

Volume 36

Number 3

Summer 2009



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T ♦ H ♦ E
ALAN
REVIEW

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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).

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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*.

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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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From the Editors

Nearly six years ago, I sat in my Kansas study, called Jim Blasingame at Arizona State University, and said I had a crazy idea: We should apply to be coeditors of *The ALAN Review*. A few months later, we were at the head (or foot, more appropriately) of a table presenting our proposal and being interviewed for the position by some of the top people in the field of young adult literature.

It was a little intimidating.

A couple days later, we learned we had been selected, and all those “great” ideas we had proposed suddenly needed to become fact rather than fiction. Dreaming is the easy part; making dreams happen is a little more difficult. We knew the quality reputation of ALAN and its journal, so we knew we would be expected to maintain those high standards. We spent time designing the journal and developing themes to give it our own personality during our tenure as coeditors.

It was a little intimidating.

As we settled into the role, we learned more and more about the exciting web of experts and enthusiasts in the field of young adult literature. Nearly daily, we became acquainted with newcomers to YA lit—classroom teachers, authors, etc. Amazingly, I found myself working with some incredible leaders in the field—authors my middle school and high school students adored (okay—I adored them, too) and educators and researchers my colleagues and I admired.

It was a little intimidating.

In the past five years, Jim and I have been fortunate to be a part of an organization—and its journal—that are thriving. We’ve tried to bring in the latest in research regarding young adult literature, while

also providing a practical side designed to encourage educators to use quality YA literature in the classroom. We know the secret to success for our students is engagement; young adult literature provides the greatest opportunity for engaging those learners. That philosophy has guided us as we’ve approached a half-decade’s worth of journals.

The numerous articles in this issue reflect that philosophy. The female fantasy heroine is the subject of an article by Kara K. Keeling and Marsha M. Sprague, while Lisa Kerr examines futuristic young adult fiction in her article, “Frankenstein’s Children.” Vivian Yenika-Agbaw provides a look at books focusing on Africa that have received the Newbery Medal. In her article on writing and teaching historical fiction, Linda J. Rice shares focuses on the works of L.M. Elliott.

In “Carolina Dreams,” Scot Smith discusses the works of Kerry Madden and shares an interview with the author. Melanie D. Koss details how today’s new literacies are affecting young adult literature. Hannah P. Gerger moves into the world of video games, discussing how they can be used to encourage teens to read young adult literature. Additionally, Emily S. Meixner shares ways to open up secondary classrooms to the LGBTQ young adult literature by using book passes.

Jerry Weis provides a look at the publishing concerns that have emerged with today’s economic issues in his Publisher’s Connection column, while Bill Broz and guest book reviewer Jim Davis discuss memoirs in the Professional Resource Connection. Also, don’t forget to read through our 31 reviews of the latest in young adult literature in the Clip and File center insert.

This issue of *The ALAN Review* is our last; we hope we've brought you the best and the brightest regarding developments in young adult literature. Now, we turn the reins over to a new set of coeditors—Steven Bickmore, Melanie Hundley, and Jacqueline Bach—who we feel confident will be outstandingly successful and propel the journal into new realms.

Most important, we hope we've shared the passion we have for young adult literature. As educators, we have seen these quality books in the hands of teens across the nation, and we believe . . . no, we *know* . . . that young people are able to find their own