subject authors with congenial writers. Joanne Brown and Kathryn Lasky, two witty Jewish mothers, hit it off beautifully, as did passionate shoppers Paula Danziger and Kathleen Krull. Ted Hipple charmed me into giving him a contract to write about his fellow Tennessee author, Sue Ellen Bridgers. But perhaps my best match was Terry Davis with his college friend Chris Crutcher. Terry, as a fine YA author himself, wrote a brilliant biographical chapter in the shape of a long, fictional motorcycle journey,

which I very reluctantly axed because it didn't fit the rest of the book, but his intimate knowledge of the dynamics of Crutch's family provided invaluable insights into the author's work. Other joys were the unexpected discoveries that emerged about authors we thought we knew: William Sleator's years as a ballet pianist; Barbara Wersba's early career as an actress (with a glamour photo to prove it on the cover); the Mazers as radical political activists in their youth.

An inherent problem in trying to analyze authors in the middle of their careers is how to fit future works by that author into a current evaluation. I ran into that difficulty very early with the first edition of *Presenting Robert Cormer*, when I tried to gather together and interpret all his themes with what I thought was a very neat metaphor about an implacable force. But Bob read it, of course, and it made him so self-conscious that none of his later novels fit my tidy interpretation. Criticism can influence creation, for good or bad. Trying to catch up with a prolific author, too, can be a breathless race, as Gary Salvner discovered in writing about Gary Paulsen. I began to tell writers to ask to see unpublished books in production, or even books in progress.

As the series went on, I started to feel that it was getting too formulaic, and so I looked for new ideas to add to the successful basic format. Science fiction and the newly emerging genre of fantasy had troubled me because to cover these genres adequately, it would be necessary to look at many minor authors, as well as a constellation of Big Names. But it was a type of writing that I had publicly deplored, despite its popularity, that became the subject of the first Twayne series genre study with *Presenting Young Adult Horror Fiction* by the irrepressible Cosette Kies. SF and fantasy had to wait, the first until I found a writer fresh enough to the genre to be objective in Suzanne Reid, and the second for eight years, while VOYA editor Cathi MacRae desperately tried to organize, read, and make sense of the rapidly expanding field of





fantasy. (Characteristically, Cathi insisted on including short book reviews by teens, over my initial objections but later approval)

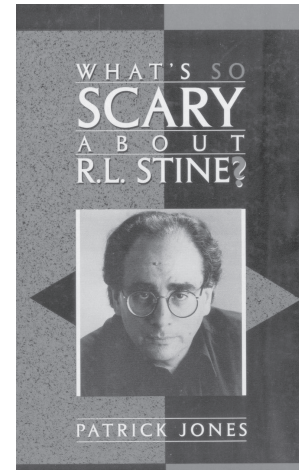
During these years there were changes at Twayne Publishers. In 1989 Athenaide was promoted out of my reach and later left to get a Master's degree at Georgetown University, and Liz Traynor Fowler

took her job as in-house series editor. Later the position was passed to Jennifer Farthing. Between 1985 and 1989 six of the early titles were updated for a Dell paperback reprint series titled Laurel-Leaf Library of Young Adult Authors. By 1995, Macmillan had replaced G.K. Hall. And then in 1997 market pressures forced Twayne to stop acquiring new titles, and two years later Macmillan Library Reference sold to the Gale Group and the series was cancelled, despite good reviews and excellent sales.

But I was having too much fun editing "my" series to give it up, and besides, I had made promises to writers who were at work on as-yet-unpublished books for the now defunct series. So I looked around and settled on Scarecrow Press, primarily because that was where Dorothy Broderick and Mary K. Chelton had taken their essential YA magazine, *Voice of Youth Advocates*. Also, I had worked with Editorial Director Shirley Lambert and anticipated that she and I would see eye to eye about the series' future. We did, and we hammered out a title: *Scarecrow Studies in Young Adult Literature* (although I lobbied for "Young Adult Authors and Issues"). In this new situation I made lots of room for fresh ideas, keeping the successful single author and genre formats, but also opening up a broader perspective to include issue studies

and anything else that might come under the heading "YA lit crit."

The first volume stretched my commitment to innovation. R.L. Stine was a controversial phenomenon at the time for his wildly popular *Goosebumps* and *Fear Street* paperbacks, and the brilliant and unpredictable Patrick Jones wanted to use Stine as a jumping-off place to examine the value of literary popular culture. This struck me as a great book idea, even though I personally abhor trashy popular horror fiction. So I wrote Patrick, "I will take care not to step on your opinions, as long as you justify them." And then I added, "I think we're going to have some fun with this." And we did, as we argued back and forth in the margins of the developing manuscript. In 1998 *What's So Scary about R. L. Stine* was published as the first volume in the new series, sporting a new look with a laminated designer cover and, instead of internal family snapshots as illustrations, a truly scary photo of Stine, warts and all, as a frontispiece.



Then, weeks after the book was published, Patrick got an email from Stine, thanking him and praising the book lavishly. "I had no idea such a work was in the works," he wrote. "Why didn't you and I ever get to talk?" We gnashed our teeth.

During the writing of the book, Patrick and I had scoured our networks to find a way to get an interview with Stine, but the walls protecting him held firm. With the help of an editor friend I even had a carefully composed letter carried into the fortress and hand-delivered to Stine's wife, but there was no response. Then, weeks after the book was published, Patrick got an email from Stine, thanking him and praising the book lavishly. "I had no idea such a work was in the works," he wrote. "Why didn't you and I ever get to talk?" We gnashed our teeth.

Chris Crowe had had better luck in getting to the notoriously

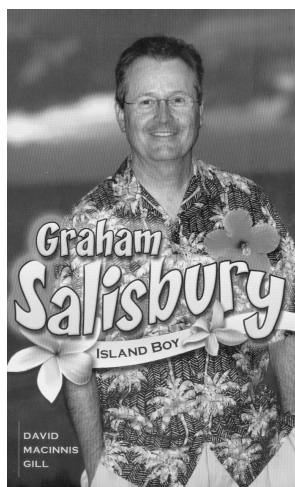
reclusive Mildred Taylor, but his fine study of that author stayed behind at Twayne and became the last book in that series. The Scarecrow series began to grow and gain good reviews, in spite of a bumpy time

But some good came out of this brouhaha, as out of it emerged the right person to do an entire book on the now obviously sensitive issue of Native Americans in YA lit—Paulette Molin.

especially Deborah Reese, who had written a scathing review, and Beverly Slapin, editor of the website Oyate. But some good came out of this brouhaha, as out of it emerged the right person to do an entire book on the now obviously sensitive issue of Native Americans in YA lit—Paulette Molin.

As the series developed, I continued to select leading authors as subjects of studies. Arthea Reed (Charlie to her ALAN friends) was a logical choice to write about Norma Fox Mazer, since she knew the couple's history through her Twayne book on Harry Mazer. Edith Tyson gladly took on Orson Scott Card instead of the book on YA Christian fiction in which she had bogged down. I made sure David Gill understood surfing and Hawaiian culture before assigning him to write about Graham Salisbury. Ten other authors were captured for the series, but still there were some who eluded me, either because they felt the time was not right for them, or

with the second book. As the completed manuscript of Jeanne McGlenn's *Ann Rinaldi: Historian and Storyteller* went into production, a huge controversy exploded over Rinaldi's depiction of government Indian Schools in her novel *My Heart Is on the Ground*. "Hold the press," I shouted. McGlenn, at my request, rewrote her analysis of that book and added an acknowledgement of the issues raised by Native American advocates,



because I continued to search for exactly the right writer.

Studies of broad YA literary issues more and more became a strong component of the series—empowered girls, sports, humor, guys, historical fiction, and a delightful discussion of names in young adult novels, a subject Alleen Pace Nilsen had wanted to write about since her Twayne book on M.E. Kerr. Forthcoming titles will tackle the growing YA theme of mixed heritage, explore the history of girls' series books, take a hard look at body image and female sexuality, and discuss serious issues of the depiction of animals in YA lit.

An obvious subject need was a book on GLBT characters and themes, and the obvious person to write it was the great Michael Cart. For years he was interested, but too busy. I waited. Finally, in 2006, he and co-author Christine Jenkins produced the definitive book on gay and lesbian issues in YA lit—*The Heart Has Its Reasons*—and it quickly became our bestseller. And one book that defied classification was *Lost Masterworks of Young Adult Literature*. Its editor, the magnificently organized Connie Zitlow, was inundated with offers from well-known YA writers and critics to sound off in essays about their own favorite forgotten titles.

Talking with renowned editor Marc Aronson one day, I had an epiphany. "How would you feel about doing a collection of your essays and speeches?" I asked. He felt fine about it, and the two books in which he gathered his audacious and literate writings became steady sellers for Scarecrow. Emboldened by this success, I asked Michael Cart for a collection of his articles and essays, and although his "Cart Blanche" columns were already spoken for by Booklist, he put together a thoughtful and enjoyable compilation, *Passions and Pleasures*. And now I am thinking of looking over my own short pieces for a Scarecrow volume, which I may title *Campbell's Scoop*.

Perhaps the most fun I had with editing the series



Marc Aronson

Twayne's Young Adult Author Series

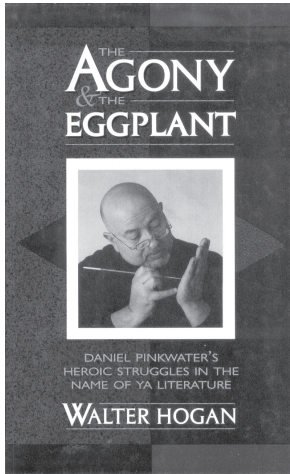
- Presenting Robert Cormier* by Patty Campbell. 1985, updated ed. 1989. Dell pbk 1990.
- Presenting M.E. Kerr* by Alleen Pace Nilsen. 1986, updated ed. 1997. Dell pbk.1990.
- Presenting S.E. Hinton* by Jay Daly. 1987, updated ed. 1989. Dell pbk. 1989.
- Presenting Norma Fox Mazer* by Sally Holmes Holtze. 1987. Dell pbk. 1989.
- Presenting Rosa Guy* by Jerrie Norris. 1988. Dell pbk. 1992.
- Presenting Norma Klein* by Allene Stuart Phy. 1988.
- Presenting Paul Zindel* by Jack Jacob Forman. 1988.
- Presenting Richard Peck* by Don Gallo. 1989. Dell pbk. (rev. ed.) 1993.
- Presenting Sue Ellen Bridgers* by Ted Hipple. 1990.
- Presenting Judy Blume* by Maryann N. Weidt. 1990.
- Presenting Zibby Oneal* by Susan P. Bloom and Cathryn M. Mercier. 1991.
- Presenting Walter Dean Myers* by Rudine Sims Bishop. 1991.
- Presenting William Sleator* by James E. Davis and Hazel K. Davis. 1992.
- Presenting Young Adult Horror Fiction* by Cosette Kies. 1992.
- Presenting Lois Duncan* by Cosette Kies. 1993.
- Presenting Madeleine L'Engle* by Donald R. Hettinga. 1993.
- Presenting Laurence Yep* by Dianne Johnson-Feelings. 1995.
- Presenting Ouida Sebestyen* by Virginia R. Monseau. 1995.
- Presenting Paula Danziger* by Kathleen Krull. 1995.
- Presenting Robert Lipsyte* by Michael Cart. 1995.
- Presenting Cynthia Voigt* by Suzanne Elizabeth Reid. 1995.
- Presenting Gary Paulsen* by Gary M. Salvner. 1996.
- Presenting Lynn Hall* by Susan Stan. 1996.
- Presenting Harry Mazer* by Arthea J. S. Reed. 1996.
- Presenting Chris Crutcher* by Terry Davis. 1997.
- Presenting Avi* by Susan P. Bloom and Cathryn M. Mercier. 1997.
- Presenting Phyllis Reynolds Naylor* by Lois Thomas Stover. 1997.
- Presenting Kathryn Lasky* by Joanne Brown. 1998.
- Presenting Barbara Wersba* by Elizabeth A. Poe. 1998.
- Presenting Young Adult Science Fiction* by Suzanne Elizabeth Reid. 1998.
- Presenting Young Adult Fantasy Fiction* by Cathi Dunn MacRae. 1998.
- Presenting Mildred Taylor* by Chris Crowe. 1999.

Scarecrow Studies In Young Adult Literature

- What's So Scary about R. L. Stine?* By Patrick Jones. 1998.
- Ann Rinaldi: Historian & Storyteller* by Jeanne M. McGlinn. 2000.
- Norma Fox Mazer: A Writer's World* by Arthea J. S. Reed. 2000.
- Exploding the Myths: The Truth about Teenagers and Reading* by Marc Aronson. 2001.
- The Agony and the Eggplant: Daniel Pinkwater's Heroic Struggles in the Name of YA Literature* by Walter Hogan. 2001.
- Caroline Cooney: Faith and Fiction* by Pamela Sissi Carroll. 2001.
- Declarations of Independence: Empowered Girls in Young Adult Literature, 1990-2001* by Joanne Brown and Nancy St. Clair. 2002.
- Lost Masterworks of Young Adult Literature*, edited by Connie S. Zitlow. 2002.
- Beyond the Pale: New Essays for a New Era* by Marc Aronson. 2003.
- Orson Scott Card: Writer of the Terrible Choice* by Edith S. Tyson. 2003.
- Jacqueline Woodson: "The Real Thing"* by Lois Thomas Stover. 2003.
- Virginia Euwer Wolff: Capturing the Music of Young Voices* by Suzanne Elizabeth Reid. 2003.
- More Than a Game: Sports Literature for Young Adults* by Chris Crowe. 2004.
- Humor in Young Adult Literature: A Time to Laugh* by Walter Hogan. 2005.
- Life Is Tough: Guys, Growing Up, and Young Adult Literature* by Rachelle Lasky Bilz. 2004.
- Sarah Dessen: From Burritos to Box Office* by Wendy J. Glenn. 2005.
- American Indian Themes in Young Adult Literature* by Paulette F. Molin. 2005.
- The Heart Has Its Reasons: Young Adult Literature with Gay/Lesbian/Queer Content, 1969-2004* by Michael Cart and Christine A. Jenkins. 2006.
- Karen Hesse* by Rosemary Oliphant-Ingham. 2005.
- Graham Salisbury: Island Boy* by David Macinnis Gill. 2005.
- The Distant Mirror: Reflections on Young Adult Historical Fiction* by Joanne Brown and Nancy St. Clair. 2006.
- Sharon Creech: The Words We Choose to Say* by Mary Ann Tighe. 2006.
- Angela Johnson: Poetic Prose* by KaaVonia Hinton. 2006.
- David Almond: Memory and Magic* by Don Latham. 2006.
- Aidan Chambers: Master Literary Choreographer* by Betty Greenway. 2006.
- Passions and Pleasures: Essays and Speeches about Literature and Libraries* by Michael Cart. 2007.
- Names and Naming in Young Adult Literature* by Alleen Pace Nilsen and Don L. F. Nilsen. 2007.

Forthcoming Titles

- Sisters, Schoolgirls, and Sleuths: Girls' Series Books in America* by Carolyn Carpan.
- Richard Peck* by Don Gallo and Wendy Glenn.
- Sharon Draper* by KaaVonia Hinton
- Mixed Heritage in Young Adult Literature* by Nancy Reynolds. Feb. 2009.
- Reading Russell Freedman* by Susan P. Bloom and Cathryn M. Mercier.
- Janet McDonald* by Catherine Ross-Stroud.
- Animals and Animal Rights in Young Adult Literature* by Walter Hogan.



came with Walter Hogan's delicious book about the quirky comic genius, Daniel Pinkwater. As chapters arrived in the mail, I couldn't resist tearing open the manila envelope on the way home from the mailbox, to delight in the latest installment of Hogan's droll discussion of Pinkwater's equally droll novels, with voluminous and amusing footnotes.

Walter was in close touch with Pinkwater all along, so when it came time to choose a catchy title, it was Pinkie's suggestion of *The Agony and the Eggplant* that caught my fancy with its sheer absurdity. But would my editor Shirley buy it? I ran it past her, and there was a long, thoughtful silence. Then she smiled.

"I love it!" she cried. However, Pinkwater's choice of a cover—himself with five rhinoceroses—was just too far out, and so we settled for a photo in which the large author is painting a picture on his own palm.

YA literary criticism has come a long way since 1983. Several publishers are now doing excellent author studies of one shape or another, and there have been many useful annotated bibliographies of various subjects. It can be said in all honesty that there is now lots of serious literature about young adult literature. And lots more to come as the genre grows beyond our wildest predictions. As I look over my list of works in progress for Scarecrow Studies in Young Adult Literature, I think I can promise that we will continue to pounce on the best new authors, tear open the most challenging issues, and spring a surprise or two.

Patty Campbell is a longtime YA critic, lecturer, and writer, and the winner of both ALA's Grolier Award and the ALAN Award. In 2005 she was the president of ALAN and chaired the Workshop.

Call for Proposals for the CEL Conference

Whether you're a veteran or novice educator, you have experiences to share to help us become better leaders in our diverse society. We invite you to submit a proposal to tell your story, share your strategy, demonstrate your lessons, or report your research. Our interactive workshops are designed to give our conference attendees insight into ways they can better serve the communities in which we live and work. For more information, go to <http://www.dev.ncte.org/cel/announcements/proposals>

Adding a Disability Perspective When Reading Adolescent Literature:

Sherman Alexie's *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*

For ten years I was an 11th- and 12th-grade English teacher at a K-12, fully inclusive, public school. Our mission was to respect the individuality of every student, to promote each child as capable and unique, and to hold all students accountable for their personal best. Classrooms were integrated with mixed-abilities from several cultural backgrounds because we felt a diverse learning environment was the best learning environment. Teachers and students were expected to be flexible, creative, self-disciplined and hard working. Maybe this is why I feel silly. It only occurred to me recently to teach students the importance of questioning how adolescent literature portrays what it means to be “able” and “normal” in any given society. Although my students represented a wide spectrum of abilities, talents, limitations and struggles, I failed to coach them to probe books for how they construct what it means to be normal. My epiphany to this perspective arrived after reading Sherman Alexie's *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*.

Almost all literature occupies some sort of binary between able and disabled bodies, yet I didn't facilitate my students to think about exploring books in this way. Reading Alexie's *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*, however, made me wonder how teachers might encourage adolescent readers to challenge and/or applaud the status quo of normal schooling. Yes, Alexie's text is controversial for several reasons, but it fosters a great deal of progressive thinking, too.

Arnold Spirit's Story

Alexie's style, voice and originality are always entertaining, and I agree with Bruce Barcott (2007) that if it appears that an Alexie line “has an unexpected poetry to it, that's because it was written by a poet.” Each chapter in *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* is written lyrically. In addition, illustrations crafted by Ellen Forney make the reading experience unique. Her artwork, used as a part of Arnold Spirit's on-going diary, delivers amusing layers to Alexie's story and promotes an alternative way of communicating the narration. Forney's drawings can be used to initiate further interpretations and conversations about how students perceive others who are not like them, especially individuals with disabilities.

The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian won the 2007 National Book Award for excellence. The story is about Arnold Spirit, Jr., Spokane Indian student, who makes his way off the Indian reservation and into a neighboring, white-community school. Arnold was born with hydrocephalus, which causes him to be a student with learning disabilities. These disabilities are secondary to his success, however, and a part of who he is—an athlete, a promising Spokane student, and an American teenager.

Alexie writes from a Spokane Indian heritage. Many of his short stories, poems, and novels come from the juncture where one character tries to fuse an understanding of their Native American traditions with the hegemonic discourses of a dominant, Ameri-

can society. In *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*, Alexie uses Arnold's heritage, as well as his disabilities, to take issue with how educational divisions often partition American schools.

Arnold has a self-deprecating wit which he uses to poke fun at himself, his reservation, the dominant culture and the discussion of what it means to be a

success story in the United States. He writes in his diary, "I wish I were magical, but I am really just a poor-ass-reservation kid living with his poor-ass Spokane family on the poor-ass Spokane Indian Reservation" (7). On being educated on this reservation, Arnold writes, "But, we reservation Indians don't get to realize our dreams. We don't get those chances. Or choices. We're just poor. That's all we are" (14). Lacking upward

mobility on the reservation appears to be Alexie's criticism.

Arnold describes his reservation school as "some kind of prison work farm for our liberal, white, vegetarian do-gooders and conservative, white missionary saviors" who are there to teach (30). His teachers don't represent the tribal community; instead, they are from the outside, majority-dominant American culture. At the reservation school Arnold discovers his geometry textbook is thirty years old and is the same one his mother used when she was a student. This angers Arnold, and he throws the book across the room where it hits his math teacher in the nose. The teacher responds, "When I first started teaching here, that's what we did to the rowdy ones, you know? We beat them. That's how we were taught to teach you. We were supposed to kill the Indian to save the child" (35). The teacher then continues, "I don't want you to fail. I don't want you to fade away. You deserve better" (40) and offers, "The only thing you kids are being taught is how to give up" (42). He advises Arnold to leave the reservation school and attend a school on the outside.

Arnold's school experience in a marginalized

reservation school parallels how some special education students are placed in marginalized classrooms. Arnold Spirit is denied an equal, regular and equitable education until he accesses it off the reservation.

Arnold's reservation school might be a metaphor for those who are not offered a fair chance at education because they are secluded from accessing better schools and classes.

Arnold Spirit's Disability

Hydrocephalus, the condition Arnold had as a newborn, occurs when brain fluid is not reabsorbed into the circulatory system. In "normal" children, cerebrospinal fluid provides a layer of protection where the brain and spinal chord float, but in children born with hydrocephalus, the extra fluid causes an expansion of the head. This fluid pressure forces the brain against the bones of the skull and, in return, can destroy brain tissue. Eye coordination, motor skills, muscles, memory, social behavior, learning, judgment, and personality can be affected, depending on the location of the swelling fluid.

In order to understand hydrocephalus, medically, one relies upon the hard work, research, exploration, and expertise of doctors, nurses, and pharmacists who add knowledge to the field. Their work saves lives, relieves pain, and makes improvements for individuals who have impairments. Under traditional medical models of education, however, disabilities are seen as deficits that need to be altered, fixed, or corrected by institutions, teachers and experts. Medical models treat the disability and not the individual, pushing the disabled individual toward a perception of normal.

Not all children born with hydrocephalus experience the educational opportunities Alexie's fictional character, Arnold, receives. Arnold refers to his hydrocephalus as having too much "brain grease" (3), but for him the condition isn't cause for mental setback. Arnold explains his hydrocephalus gives him a "lopsided view" (3) of the world from Indian Health Service-prescribed glasses, but his disability is never a handicap. Instead, Alexie empowers the protagonist with a strong sense of humor: "My feet were a size eleven in third grade! With my big feet and pencil body, I looked like a capital L walking down the road. And my skull was enormous" (3). Arnold's seizures, suffered twice a week, are described as *damaging* old

Arnold has a self-deprecating wit which he uses to poke fun at himself, his reservation, the dominant culture and the discussion of what it means to be a success story in the United States.

damage (3). With a “st-st-st-stutter and a lissssssssththththp” (4), Arnold confesses, “And if you’re fourteen years old, like me, and you’re still stuttering and lisping, then you become the biggest retard in the world”(4). He is aware of his differences (and the labels that come with them), but celebrates who he is with a fight and, eventually, with a flight to another school. He doesn’t allow his disability to hinder his success.

Arnold’s hydrocephalus is not as central to the story, or as controversial, as his decision to leave the Spokane reservation school. Yet, when giving this decision a disabled reading, it progressively promotes access to the most inclusive, challenging classrooms available. Drawing parallels between Arnold’s disability and his reservation experience demonstrates the double minority status of Arnold Spirit, Jr. as a disabled Spokane boy who is kept away from “regular” society until another school opens its doors to him.

Toward a Disability Interpretation of Arnold’s Departure

Disability becomes synonymous with second-class citizenship when teachers and schools use such labels to exclude individuals with disabilities. The manner in which disabilities are constructed needs to be questioned (Danforth & Gabel, 4). Deconstructing able and disabled bodies is at the heart of offering adolescent literature a disabled reading. A disabled reading, for instance, of *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*, challenges assumptions made about minority students—including Native Americans and students with disabilities—which, in return, politicizes the way students from minority communities are given access to education within their schools. Alexie brings Arnold’s double-minority status to the forefront and makes readers wonder whether or not it is acceptable for him to leave his reservation in order to gain access to a better education. In the days of No Child Left Behind, the story pushes an agenda for non-traditional students, who have traditionally been left behind, to have better access.

The reservation teacher’s advice offers words to Arnold that mirror differences between medical models for disabilities and socially constructed models that question the true intentions of “special” educa-

tion. Within a medical model, individuals are diagnosed, labeled, prescribed, controlled, institutionalized, medicated, studied, probed, beaten, shackled, contained, restricted, denied, and oppressed (Shapiro, Chapter 4). In contrast, the socially constructed model requires rethinking diagnosis, labels, prescriptions, and restrictions. The similarities between Arnold’s experience in *The Absolutely True Autobiography of a Part-Time Indian* and the way individuals with disabilities have traditionally been treated in American schools are obvious. Whereas the geometry teacher admits educators were supposed to “kill the Indian to save the child,” the medical model, he also admits, “I don’t want you to fail. I don’t want you to fade away. You deserve better,” a socially constructed model that advocates for student

success. Blaming the individual for a disability (in Arnold’s case, being an Indian with hydrocephalus) and mandating they adapt to normal society (in this case, American society) is different than blaming society for how an individual with a disability or who is from a particular culture is accepted. Under a socially constructed model, society is challenged for the way it treats its marginalized populations. The socially constructed model should be important to individuals who teach adolescent literature because many of our students arrive from marginal populations and

homes. As educators, we should be asking ourselves how our curriculum disables the students we teach.

Disabilities are not to be viewed as conditions needing to be cured or healed, but rather as differences to be accommodated and accepted (Taylor, xx). The argument against a medical model is that its language, psychological measurements, and behavioral science “formulate a clinical discourse that casts perceived biological or cultural differences as educa-

The socially constructed model should be important to individuals who teach adolescent literature because many of our students arrive from marginal populations and homes. As educators, we should be asking ourselves how our curriculum disables the students we teach.

tional illness requiring proper diagnosis, quarantine, and treatment by scientific professionals” (Danforth, 84). Labels placed on class, race, ability, and gender positions, should not become determinants of one’s identity (Rice, 21), unless someone is claiming it for them. Yet, the longstanding, exclusionary practices in U.S. public schools are known (Kozol, 2005; Ferri & Connor, 2006).

Hierarchical ranking (Gallagher, 71) has historically aligned itself with importance of bloodlines and ancestry, and these eugenic concerns have resulted in many practices of socialization (evident through both

Indian reservations and schooling institutions). Immigrants to the United States, in fact, often experienced an educational system which forced dominant cultural values onto them while devaluing the experience of their diverse, home cultures. The definitions for “normal” came from privileged people (Kliewer, 95). Individuals who didn’t fit the acceptable categories designed by such people were placed in “special education” (Solis & Connor, 107). Therefore, the disabled body has historically been defined as deficient.

The argument can be made that a medical model for treating disability as

abnormal is similar to creating Indian reservations designed to keep Native Americans from the rest of society. Families and students with disabilities who want inclusive education should be supported and encouraged. Comparably, students seeking academic instruction different from what they receive at their regular school, like Arnold, should be allowed to do so. The best education should be available to all.

The new school Arnold attends in Reardon, Idaho, represents regular education. With a medical model perspective, Arnold’s reservation school exists only

because Native Americans have been deemed not normal; they need to be kept away, reserved, from regular society. This thinking creates inequity and holds abnormal individuals accountable for their own abnormality, and not the other way around. Because of labels, a separate treatment, facility, and placement occurs, and this is why thinking about education from a traditional, medical model falls short; it discriminates against minority populations.

Gordy, the nerdy white boy at Reardon who also feels outside the norm of his peers, tells Arnold:

Well, life is a constant struggle between being an individual and being a member of the community . . . in the early days of humans, the community was our only protection against predators, and against starvation. We survived because we trusted one another . . . So, back in the day, weird people threatened the strength of the tribe. If you weren’t good at making food, shelter, or babies, then you were tossed out on your own . . . weird people still get banished. (132)

Disabled and abnormal individuals have historically received positions of alienation. A minority status has always been placed in opposition of a prescribed, majority-based notion of what it means to be able. If one is perceived as unable, he or she is pulled out of the community and kept away.

A socially constructed model for full inclusion promotes individuality and the acceptance of all individuals. In inclusive classrooms students are treated with dignity, and belonging comes to the forefront. Kunc (1992) explains that efforts of kindness, support, respect, dignity and belonging are extremely important for any individual to self-actualize (<http://normemma.com/armaslow.htm>); therefore, assisting students toward a place of self-actualization should be the goal for all educators, within all classrooms.

Behind a socially constructed model for inclusion are questions about basic human rights. In developing countries, individuals with disabilities see survival as a first priority and education as a luxury (Peters, 314). Survival, it can be argued, is the case of Arnold when he goes to school on the reservation, until he leaves to take advantage of the luxury allowed at Reardon. Gloria Ladson-Billings (2006) writes that students must experience academic success while maintaining their own cultural awareness and competence. Arnold develops critical consciousness while challenging the status quo (that of his new school) and his culture

Gordy, the nerdy white boy at Reardon who also feels outside the norm of his peers, tells Arnold: So, back in the day, weird people threatened the strength of the tribe. If you weren’t good at making food, shelter, or babies, then you were tossed out on your own . . . weird people still get banished. (132)

(that of his reservation school) to make sense of his own identity and individuality. At Reardan, his academic success is allowed to flourish; however, his awareness of Spokane traditions is not necessarily promoted.

Arnold's act of choosing the school he wishes to attend is central to the issue of educational equity because, at the heart of it all, he has the right to make a decision for himself. Reardon is a wealthy, white farm town, and Arnold notes, "I was the only kid, white or Indian, who knew that Charles Dickens wrote *A Tale of Two Cities*. And let me tell you, we Indians were the worst of times and those Reardan kids were the best of times" (50). Arnold assesses Reardon as offering students more opportunities, and he chooses to walk the twenty-mile journey to leave his "worst of times" behind.

At his new school, Arnold finds himself in challenging classes with success-driven peers. The challenging classes and encouragement are a part of the socially constructed model for disabilities instruction. In inclusive schools, educators have the responsibility and power to shape the curriculum and to design the expectations for meeting the needs of diverse learners, including students with disabilities. These schools place the responsibility of curricular-adaptation on themselves, instead of ostracizing individuals with disabilities for their limitations (Finders & Hynds, 95). Arnold Spirit experiences such design and addresses it as follows:

I suppose it had something to do with confidence. I mean, I'd always been the lowest Indian on the reservation totem pole—I wasn't expected to be good so I wasn't. But in Reardon, my coach and other players wanted me to be good. They needed me to be good. They expected me to be. And so I became good.

I wanted to live up to expectations.

I guess that's what it comes down to.

The power of expectations. (180)

Within the social construction model, eccentricities and differences are encouraged and supported because a solid, student-centered education exists for all students. Individual achievement is the goal, and classrooms become supportive environments to meet the needs of multiple learners.

Literacy as Survival

In his essay "Superman and Me" Sherman Alexie discusses his home as a print-rich environment. Alexie (1997) writes about being a reader:

A little Indian boy teaches himself to read at an early age and advances quickly. He reads "Grapes of Wrath" in kindergarten when other children are struggling through "Dick and Jane." If he'd been anything but an Indian boy living on the reservation, he might have been called a prodigy. But he is an Indian boy living on the reservation and is simply an oddity. He grows into a man who often speaks of his childhood in the third-person, as if it will somehow dull the pain and make him sound more modest about his talents. (3–6)

Marlinda White-Kaulaity (2007), a researcher who explores Native American literacy practices, recalled how she, too, was an oddity because of her literacy practices. Her culture didn't value print-text; instead, the spoken word carried greater importance. She wrote, "Because the written word was often used to discredit Native American culture or rob us of our rights, writing and reading are considered by some to be 'white man's' activities" (561). Any one classroom creates a hegemonic structure. For many students, this structure immediately denies access to equity because students may "distrust" the school-work—in this case the literacy valued by the dominant culture.

Challenging how texts are constructed opens the door for new voices to be heard. Who makes the decisions that some students receive a particular type of education while others receive another? Why are some students allowed access to materials, like advanced placement, while others aren't even mainstreamed in classrooms with their peers? Which

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students are conditioned to join the cultural ranks of those already in power, and which students are denied access to such conditioning? Should literacy matter for all students?

In an interview with Rita Williams-Garcia, Alexie admits, “I suppose Arnold would think that literacy is a form of self-defense. If one reads enough books one has a fighting chance. Or better, one’s chances of survival increase with each book one reads” (http://www.nationalbook.org/nba2007_ypl_alexie_interv.html). Acknowledging that *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* is autobiographical, Alexie promotes literacy as a means for survival. He does not allow the labels placed on Arnold as “different” to overpower Arnold’s literacy practices and success in school.

There is a tragic sadness, though, in Alexie’s adolescent novel that arrives with Arnold’s success. When Arnold attends Reardan, he enters a world that many on his reservation don’t know. Attending

Reardan allows him privilege and acceptance into the society that has historically created institutions and reservations designed to oppress. Arnold notes, “. . . Indians have forgotten that reservations were meant to be death camps” (217). He understands that his new place in society sets him up for opposition with his old place. Arnold’s best friend on the reservation, Rowdy,

operates as a reminder of where he comes from, and stirs within Arnold what is important about Spokane culture. Arnold’s story is one of negotiating boundaries between two worlds. He recognizes a nomadic ancestry (229), but also that his people had better adaptation skills before the white man and their institutions arrived.

Arnold’s decision to leave the reservation comes at a cost of how he is perceived by those on the reservation. His place on Reardon’s basketball team is a symbolic “court” for cultural identity. Although Reardan and the reservation basketball teams find themselves in battle twice, Arnold and Rowdy play the final game, one on one, without keeping score (230).

Implications for Teachers of Adolescent Literature

Alexie’s *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* is accessible for educators who work with adolescent readers. The story has the potential to promote discussions among a wide variety of students: those with disabilities, those who are seen as able, those from majority-dominant backgrounds, and those from minority cultures. The text asks its readers to think about how individuals who are not normal are treated by schools. Examining Arnold’s experience on and off the reservation through a perspective that questions socially constructed roles for marginalized individuals allows for an original way of interpreting literature.

Multiple lines of vision need to exist when exploring any classroom text and a disability reading offers a new way of seeing how our culture promotes and demotes particular populations. All students need to read. All students need to be challenged. All students need to write. But most importantly, all students need to belong. Offering students an opportunity to question how a piece of adolescent literature constructs definitions of an able or disabled character, provides an additional platform for how power structures are defined in our society. Teachers of adolescent literature should ask disability questions of the books they teach.

Although only *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* is read from a disability lens here, issues of able and disabled labels can be found in most literature. Drawing on a few adolescent texts my students read—*The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, *Monster*, *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night*—it is easily noted that disability issues have always existed in my classroom, although I didn’t pay enough attention to them. In addition, several classics—*Of Mice and Men*, *Oedipus Rex*, *The Color Purple*, *Cry The Beloved Country*—are worthy of disabled readings, too. Literature provides a window into how cultures create power dynamics and roles for its people—roles deserving challenging questions and rethinking.

I encourage disabled readings and interpretations of adolescent literature because I recognize the potential for creating democratic classrooms through the art of questioning. During my 10 years in an

All students need to read. All students need to be challenged. All students need to write. But most importantly, all students need to belong.

Suggested Questions to Promote a Disabled Reading of Adolescent Literature with Students

- How are abled bodies defined by the text?
- How are disabled bodies defined by the text?
- Do power dynamics exist between able bodies and disabled bodies?
- Are characters with handicaps pitied? Promoted? Abused? Scorned? Celebrated?
- How are dis/abled characters treated by other characters in the text?
- Are disabled characters given the same depth of character as able characters?
- What conflicts do the disabled characters face in the text?
- How does the disabled character define other characters in the text?
- How would the story be different if the able/disabled characters' roles were reversed?
- How does the setting affect characters with disabilities?
- What does the author intend to get from their able/disabled characters?
- How were people with disabilities treated at the time the story takes place?
- Do questions regarding ability and disability make you uncomfortable? Why? Why not? What is gained from giving a text a disabled reading?
- How does the text define normal? Is the book's idea of normal different from your own?

inclusive educational environment, our school held that that difference and diversity should act as bridges rather than barriers to communication, and I believe a similar approach should exist in understanding how literature is constructed and interpreted. Asking teachers to question how we promote, or challenge, the construction of able and disabled individuals can only be good for the diverse student populations we teach.

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Gallo Grants

The Gallo Grants were established in 2003 by former ALAN Award and Hipple Award recipient Don Gallo to encourage educators in their early years of teaching to attend the ALAN Workshop for the first time. The grants provide funding—up to \$500 each—for two classroom teachers in middle school or high school each year to attend the ALAN Workshop. (The amount of a grant may be less than \$500 if the applicant lives within commuting distance of the convention location where airfare and housing would not be necessary.)

The Workshop is held at the annual convention of the National Council of Teachers of English on the Monday and Tuesday prior to Thanksgiving Day. Applicants must be teaching full-time; must have been classroom teachers for less than five years prior to the year in which they are applying; and must not have attended an ALAN Workshop previously. Membership in ALAN is not required for consideration, though applicants are expected to become ALAN members if they receive this grant.

Each applicant must fill out the attached grant application form and submit an essay of no more than 750 words explaining their interest in Young Adult Literature, what they hope to gain by attending this year's ALAN Workshop, and how they hope to use the experience in their classrooms in the future. A letter of support must also come from the applicant's school system. **The deadline for submission is September 1.** Applicants will be judged on their ability to articulate their understanding of the value of Young Adult Literature as well as their explanation of how they intend to use YA books and the information they gather at the Workshop in their own classrooms.

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



Roses are Red

Taking a Leap of Faith

*Roses are red;
Violets are blue.
I'm a Baptist, Muslim, Mormon;
How 'bout you?*

With an opener like the one above, you may have guessed the subject of this article: Religion and Young Adult Literature: I began thinking about this topic and about writing this article seven months ago. Truthfully, I had never stopped to think about the duality: religion and literature for teens. Except for reading my own religious texts, I had never considered if there were any young adult titles that centered their plot and characters smack dab in the middle or even on the periphery of religion. Undoubtedly, my lack of exposure to such literature shaped an opinion that it must not be a popular approach. The genre, if you will, was not bursting with titles, so as part of concrete preparation, I thought long and hard about my own adolescent reading. Initially, that led me nowhere. I then visited English and reading classrooms, surveyed young readers, and searched for titles that

seemed religious in nature. I talked with my college students, and I obtained membership in a religious book club. But after months of research and study, I only guardedly believe the situation may not be as desperate as I once thought.

It is true that while craning my neck around library and classroom bookshelves and poring over electronic files, I found only a few books that mentioned a spiritual journey of any kind. Although I understand the difference, that one quality can exist without the other, I found myself referring to “religious” and “spiritual” as synonyms, as there are simply not enough words to describe either of the words. So, after investing this time on “religion” and its books, I was naturally focused on the lack thereof. As a reader and, well, a “seeker,” I became curious about the dearth of spiritual content couched in young adult books. I wondered why. What made this topic, unlike so many uncomfortable topics, taboo? Do students opt out of religious material? Do parents discourage these reading selections? Consider this irony: In my research, I found no books

which explicitly embraced the Sermon on the Mount, yet I found numerous selections with content that might offend even the most liberal parent. It bears investigating that in this extensive world of young adult literature, much that is brimming with controversial subjects of incest, abuse, murder, sex, the supernatural, violence, cutting, inhumanity, and much more, what hinders religious literature from being abundantly produced by writers, and what hinders it from being fully embraced by young readers?

Yes, that would be a whale of a topic for another time, but my interests lie in the here and now. I put on my teacher’s hat and focused on the three most pressing questions on my mind:

- 1) What types of religious literature are teens reading, in and outside of school?
- 2) What in-school reading can be considered (or do students feel) is religious in nature?
- 3) What do teens consider to be religious literature?

I knew straight away that the second question—what in-public-school reading can be considered

(or do students feel) is religious in nature?—was problematic. The question itself had backed me into a corner with prospects of few answers. Why? The answer is found in the First Amendment: *Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.* With this amendment and in terms of text, teachers and legislators are aware of the separation of church; nevertheless, schools continue to remain a playing and/or battlefield in terms of religion, i.e. prayer, devotionals, Bible clubs, etc. For purposes of this study, the question was relevant, but for me to assume students might be universally assigned a book steeped in religious considerations, was, at best, naïve or misguided. I had no choice but to step back and reconfigure my question.

But “of whom” was I asking the questions? I wanted to explore answers from librarians and teachers of YAL, but to know what teens were reading seemed far more useful and informative. Wisely we have learned and accepted that the reading habits of the two are not always synchronized, and to sample one population and not the other might provide a hopeful yet inaccurate assessment of the actual reading situation. Well-intentioned teachers and tutors of reading may suggest titles “until the cows come home,” but if a reader is not tantalized by the genre, the book will probably remain on a dusty bedroom shelf.

Anonymous Survey

My investigation of the situation, I must admit, was far from hard research. I conducted a casual and

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anonymous survey of 500-plus students, which was arguably small-scale, but I was more interested in a spot-sampling rather than one with deliberate cross-cultural considerations and large-scale probability. In other words, I was putting a little Utah-toe into new and national waters, and pursuing tiresome quantitative or rich qualitative research was not my goal. I wanted to poll my community, the kids who live in my town, and the teachers I know and see from time to time. I took heart in the realization that should the question of YAL and religion again surface, deeper considerations can be made by a true researcher. So, with that being said, this was my protocol: A questionnaire was electronically sent to a list serve of approximately 150 English teachers who had recently begun a career in teaching secondary English and language arts. The questionnaire contained six broad questions about reading preferences, and all respondents remained anonymous. Teachers mailed the responses back to me in plain envelopes which prevented me from knowing what schools the responses came from and the names of the participating teachers and students. As merely an

exploratory tool and one that provided answers that allowed me to make inferences, I surveyed the responses and made loose categorizations of answers.

By my calculations and because Utah teachers usually teach large classrooms, I could have received more than 1500 responses, but as I counted my piles of papers, I had a hand-count of 500 responses. Even so, the number thrilled me, but the caliber of the responses left a great deal to be desired. I began to wish for answers written in volumes rather than “Don’t know” or, sadly, the “I don’t read” response. As I considered the categories and quality of the responses, I was reminded of survey research that speaks to types of responses usually found within samples. Many of my responses appeared to align with the bulleted information below, and like every researcher, I tried to minimize the problems associated with sampling, non-responses, and biased.

- Reactivity—respondents tend to give socially desirable responses that make them look good or seem to be what the researcher is looking for
- Sampling Frame—it’s difficult to access the proper number and type of people who are needed for a representative sample of the target population
- Nonresponse Rate—a lot of people won’t participate in surveys, or drop out
- Measurement Error—surveys are often full of systematic biases, and/or loaded questions (O’Connor).

In addition to a healthy amount of authentic “I don’t know” responses, I enjoyed reading the majority of

responses which gave other thoughtful and explicated responses to the questions. It is their re-

sponses that shed light on the “whys and why nots” of religion and young adult literature. Let’s

consider a sampling of all the informative and representative answers:

<p>1. What type of young adult literature do you read? Why?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * I don’t know. * I like suspense stories, love novels, and all types pretty much except for fantasy books! * Anything that grabs my attention! * Historical fiction mostly because it could have really happened. * I like literature that has an inspiring role model, so usually adventure stories because the main character is courageous, strong, and determined. * Suspense; it keeps me thinking all the time. * Chuck Palanvik. It’s not just another boring story. * I don’t read young adult literature. * All sorts of stuff. * I like to read about war and pretty much anything. * Horror stories. They are addicting. * I don’t like to read. * Anything that doesn’t involve witchcraft. * Stuff that actually relates to me. * <i>Harry Potter</i>. * Biographical cause I like realistic stories, not dumb fake ones. * Fiction. I’m not influenced to believe certain things. * Fantasy: <i>Lord of the Rings</i> type books. * Mysteries, because you are always guessing. * Fictional because I don’t like learning about real things, and they are easy to get more lost in them. * Action and sports, cause that’s what I’m into. * Fantasy, suspense, almost any kind of fiction because reading takes you wherever you want to go. * I like comedy. I like to laugh. * I don’t know. What is young adult literature? * I don’t really like young adult literature. They are too “air-headed.” The conflicts aren’t “deep” enough. * Books about controversial problems (drugs, homosexuality, depression, i.e. <i>Go Ask Alice</i>, <i>A Million Little Pieces</i>). * Um . . . stuff that I deal with gets kinda lame. Everyone goes through a lot of the same stuff, and after awhile, it gets redundant. I like hearing about the kids in other countries . . .
<p>2. Have you recently read a book that dealt with a religious theme? What was its title? What was the book about?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * I don’t know. * Yes! It’s in Spanish. It’s called <i>Angeles y Demonios</i>. * Yes. <i>I’ll Be Seeing You</i> by Borrowman. * Yes; <i>Wind in the Door</i> by L’Engle. * No. * My college history book is dealing with a lot of the new religions in early America. * <i>Embraced by the Light</i>. It’s about a lady who dies and has an out of body experience. It’s pretty awesome. * Yes, <i>Loves Labor Tossed</i>; it’s about a missionary who hates his mission but learns to love it.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * <i>The Davinci Code</i>. It was about how Jesus had a wife and child. * Yes, <i>The Crucible</i>. * Yes, <i>The Book of Mormon</i>. * No. I hate religious books except <i>Charley</i>. * Kind of. It was called <i>Wicked</i>, and it touched on themes of sin and inherent evil. * Yes, about Quackers (sic) * Sort of: <i>Lovely Bones</i> * <i>Ender's Game</i> * <i>Devil's Arithmetic</i> * No, unless you count the <i>Bible</i>
<p>3. Would you like to read a young adult book that dealt with the issues of religion, beliefs, morals, etc.? Why or why not?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Don't know. * Sure. I'm always opened to any type of story that can teach you something. * Yes because I usually read books like that anyway and I enjoy them. * Not really because I like to leave my religion at home and out of school. * Yes, because it applies to everyone. * Most likely not, because we talk about it all the time in school, church, etc., and I don't want to read about it. * Yes. A lot of times in school we avoid discussing religion. It's something I'd like to talk more about. * Maybe. * Yes, because as a teenager that is what I'm dealing with in life. I could relate to it. * Yes, as long as it isn't <i>Huck Finn</i>. * Sure. I'll read whatever. * No; I'm sick of people trying to change my beliefs. * Yes, because that is something I deal with every day. * Yes, as long as it's a good book, I don't care what it's about. * No. The public education system only talks about abstinence. * No, because I believe that everyone should have their own, and I don't care what others believe. * Yeah, sure, because it might be cool. * No, cause that's boring. * Yes, because those are the things that have the most debate nowadays. * Maybe, it could be interesting. If I thought it was boring, I would stop reading it. * I would because I like to keep an open mind about different things. Although I may disagree; everyone is entitled to their own opinion. Something in the novel may also help to change my particular beliefs. * Yes and no, because school is a time for literature about past, future, and fictional things, and there are other times for religion. * No, I don't like people being a part of religions cause they think they're better than others. * I suppose. It's always interesting to read about things that are more than just the staunch black and white. * No, cause it doesn't excite me. * Beliefs and morals: yes. Structured religion: No. * Not of Christianity; we know that, but of hedonism * I don't want to ruin my beliefs by reading something else. * Heck no! Sports!

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Sure, I'll give it a try. * Not really. It doesn't sound interesting, at all. * Yes, because life deals with these issues sometimes every day. * Yes, if it related to my religion. * Depends on my mood * Not until I'm older; I don't think I would enjoy it now. * Sure; you can always learn from others * Yes, I enjoy controversial books.
<p>4. Would your parents like you to read a young adult novel/book that dealt with a religious topic? Please explain.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * I don't know. They like business books. * Probably, but my parents aren't big readers so I'm not sure. I think they'd be fine with it because they knew I was reading a good book. * No; they believe in no religion in school. * Probably; they are religious, but they wouldn't make me. * Maybe if it helped me be a better person. * Probably yes . . . to help me, I guess. * No. They hate it when you try to change my beliefs. * Yes; they like me to be well-rounded. * No. I don't live with them, so their opinions don't matter. * I'm sure they wouldn't mind because they trust me. * It depends on the type of religious topic; they would if it related to my religion. * My parents like me to be well-cultured, and they don't really force books upon me. * Sure; I'm sure they wouldn't care, but it wouldn't kill them if I didn't. * Yes, so I can learn what I need to take care of. * Yes. They try and force religion on me all the time. * I suppose they're indifferent, so long as I am not disturbed by its content. * Depends on what religion * My parents wouldn't care because we don't go to church. * I don't know what they want. * They don't like religion being taught in school, as do I. * My parents could care less what I read. My dad recommended the teaching of the Dalai Lama, but that isn't a young adult book. * I don't think they would mind, but they would have to approve. * They don't care what I read, as long as it is a good book. * My mom doesn't really mind what we're reading. She's just proud when we read. * Most likely; my mom has two very rebellious kids (I'm not one of them), and they hardly ever talk to me
<p>5. What book have you recently read IN SCHOOL that taught you a moral or lesson about life? Please explain.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Dunno * <i>Holes</i>, because you learn that if you steal things, you have to pay for your decision. * None * I read <i>The Crucible</i> and <i>Anthem</i>, and others that taught me how to handle trials and treat others. * <i>Huck Finn</i>; it taught that you need to own up to your own doings in the end. * I haven't read any books yet. * <i>How To Kill a Mockingbird (sic)</i>; it teaches that bad things happen to good people. * <i>Beowulf</i>; it's basically saying 'be brave,' I guess.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * <i>Mississippi Trial, 1955</i> * Umm . . . the closest one I can think of is <i>Man in the Water</i>. It is about the man that saved everyone's life by giving them floatation devices instead of taking it himself. * <i>Billy Budd</i>. The characters had to decide between the law and what they knew in their hearts to be right. * <i>Go Ask Alice</i>—It taught me about addiction and pain. * <i>Old Yeller</i>—Live life to the fullest. * <i>The Outsiders</i>—be good. * n/a * <i>The Pearl</i> taught me valuable things aren't as valuable as thing you value in your life. * <i>A Child Called It</i>. * <i>Les Miserable</i> taught that you can't judge somebody based on past experiences. * <i>The Great Gatsby</i>; it taught about rich, snotty people * <i>The Chosen</i>. I liked how it showed we can't be forced into careers/choices by anyone but ourselves. * <i>The Scarlet Letter</i> is about a woman who has committed adultery and the lessons she learns from her sins. * <i>Ender's Game</i>: not to let power get to our heads. * <i>The Only Alien on the Planet</i>. It taught me about how much people different and what could happen to someone after a tragic event. * <i>Animal Farm</i>; it teaches how tyranny is so possible. * I haven't read one. * Last year I read <i>Gifted Hands</i>. It taught me that even the smallest, ghetto kid can become successful. * <i>Where the Red Fern Grows</i>; it taught me to watch out for my dogs. * The one thing I can remember saying to myself, "Holy crap! This is freakin' questioning my thoughts," would have to be the <i>Diary of Anne Frank</i>, making me ask myself "what would I do if this or that happened to me or my family." * <i>Hatchet</i> because it tells me that I need to work on how I live. * <i>Fahrenheit 451</i> * <i>Romeo and Juliet</i>: taught me to get along * Haven't been in school long enough to read a lesson on life * <i>Princess Bride</i>—love conquers all * I don't usually read the books teachers give me. * Most of the books I read don't teach lessons.
<p>6. How comfortable would you be reading a book about all types of faith? Please explain.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Don't know. * I'm very curious about all types of faiths, cuz I'm secure about my beliefs. * I think I'd find it really interesting because I'd be able to see why other people act the way they do. * Well, not very. I don't like to read about religions. * I would be fine with it. I am very open. * Comfortable * Very because I have friends of other faiths than me and I want to understand more. * It wouldn't bug me. * I wouldn't read it! I don't have time. * I'm OK learning about faith, as long as you try not to make me believe it.

- * Perfectly comfortable. People need to respect and understand other religions to really appreciate their own religion.
- * Very comfortable, because I find it is interesting to see how similar and different religions are, but I would not choose to read it outside of school.
- * I wouldn't ever read a book like that.
- * I haven't really figured out what I believe in, but I think it would be cool to read about some teen who struggled to figure out what they believed in, in life.
- * Not very. I am only interested in my own faith. I'd rather be learning something I would use than reading something to quench my curiosity.
- * I would be fine because I don't question my faith.
- * Not comfortable.
- * It would be interesting, but I might get sad or mad of how different people say about the things I believe.
- * It depends on the level of controversy it contains, really.
- * Good if it had people of different religions as friends, but not all just facts or how it came to be. It has to be interesting, but I would love to know.
- * I would read it if the style of reading is not so hard.
- * Um. I think I'd be fine with that, as long as they were depicted correctly.
- * I think it would actually open my eyes to see their point of view.
- * Why do you keep talking about religion? School and religions are supposed to be separate . . . shut up!
- * I wouldn't mind, but I probably wouldn't be able to get into it.
- * I would like reading about all types of faiths. Different religions interest me. I like to see why people do the things they do.
- * I think it would be fine.
- * I really wouldn't care, as long as it has a good plot.
- * Pretty comfortable, living in Utah as a Catholic makes you understand how each race and religion is different, not to say you should believe them, but that they are entitled to what they believe in and us judging them.
- * I wouldn't mind it, but I'm not gonna go out of my way to do so. I'm interested, but not that much.
- * OK if it's not racist
- * Yawn; I'd rather die
- * If the book were against mine (religion), I would throw it away.
- * . . . it would need to be entertaining. Not like textbook—belch!

Reactions

I was fascinated with the breadth of these responses, and yet even after I considered the maturity level of the students, I was surprised by answers that remained superficial or logically flawed. Even within my liberal view that any type of meaning may be derived from a book regardless of its pre-designated

genre, student answers stumped me. I have never categorized such novels as *Go Ask Alice* or *Old Yeller* as books written to specifically teach morals, ethics, or religious principles. In the responses to question #5 seen above, we see that many students muddle the distinction between a book with religious content and one that includes a theme that encourages

readers to live reflective and compassionate lives. In fairness to the respondents, public schools are not the venue for religious materials, but even when given the opportunity to share titles of books with a religious slant, many students struggled to remember the names of any such book. It seems apparent that either spiritual or religious books are rarely in the

hands of our adolescent readers or that teens don't make the fine distinctions among religion, ethics, or morals. A book that emotionally speaks to an individual's quest for life-meaning can most certainly be regarded as a book that is profound and a guide. Experience as a reader can help label those distinctions.

Breaking Trends

In my search for YAL situated within a religious context, I came across several new-to-me books that unquestionably fell within the parameter. These texts were not easy to find and were not on the top of popular book lists, yet each book made for a thoughtful and pleasant read. My reactions to the books were positive, and I was immediately attracted to the stories, the characters, the dilemmas, and the unmistakable religious context. When I questioned university readers in my YAL course, no one had heard of the books. When I also questioned literacy teachers who are familiar with young adult literature, the books were also unfamiliar. Perhaps the suggestion of a few titles will help open the door to a faith-genre that has been pushed aside, forgotten, or untapped for whatever reason.

The Tent by Gary Paulsen is a story that unfolds squarely within a religious context. A down-and-out dad named Corey and his 14 year-old son Steven find themselves without employment. After stealing a motel Bible and getting an old army tent, father and son set out to provide tent revivals to the local Texan believers. Even though Corey is anything but a minister, he has a knack for giving sermons, perform-

ing faith healings, passing the collection plate, and making a living as a religious sham. As their riches and Bible-reading sessions increase, so do their consciences. Father and son turn their lives around, and in parable style, the story shows readers how faith and honesty can grow when we listen to the Word of God.

Using beautiful poetic free verse, Nikki Grimes has written a book that juxtaposes the biblical story of Hagar, Ishmael, and Abraham with a modern story of African American Sam, his father, and the father's new Caucasian wife and child. *Dark Sons* is a captivating novel that speaks to a modern conflict by using the Old Testament story of mother Hagar and son Ishmael who are exiled by Abraham when a child is finally born to Sarah, Abraham's first wife. Religion is more than just a theme found in this book; it is the central backdrop for this story, and it would be impossible for readers to miss the Old Testament parallel. The on-going parable of Sam and Ishmael explore their lives within the context of both God's relationship to them and with their earthly father who has "replaced" them with a new family

Send Me Down a Miracle, by Han Nolen, is a riveting novel that reminded me of my impressionable adolescent years. I loved reading about the daughter born of an Alabaman preacher. Perfectly named for her perfect behavior, Charity Pittman had always believed her father was infallible. But at age 14, after an eccentric and artistic young woman with crazy ways moves into town, Charity finds herself at odds with her father

and his God. She befriends the new girl, Adrienne, over her father's objections. After a self-imposed deprivation experiment of three weeks of solitude, no food, and meditation, Adrienne emerges with the confession she has seen Jesus sitting in her living room chair. Soon the town is in an uproar. Predictably, Pastor Pittman believes Adrienne is the devil, or at least controlled by the devil. In contrast, Charity is overcome with faith; she believes in the heavenly visitation and in the power of the Jesus-chair, and she defiantly stands up to her father. In this book, one which asks readers to question the depth and security of our belief systems, a young girl is required to test and then stand by her own religious convictions. A great read!

In an action-filled story told by 9th-grader Genevieve, *Fallout* by Trudy Krisher packs a punch that will invite all teens to examine their social and religious beliefs. As a destructive hurricane nears North Carolina, and as a suspicious McCarthy-loving father prepares to fight communism, Genevieve meets Brenda Whompers, a California girl whose radical social beliefs and atheism oppose all that Genevieve has ever known. By the book's end, fallout occurs for everyone. Brenda becomes interested in faith, and Genevieve realizes she must live by her own convictions.

Buddha Boy by Kathe Koja (2003) examines the unlikely friendship between a hip teen and bald Buddhist teen who goes to temple after school, begs lunch money like a monk, and wears no coat in the winter to build inner discipline. Out of awe and wonderment, Justin befriends Jinsen as

they work together on a school project. When peer pressure affects them both, readers learn how Karma works for both boys and how Buddhism calls upon a “god inside” and eliminates “hungry ghosts” to make living more moral and peaceful.

Kindness: A Treasury of Buddhist Wisdom for Children and Parents by Sarah Conover (2001), wry and interesting short stories of traditions in India, Japan, and Tibet are told in fable form. Each story is prefaced with words of wisdom, and adolescent readers read through lyrical and delightful voices that share an ethos of Buddhism that relates to everyone’s life journey.

Does This Thing Make My Head Look Big? by Randa Abdel-Fatthah (2007), readers are introduced to the struggle of Amal, a normal yet faithful Muslim teenage girl. Knowing she will set herself up for discrimination at school and with peers, Amal decides to show her unwavering faithfulness by wearing the hajib everywhere everywhere she goes. This powerful book for teens, regardless of their beliefs in any religion, shows the strength of Amal. She is ridiculed, loses friends, and upsets the dress code of the school. Nevertheless, Amal remains true to her convictions. As a great role model for teenage girls, readers identify with Amal’s struggle to courageously stand in a world of peer pressure, the allure of television, and designer clothing trends.

Making a Difference: Putting Jewish Spirituality into Action, One Bar Mitzvah at a Time, by Bradley Shavit Artson (nonfiction, 2001) asks and answers universal

questions from adolescents: in this faith, what will my life be like when I grow up? Stating that the Torah teaches that God made a sacred promise to the Jewish people, young readers can learn how to make a commitment between themselves and God.

A Final Word

The consideration of this question—to read or not to read spiritual/religious YAL books—has not only been fascinating but also a bit problematic. If we subscribe to the philosophy of theological professor Vigen Guroian who believes “the moral imagination needs to be cultivated like the tea rose in the garden. Left unattended and unfed, the rose will languish and a thistle will grow in its place” (178), then we must as literature teachers consider the role literacy plays in our moral development. Many of us have been raised on some “good soup” for the soul, but many of us, including today’s teens, have not. It is also natural that we further acknowledge that many teens are seeking spiritual indicators. Can they turn to a text for lessons on faith, repentance, or of multiplying their talents? Indirectly and if they read with a desire to know, I believe they can.

Nevertheless, with so many parties at play—parents and friends; teachers and pastors; creationists and evolutionists; Democrats and Republicans; Christians, Jews, and Muslims; and liberals and conservatives—I would never assume to know religious literature that would please all people. At face value, an enlarged understanding of how any religion

works in the lives of others sounds innocuous enough, but for a Born-Again girl to be swept away by Hare Krishna literature would likely upset any set of Christian caregivers. I would, however, encourage going the first mile: ask each of us to re-examine the value of text, all text, and their abilities to accompany an adolescent on a spiritual quest. What lessons can be learned? What human attributes did we see evident in the story, and can we attribute those to our or any other value system? This is a bold but earnest statement: moral development can and does occur outside the context of organized religion, and teachers can, no, we must, use literature to support the spiritual quests.

As a final thought, we should read once again the important words of M.L. Mendt, “Spiritual Themes in Young Adult Books,” printed in the spring 1996 edition of the *ALAN Review*.

. . . many young adults are dealing with new understandings of concepts such as death, their own mortality, spiritual transcendence, and the soul. Young adulthood can be a time of loneliness, emotional turmoil, and confusion. However, it can also be a time of spiritual growth, introspection, and values clarification, especially when young adults can exercise their capabilities for formal operational thought through spiritual themes in young adult literature. Through such literature, their experiences are enhanced by exposure to information about various belief systems and the humans who subscribe to them, to characters in search of spiritual understanding or knowledge, and to characters integrating various beliefs into their emerging adult identities. All too soon, the crises of adulthood will be upon today’s young adults; they need now to begin building the spiritual foundations that

will sustain them through the uncertain future. Staying within the safe and secular genres does not always make for a smooth ride through life. In adolescence, when days are filled with self-doubt, loneliness, anger, feelings of betrayal, and any number of real or perceived emotions, there must be self-help somewhere. I believe the help can be found on a bookshelf. As adults, we have known that for a long time, and may we have the courage to dig deeper in the shelves and suggest a spiritual book that highlights the teen's world and the challenges inherent in young adult culture.

In conclusion, let's return at this point to teen response from the anonymous survey. In question 5,

when asked what school book has taught a moral or lesson in life, the final response illustrates our duty as teachers: "Most of the books I read don't teach lessons." Fortunately, we know this is not the case. Much of what we teach and read is grounded in social and religious mores, and as teachers, we must make those explicit text connections that engender qualitative changes in the way young individuals think and then act. We have accepted a moral duty to care for our children. We are bound by this concern, and undoubtedly

many of us are bound by the promise of an ancient theologian: "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you" (Mathew 7:7).

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ALAN Foundation Research Grants

Members of ALAN may apply to the ALAN Foundation for funding (up to \$1,500) for research in young adult literature. Proposals are reviewed by the five most recent presidents of ALAN. Awards are made annually in the fall and are announced at the ALAN breakfast during the NCTE convention in November. The application deadline each year is **September 15th**.

The Gloria Barron Prize for Young Heroes

The Gloria Barron Prize for Young Heroes seeks nominations for its 2009 awards. The Barron Prize honors young people ages 8 to 18 who have shown leadership and courage in public service to people and our planet. Each year, ten national winners each receive \$2,000 to support their service work or higher education. Nomination deadline is April 30. More information is available at <http://www.barronprize.org/index.html>.

Sharon M. Draper:

Reaching Reluctant Readers

I first met Sharon M. Draper about five years ago when I was a doctoral student at Ohio State University. At the time, Ohio State held an annual children’s literature conference, and the year I met Ms. Draper I was chosen to be her assistant. My responsibilities were few, but the rewards were great. While I tried to make sure she arrived at various locations on time, we chatted about teaching and writing. Always the teacher, she mentored me, offering advice about everything from pursuing goals to writing fiction of my own.

Since our initial meeting, I have followed her career, read all of her work, and shared much of it with my students and my own son. I have heard her speak numerous times, and I have always appreciated hearing the story of how she went from teaching students face-to-face at Walnut Hills High School in Cincinnati, Ohio, to teaching students all around the world through her novels. An accomplished English language arts teacher—she was honored as National Teacher of the Year in 1997—Draper had never considered being a writer herself until one of her students confronted her with a challenge: “You think you so bad—why don’t YOU write something!” The student urged as he handed her an application for a writing contest sponsored by *Ebony* magazine. Reluctantly, Draper accepted the application. That afternoon she went to the grocery store and was moved by something she saw:

I was pushing my cart down an aisle, when a woman came toward me from the other direction. In her cart was a chubby, almost cherubic-looking three-year-old, standing amidst the food items his mother had selected. He was grinning and

reaching for her. Just as I passed them, instead of reaching for her son, I heard her say to him, “If you don’t sit your stinkin’, useless butt back down in that shopping cart, I swear I’ll bust your greasy face in!” (Draper 53)

Draper continued,

Shocked, I looked at her sharply, but I said nothing. The child sat down heavily, his smile gone. She rushed past me and headed to the checkout lane. I found the spaghetti sauce and pasta I was looking for, but I was no longer hungry. I couldn’t get the face of that child out of my mind. What kind of life must he have at home? If she treats him like this in public, what might she do in private? (Draper 53)

Inspired, Draper went home and wrote what became the 1990 Gertrude Johnson Williams Literary Contest winning entry, “One Small Torch.” Since then, Draper has written ten novels: *The Hazelwood High Trilogy: Tears of a Tiger* (1994), *Forged by Fire* (1997), and *Darkness Before Dawn* (2001); *Romiette and Julio* (1999), *Jazzimagination: A Journal to Read and Write* (1999), *Double Dutch* (2002), *The Battle of Jericho* (2003), its companion novel, *November Blues* (2007); *Copper Sun* (2006), and *Fire from the Rock* (2007).

In 2005, she co-wrote a biography for young adults titled *We Beat the Street: How a Friendship Led to Success*, which appeared on the *New York Times* bestseller list. She has also self-published two books of poetry, *Let the Circle Be Unbroken: Collected Poetry for Children and Young Adults* (1997) and *Buttered Bones* (1997); written two nonfiction books for teachers, *Teaching from the Heart: Reflections, Encouragement, and Inspiration* (2000) and *Not Quite Burned Out but Crispy around the Edges: Inspiration, Laughter, and Encouragement for Teachers* (2001); and devel-

oped a series for upper elementary/lower middle school readers called Ziggy and the Black Dinosaurs—*The Buried Bones Mystery* (1994); *Lost in the Tunnel of Time* (1996); *Shadows of Caesar's Creek* (1997); *The Space Mission Mystery* (2006); *The Backyard Animal Show* (2006); *Stars and Sparks on Stage* (2007).

When I went to the slave castles, one is called Cape Coast Castle and one is called Elmina Castle, I was physically affected. It was spiritual; it was emotional.

over one hundred teachers at the 2006 National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) conference about how the book came to fruition, I decided to sit down and talk to Draper about her career as a teacher and writer.¹ Upon accepting her invitation to attend the 38th Annual Coretta Scott King Award breakfast held in Washington, DC, where she was being honored for *Copper Sun*, I listened attentively as she gave her acceptance speech before we sat down in the Renaissance Hotel to talk about her work. This article is intended to discuss Draper's first historical fiction book and how she strives to reach reluctant readers.

Draper has visited Africa several times. In 1998, for example, she attended a conference and visited schools in West Africa, and in 2001 she visited Ghana, where she taught English literature at Mawuli School. She also visited the slave castles, which proved to be an inspirational experience for her. In March she said, "When I went to the slave castles, one is called Cape Coast Castle and one is called Elmina Castle, I was physically affected. It was spiritual; it was emotional. It was like someone tapped me on my shoulder and said, 'You have to tell my story.' It really was almost a spiritual kind of thing." Later, in her speech at the Coretta Scott King breakfast in June of 2007, Draper said, "It was like I was chosen to write this book. I was tapped on the shoulders by the ancestors. I really believe that. The first time I went to Africa I had no plans to write a book about slavery, but the dusty red

In 2006, after over ten years of writing contemporary realistic fiction, Draper published her debut historical fiction book, *Copper Sun*. The novel focuses on a fifteen-year-old girl's struggle to survive the Middle Passage and slavery during the 1700s. After reading and reviewing *Copper Sun* and listening to Draper talk to

dirt and the warmth of the air and the bright, copper sun of Ghana had different ideas. . . . I think Amari tapped me on the shoulder when I was crawling on my hands and knees through that door of no return, and she whispered in my ear. She said, 'Tell my story. Write my life. Help me live forever. Don't let me be forgotten.'"

On her website Draper explains what she hopes young readers will learn while reading *Copper Sun*: "I want young readers to ask themselves, 'What if that had been me? How would I have coped as a fifteen-year-old slave?'" When First Lady Laura Bush invited Draper to the National Book Festival in 2007, Draper actually asked adolescents in the audience to think deeply about the slave experience by using teen volunteers to recreate a scene from the novel.

Since *Copper Sun* was Draper's first work of historical fiction, I asked, "What propelled you to write historical fiction?"

Sharon M. Draper: I didn't like history during childhood, but I loved historical fiction. (She laughs.) I read lots of historical fiction when I was in elementary school and middle school. If I wanted to know about the middle ages, I read historical fiction.

I learned the history, but it was fun because I was caught up in the character as well as the time period I was reading about.

KH: Do you have plans to write in any other genre?

Sharon M. Draper: I want to write a picture book.

KH: What type of research did you do before writing *Copper Sun*?

Sharon M. Draper: I went to Africa three times; I went to the remote villages as well as the big cities. I also went to South Carolina and Florida. I went to all of the places that Amari goes to. It took ten years to write *Copper Sun*. I would work on it for a little while and then I'd go to Africa, and learn something new. It was a work in progress for a long time. I wrote three or four other books while I was working on it. It was a very slow process because when I write I feel like I have to immerse myself in the subject matter.

KH: “Ten years?”

Sharon M. Draper: The original version of *Copper Sun* is so different from the final version it is almost like they are two different books; it was a work in progress all along. I would change huge sections of it, delete, and update as I learned more. I said that’s not going to work, and I would take out huge chunks and start over.

At the NCTE conference mentioned earlier, Draper said that writing historical fiction for an audience that looked to her for fast paced books about current issues and topics was challenging. “How was I going to get kids to care about what happened in 1738?” she wondered. In her Coretta Scott King award acceptance speech she quips, “I write about lockers, and homework, and teachers, and librarians; I write for 21st century kids. They can’t make it without their cell phones, and their I-pods, and their computers. They have learned to trust me and depend on me to write something that is relevant to their lives, and I’m going to take them back to 1738? Yeah, right.” She finally solved this problem by appealing to the reluctant reader’s craving for compelling characterization. “What I ended up doing is not focusing on dates and castles and kings, but on characters because that’s what they [her readers] care about,” she explained.

KH: “Does the reluctant reader demand something different from a historical piece than they do from a contemporary fiction piece?”

Sharon M. Draper: I think that in order to grab a reluctant reader, regardless of the genre, the writer has to find what it is that will grab them. In fiction, I think it’s character because reluctant readers need action, and they need a character they can care about. When I talk to kids about *Copper Sun*, they tell me, ‘I don’t care anything about historical fiction, but I cared about Amari. I was worried about her; I cared what happened to her; I kept reading because I wanted to know if she was going to be OK. I grab them, I think, by creating caring characters. Writers also have to have a plot that pulls them in.

Draper began writing novels and poetry for the

reluctant readers in her classroom. When her students would not read the poetry in their anthology, she wrote poetry, and when students told her they were nonreaders and proud of it, she promised them she would write a book they would enjoy reading. The numerous e-mails she receives daily suggest that Draper made good on her promise. Here are three that exemplify how most of her readers feel about her work:

I have never read a book in my life until i pick up one of your books i love every single one of books i am a big fan!! you really dont understand how much i love you and your books i love them from tears of an tiger to forged by fire god know s what i been through in im only 15 in your book forged by fire really touch because i knew what that character went through you probably dont care but i think and hope you do because i support you in all ways in i dont care if it’s my last dime i will spend it just to get one of your books.

Thank you!!

Sincerely Yours, Anthony

My name is Adler and im a senior at Golden Gate High School and i was introduced to one of your books i think it was The Battle of Jericho doing my junior year and i loved it embarassed to say that was the first book ever read ever since I’ve read two more of your books Tears of A Tiger and Forged by Fire. I writting you this mail to think you because you’ve inspired me to read something i really hated doing, because of your great writting i can now say i enjoy reading Thank you Maddam Draper.

My mom used to bug me so much about reading, every day she would be asking if I had gotten a book out from the library recently. I didnt like reading that much. I could never concentrate on the words on the page, I would think about something that happened in school or something I was planning on doing later. My best friend started reading your books, we would be on the phone and I wouldnt know if she was there or not, Sometimes I had to scream her name into the reciever a million times and she would finally respond with, “Hold up, I gotta finish this book!” So I decided I would try reading your books. I started reading Tears of a Tiger, and my eyes were glued to the page! I even brought it to the hairdressers with me to read! It took me two days to finish it, the first day I brought it to the hairdressers and read before bed, the next day I read all day until I finished. I just had to know what was going to happen next! [Unsigned.]

Sometimes the reluctant reader needs help visualizing what he or she reads, so Draper says included vivid descriptions of Africa to help readers visualize the country and the time period.

Sharon M. Draper: [Students] have never been to Africa in 1738, so I had to explain what the air smells like, what the dirt looked like, what the trees looked like, so that [they] could be there with me.

KH: Did you read any particular books about slavery before writing *Copper Sun*?

Sharon M. Draper: Hundreds. (She laughs.) I have so many books on slavery: the slave trade, the middle passage, and African kingdoms. I read more than I needed to know, but I didn't know what I didn't need to know until I'd gone through it [the actual writing of *Copper Sun*].

I wanted to hear about specific titles so I pried, "Were there any particular titles that stood out for you?"

Sharon M. Draper: *Africans in America: America's Journey through Slavery* by Charles Johnson and Patricia Smith; that's the one PBS did, and there is a video that goes with it. That one was particularly good. *To Make Our World Anew: A History of African Americans* edited by Robin D. G. Kelly and Earl Lewis, and I read slave narratives. I was really influenced by Tom Feelings' *Middle Passage: White Ships/Black Cargo* because the pictures are so powerful.

KH: Your reading of Alex Haley's *Roots* influenced your teaching and perspectives on American slavery, did you reread it in order to prepare to write *Copper Sun*?

Sharon M. Draper: No, I did not go back and reread *Roots*. I did not want to be influenced by his writing. Of course it's in my head some place, but I did not reread *Roots* as a part of my writing process for *Copper Sun*.

We still have much to accomplish, taking care of each other on a global scale. The reason why we need to specifically study the African slave trade of the American past is to understand some of the social, economic, and political realities of the present. The past is a teacher from which we can learn much.

KH: Why is slavery a relevant topic in the twenty-first century?

Sharon M. Draper: Slavery is a relevant topic for the 21st century because it still exists. Girls (and boys as well) from third-world countries are still being exploited as sex slaves all over the world. Human beings are still subjugating other humans for profit. We still have much to accomplish, taking care of each other on a global scale. The reason why we need to specifically study the African slave trade of the American past is to understand some of the social, economic, and political realities of the present. The past is a teacher from which we can learn much.

KH: What advice do you have for teachers who wish to use books like *Copper Sun* to teach about slavery?

Sharon M. Draper: Students will absorb and learn a surprising amount of history through fiction. I have provided maps and photos and timelines and questions and websites for further study on my website (www.sharondraper.com) by clicking on the tab *Copper Sun* Resources. I tried to provide plenty of resources so the historical information is available to merge with the fictional story.

KH: Would you tell me about winning the Coretta Scott King award for *Copper Sun*?

Sharon M. Draper: I was sick the night before, and I had taken NyQuil. I woke up groggy, so when I got the call, 'I'm going what? Who?' I told them yesterday—we had a luncheon—that they must have thought I was drunk or something. It was six o'clock in the morning, and I wasn't expecting the call at six o'clock in the morning because it took place in Seattle, Washington. I was really excited

because *Copper Sun* is so special to me. So it is meaningful to receive the Coretta Scott King award for *Copper Sun* because of what it is and what it represents.

When I asked Draper what she thought teachers could do to help reluctant readers, she responded, "First, they have to believe in them. They have to believe the kids can read; then they have to find the right book. Teachers have to read widely so they can find just the right book to encourage a child to read. If you're going to teach reading on a young adult level, you have to read [young adult books]."

Young Adult Novels

Tears of a Tiger. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994.
Forged by Fire. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997.
Jazzimagination. New York: Scholastic, 1999.
Romiette and Julio. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1999.
Darkness Before Dawn. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001.
Double Dutch. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2002.
The Battle of Jericho. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2003.
Copper Sun. New York: Atheneum, 2006.
Fire from the Rock. New York: Penguin, 2007.
November Blues. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2007.

Select Book Awards

Tears of a Tiger (1995 Coretta Scott King Genesis Award)
Forged by Fire (1998 Coretta Scott King Award)
The Battle of Jericho (2004 Coretta Scott King Honor Book)
Copper Sun (2007 Coretta Scott King Book Award; 2007 Ohioana Literary Award)
November Blues (2008 Coretta Scott King Honor Book)

Books for Teachers

Teaching from the Heart: Reflections, Encouragement, and Inspiration. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2000.

Not Quite Burned Out but Crispy around the Edges: Inspiration, Laughter, and *Encouragement for Teachers*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2001.

Essays

Draper, Sharon M. "Alex Haley, Me, and a Kid Named Kyrus." *Obsidian III* 3, no. 1 Spring-Summer 2001: 26-35.

Draper, Sharon M(ills). "Autobiography Feature." *Something About the Author*, vol. 146 (Detroit, MI: Gale Research, 2004), 47-61.

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Note

¹ The undocumented quotes here come from numerous telephone, e-mail, and face-to-face conversations I have had with Ms. Draper.

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From Basketball to Barney:

Teen Fatherhood, Didacticism, and the Literary in YA Fiction

While the affirmation of nontraditional families may be a hallmark of much contemporary YA fiction, it is particularly complicated in the case of one popular subgenre: the teen pregnancy and parenting novel. Here, the compulsion to honor adolescent readers' diverse family relationships—and to tell the truth about the variety of their lived experience—conflicts with the presumed didactic function of such literature, a presumption that is especially keen in a decade when alarm over teen sexual behavior has prompted a nearly 2500% increase in public funding for abstinence-only sex education¹ (“Spending”). Indeed, although pregnancy and parenting novels have changed significantly over the past 35 years, with more girls keeping and raising their babies (and often making the honor roll to boot), they are still very much cautionary tales about the dangers of teen sexual activity. For example, an astonishing number of their teen protagonists conceive the very first time they have intercourse, and not only in more conservative novels like Louise Plummer’s *A Dance for Three* (2001), in which the girl has a nervous breakdown and ends up institutionalized, but also in more progressive novels like Ruth Pennebaker’s *Don’t Think Twice* (1996), Sarah Dessen’s *Someone Like You* (1998), and Janet McDonald’s *Spellbound* (2001).

While the didactic compulsion of the YA pregnancy and parenting novel may be understandable, it is also often in tension with competing drives. These include not only the celebration of certain non-traditional adolescent relationships, such as the teen parent and child dyad, but more fundamentally, the

challenging cultural work of legitimizing YA literature as literature. As Cindy Lou Daniels wrote in *The ALAN Review* in 2006, YA literature “tends to be ignored by many serious literary critics,” who see it as “a secondary category of child-like storytelling—didactic in nature—and unworthy of serious literary evaluation” (78). Marc Aronson attributes this tendency partly to a “Moral Instruction gang” who “believe that the test of the value of a YA book is the values it supposedly teaches or the role models it theoretically offers” (115) and to parents who want “the book itself to be a kind of adult: a rule giver who inculcated on the page the values the parent is not sure she has instilled on her own” (70). This is particularly the case for realistic fiction, often problematically elided with the “problem novel,” in which issues trump stories and characters; as Michael Cart asserts, the genre is “to YA literature what the soap opera is to legitimate drama” (64).

For these reasons, teen pregnancy and parenting novels are unlikely candidates for major literary awards, and novels like Angela Johnson’s *The First Part Last* (2003) are both highly unusual specimens and very compelling case studies. Written during her tenure as a McArthur Fellow, Angela Johnson’s novel not only earned both the 2003 Coretta Scott King award and the 2004 Printz award but also reshaped the boundaries of the subgenre. Johnson achieves this partly through careful narrative technique but also, I argue, by shifting the focus from teen mothers to teen fathers, whose sexual behavior carries far less cultural weight. This shift is explored at roughly the same time by Margaret Bechard, whose *Hanging on to Max*

(2002) provides illuminating points of comparison and ultimately points toward a similar conclusion: regendering the YA pregnancy and parenting novel may enable it to navigate more successfully between literary and social imperatives.

Although teen birthrates over the last 25 years are actually lower than they were during the 1950s and 1960s, pregnant and parenting girls have come to play a symbolic role disproportionate to their demographic presence, particularly when they are poor and/or dark-skinned. During the early 1990s, adolescent mothers supplanted earlier versions of the so-called “welfare queen” as a favorite media scapegoat—despite the fact that women under 18 comprised less than 2% of welfare recipients (Douglas and Michaels 190). In addition, over the last ten years, federal funding—and social support—for abstinence-only sex education,² both in public schools and through private organizations, has escalated despite a growing body of evidence that it has no effect on teen sexual behavior.³ Consequently, whereas in 1988, only 2% of secondary public schools “taught abstinence as the only way of preventing pregnancy and STIs,” by 2002, 35% of school districts either opted not to mention contraceptives at all in sex ed classes or instructed students only about failure rates (Collins *et al.* 7). Thus the cultural climate reflected in and shaped by both the vilification of the teen mom and the rise of abstinence-only education renders it even more challenging for teen pregnancy and parenting novels to transcend their primarily didactic legacy.

But one of the most striking features of *The First Part Last* is how determinedly it refuses to offer moral instruction about teen sexual activity beyond asserting that teens who don’t use condoms should “call . . . 1-800-ISTUPID” (37). In fact, though Bobby regrets his failure to use birth control, in contrast to the protagonists of so many teen mother narratives, he has no regrets or even second thoughts about having sex. His parents, also unlike so many of the parents in teen mother novels, do not expect abstinence from him. In fact, his mother purchases condoms for Bobby, his brothers, and even his buddies. Moreover, the novel gently mocks his friend K-Boy’s mother, who “almost lost her mind when she found a pack of condoms underneath his bed” and who “didn’t want to hear that he was being safe” but “just wanted him not to do it” (38).

Interestingly, the novel skips over the conventional scene in which the young couple makes the fateful decision to become sexually active, a scene that is almost obligatory in teen mother novels, where it reinforces a logic of poor choices. We are never told how many times Bobby and Nia had intercourse before she got pregnant, though we can infer that it wasn’t the first time. Further, neither he nor Nia are turned off to sex once they discover how “dangerous” it is for teens, but they continue to enjoy intimacy with the blessing of her doctor. Moreover, neither sex nor pregnancy seems to hurt their relationship (as abstinence-only literature and many teen pregnancy novels caution), even when Nia is most frustrated by her condition.

Similarly, the narrative logic of *The First Part Last* also subverts a didactic reading. Certainly if taken out of context, the fact that the teen mother succumbs to severe eclampsia and ends up in a vegetative coma might seem to suggest the

“dangers” of teenage sex. However, the novel is carefully constructed to assure us that this is not a punishment but a rare and random accident. More importantly, the novel ultimately affirms that—*despite* Bobby’s sleep-deprived struggles and even despite his brief lapse into irresponsibility when he plays hooky, spray-paints a wall, gets arrested, and fails to phone the sitter—it is “too right” that he should keep his daughter Feather (11). It also ends with the promise of a happy life when Bobby moves from NYC to rural Heaven, Ohio, as signaled by the idyllic name, by his report, upon looking out the window of his new home, that he feels “as brand new as [his] daughter” (131) and, for some readers, knowledge of the friendship and joy the pair finds there in Johnson’s 1998 prequel.

Finally, the narrative structure also works to challenge conventional expectations of the genre. The novel is comprised of short chapters alternately headed “now” and “then”; most of the “then” sequences are narrated in the present tense, gradually

Johnson’s avoidance of a linear narrative by itself works to undermine a moralistic reading of the novel, as it frustrates the path through which Action X leads to Consequence Y.

revealing the story of Nia's pregnancy through flashbacks. Johnson's avoidance of a linear narrative by itself works to undermine a moralistic reading of the novel, as it frustrates the path through which Action X leads to Consequence Y.⁴ And indeed, among recent teen mother novels, more overtly didactic titles such as Judith Caseley's *Losing Louisa* (1999) and Beatrice Spark's *Annie's Baby* (1998) follow a far more linear plotline than more ambivalent works such as *Don't Think Twice*, which also relies heavily on flashbacks. At the same time, Johnson's use of the present tense in both threads challenges the more conventional split between the knowing self of the present and the naïve former-self of the past, and thus avoids casting Bobby (along with the readers who see through his eyes) in the role of an "adult" assessing past behavior through the lens of maturity.

While Johnson's narrative techniques partially account for her success in creating a teen pregnancy and parenting novel in which aesthetics are not

Moreover, while the sexuality of all teens is fiercely regulated within the abstinence-only movement, regardless of gender, even here, boys' desires are presumed to be more "natural" and understandable than girls' and therefore less alarming.

subordinated to moralism, her unusual choice of a male protagonist is likely also a major factor. Historically, of course, female sexuality and desire have always been a much greater source of cultural anxiety. Moreover, while the sexuality of all teens is fiercely regulated within the abstinence-only movement, regardless of gender, even here, boys' desires are presumed to be more "natural" and understandable than girls' and therefore less alarming. For example, the popular workbook *Sex Respect* informs students that "A young man's natural desire for sex is already strong due

to testosterone," while "females are becoming culturally conditioned to fantasize about sex as well" (Mast 11, qtd. in "In Their Own Words"). Similarly, in the media discourse condemning the economic and social cost of teen parenting, it is the teen mothers who are criminalized for allegedly expecting taxpayers to

bankroll their babies. Seldom are the babies' fathers taken to task on this point, at least not with the same emotional intensity, despite the fact that a significant number are not teenagers but adults,⁵ and just under half of all non-custodial fathers pay child support in full (Grall 2). Thus it seems reasonable to hypothesize that because contemporary U.S. culture still attaches so much less symbolic weight and social stigma to the sexual and reproductive activities of adolescent men, YA fiction about their experiences in this realm would be less bound by ideological expectation and controversy.

At first glance, a look at Margaret Bechard's *Hanging on to Max* appears to complicate this hypothesis. Strikingly similar to Johnson's novel, despite Bechard's shift to a white, suburban, blue-collar protagonist, Max also tells the story of a likeable young man who quite unexpectedly assumes custody of his child in the absence of its mother. Both Bobby and Sam struggle with the day-to-day challenges of caring for an infant on very little sleep, with parents who are supportive in some ways but not in others, with an overwhelming feeling of responsibility, and with their frustration over the loss of youth and freedom. And in both novels, the denouement involves a moment of weakness in which the teen father briefly lapses into irresponsibility and impetuously reclaims his lost youth. Negative (though not devastating) consequences ensue, and the incident prompts him to reassess his life and his priorities.

However, *Hanging on to Max* seems to approach the issues of teen sexual activity and parenthood with far less moral neutrality than *The First Part Last*. It implies that Brittany's pregnancy (and the couple's decision to become sexually active) leads to the end of the relationship; Sam reports that things "just weren't the same." Furthermore, though Sam doesn't express agreement when his father implies that the pregnancy and, presumably, Sam's decision to have sex in the first place indicate a shortcoming of his upbringing, he doesn't disagree either. When strangers see Sam and Max together and ask questions about their relationship, Sam feels shame at being a teen father and often lets people believe that Max is his brother. Most importantly, whereas the moment of crisis leads Bobby to a deepened commitment to raising his daughter Feather, it leads Sam to to place 11-month-old Max with adoptive parents. Little explanation is

offered, apart from Sam's assertions that Max "needs a real father" and that "everybody ought to have a mother" (195) and the hint that deep down, he wants to be free to "play basketball with Andy" and otherwise be a high-schooler again. But the brief epilogue clearly assures us that in recognizing that he was not ready to parent, Sam clearly did the right thing. Here, 18-year-old Max has grown into an admirable young man, thanks, it is implied, to the guidance of his "proper" adoptive parents. He is happily reunited with his birth father, who, having chosen the "right" path, has also been rewarded with his white-collar dream job, a loving wife, two charming daughters, and a garage full of "stuff."

Yet at the same time, Brittany most definitely does not get pregnant the first time they have sex (or the second, or the third . . .). A key subplot explores the ways that both Sam and his father are still grieving the death of his mother, and it locates Mr. Pettigrew's attitude toward Sam's situation in that context. In other words, his condemnations are shown to be more about his own insecurities as a single parent than about Sam's actions. The narrative structure of *Hanging on to Max*, as in *The First Part Last*, moves easily (though not as systematically) between past and present, with similar effects. In addition, Sam's shame at being a teen parent is foiled against the pride and ease projected by his girlfriend Claire, a classic YA "good girl" who counters a friend's surprise that she has a child by smiling and calmly affirming, "Smart girls get pregnant too." (121) Unlike Sam, she makes a point of correcting those who mistake her for Emily's babysitter, reminding Sam that "we don't have anything to be embarrassed about" (118). Claire and her friend Gemma also foil Sam by achieving real success at balancing books and babies; they excel in both arenas, confidently plan for college, and thus complicate the novel's apparent cautionary message about teen parenthood. *Hanging on to Max* even goes so far as to poke fun at those who assume that a teen parent's story is necessarily a dire warning to other teens; Sam and Claire share a good laugh at the expense of those who see Claire as a "poster child for the dangers of teenage sex" and expect her story to be a "CBS Afterschool Special" (82).

Finally, the inexplicability of the ending might also be taken to mitigate its apparent didacticism. Indeed, book reviewers regularly comment that the

text does not at all prepare us for this sudden twist, nor does it do much to illuminate Sam's reasoning. *Horn Book*, for example, describes the ending as "provocative, some might say maddening" and suggests that the epilogue "seems meant to appease those outraged by Sam's choice" (Heppermann 324). *Kliatt* observes that "readers may not quite understand all of Sam's reasoning" and that "it looks as though the plot is heading in one direction, but it veers sharply after [the] trip to the hospital [where Max gets stitches following an injury]" (Rosser 15). Was this unexpected turn simply a way for Bechard to heighten the drama of the story? Or might its very unexpectedness invite the reader to question whether it is a "good fit" and thus also question the inevitability of the more socially-sanctioned ending? Certainly the sexual politics of *Hanging on to Max* are murkier and more ambivalent than in *The First Part Last*, but it still finally avoids offering an entirely clear message about the consequences of teen sexual activity.

If, as I propose, the shift from a male protagonist to a female one is a strategy that aids the teen pregnancy and parenting novel in resisting the cultural call to privilege moral and social instruction, then how might we account for the varying degrees of success that *Hanging on to Max* and Johnson's acclaimed *The First Part Last* have achieved in this regard? One of the most obvious differences between the two novels is that Johnson is not only writing against the dominant discourse in terms of sex but also of race. The most tenacious and vicious stereotypes about pregnant and parenting teens are—as Douglas and Michaels, among others, point out—highly racialized. The media paints the "typical" teen mother as both African American and herself the daughter of a teen mother, despite ample demographic evidence to the contrary.⁶ At the same time, Johnson must also write against stereo-

Claire and her friend Gemma also foil Sam by achieving real success at balancing books and babies; they excel in both arenas, confidently plan for college, and thus complicate the novel's apparent cautionary message about teen parenthood.

types of African-American males, who are so often portrayed in the media as siring children by multiple mothers yet taking little interest in them. Thus, there is much more at stake for Johnson in resisting cultural pressures to construct a narrative that focuses on the hardships of school-age parenting in order to encourage teen celibacy. For if she shows Bobby and Nia as unwilling or unable to parent, she risks reinforcing media stereotypes that portray urban African Americans (particularly when they are young and/or poor) as incompetent or indifferent parents.

Another key difference is that *Hanging on to Max* makes a more concerted effort to truly “masculinize”

the teen pregnancy and parenting novel. Bechard’s novel not only devotes substantial space to exploring the tensions between the “feminine” activity of caregiving and more traditionally masculine cultural imperatives but also takes pains to construct both Sam and Max (whose original name, “Julian,” is promptly changed because Sam thinks it is “fruity”) as unimpeachably male. By contrast, *The First Part Last* does not make the same attempt to appeal to male readers and even seems to court a female readership. In fact, in an interview for *Booklist*, Johnson reveals that the idea for the novel first came about when her editor reported that a group of sixth-grade girls identified Bobby as their favorite character in *Heaven* and

wanted to learn more about him. Throughout, the novel is wrought with pointed gender reversals, and Bobby himself—gentle, tender, vulnerable, and tearful in almost every chapter—is rendered somewhat androgynously. Perhaps, then, *The First Part Last* imposes greater limits on the degree of identification between the presumed reader and the protagonist and

is consequently more empowered to resist the cultural compulsion to “model” beliefs and behaviors.

Finally, while *The First Part Last* is indeed a “truthful” novel, it is not always a “realistic” novel, at least in the material sense, or in the sense that many adults mean when they use that term in relation to YA literature. And in this way, it represents a significant departure from a mode generally associated with both the teen pregnancy and parenting novel and its progenitor, the much-maligned “problem novel.” *The First Part Last* conspicuously underplays the question of how early parenthood will affect Bobby’s ability to financially support himself and his child or to pursue his dream of becoming an artist. Even in *Heaven*, Johnson’s prequel, we are not privy to the logistics of how, by taking on contract work painting billboards and the like, Bobby manages to pay for Pull-ups and babysitting, much less an apartment and health care. Despite the relatively low cost of living in rural Ohio, this scenario clearly stretches plausibility. By comparison, *Hanging on to Max* is relentless on this point. One of its primary subplots concerns the question of whether Sam will be (or should be) able to attend college or even take the SAT. This becomes one of the primary tensions between Sam and his dad, and the novel’s ending hinges on the assumption that this is an either/or choice for him.

Marc Aronson illuminates the significance of this difference when he yokes together YA literature’s “insistence on ‘realism’” with its “pressure for ‘moral messages’” in identifying the primary reasons why it “splits off from the main art trends of our time” (79) and thus has so much difficulty claiming entry into the realm of the literary. Moreover, he argues, teens value books that feel “real,” but they define “realism” differently than many parents and critics, in terms that are more emotional or psychological than material. This kind of “real” “tells a truth people don’t want to see, because it doesn’t settle, it provokes” (82). It also, perhaps, offers YA writers a way to explore controversial territory without sacrificing art to moral or social imperatives.

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Notes

- ¹ Between 1996 and 1997, spending (federal and state match) more than doubled from \$4 million to \$9 million. When Title V funding began the next year, it increased more than tenfold, and by 2007, it more than doubled again to \$214 million.
- ² Curricula developed for federally-funded programs must either be “responsive to” or “not inconsistent with” the 8-point definition of “abstinence only” established by the government, a definition that includes criteria such as “teaches that sexual activity outside of the context of marriage is likely to have harmful psychological and physical effects” and “teaches that bearing children out-of-wedlock is likely to have harmful consequences for the child, the child’s parents, and society.” (“Fact Sheet”)
- ³ The only long-term study of abstinence-only education, commissioned by the Department of Health and Human Services, conducted by Mathematica Policy Research, and published in 2007, found no differences in the sexual behavior of teens participating in the four Title V abstinence-only programs they studied compared to those in the control group (Trenholm *et al.*)
- ⁴ For a different reading of Johnson’s narrative structure, see Lester. He argues that “[t]he novel’s effective alternating now/then organizational pattern reinforces the theme that the present and past are inextricably connected on the basis of choices that we make for ourselves, particularly bad choices made by youngsters who knowingly engage in risky behavior” (429).
- ⁵ The number of adult partners of teenage mothers is very difficult to calculate, as this data is often unreported. The American Academy of Pediatrics, recognizing this difficulty, cites the rate as somewhere between 7% and 67% (Klein); Child Trends reports that, for cases where paternal age was available, 38% of births to adolescent (defined as 18 or under) mothers involved partners at least four years older (“Facts at a Glance”); Michael Males, using California data, claims that just under two-thirds of children to women age 19 and younger are fathered by men age 20 and older.
- ⁶ The persistence of this image could explain why Johnson chooses to represent Nia as the only child of affluent professional parents; in addition to creating an uptown/downtown tension in her relationship with Bobby, Johnson averts reinforcing (and even actively challenges) such assumptions.

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NCTE PRESENTS...

Genre Theory: Teaching, Writing, and Being

Deborah Dean

Contemporary genre theory is probably not what you learned in college. Its dynamic focus on writing as a social activity in response to a particular situation makes it a powerful tool for teaching practical skills and preparing students to write beyond the classroom.

Although genre is often viewed as simply a method for labeling different types of writing, Deborah Dean argues that exploring genre theory can help teachers energize their classroom practices.

Genre Theory synthesizes theory and research about genres and provides applications that help teachers artfully address the challenges of teaching high school writing.

Knowledge of genre theory helps teachers:

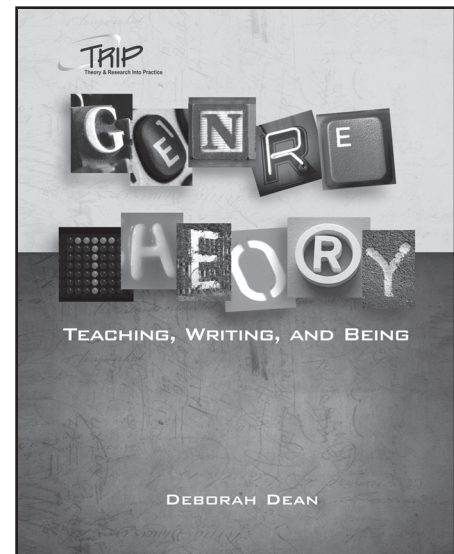
- challenge assumptions that good writing is always the same
- make important connections between reading and writing
- eliminate the writing product/process dichotomy
- outline ways to write appropriately for any situation
- supply keys to understanding the unique requirements of testing situations
- offer a sound foundation for multimedia instruction

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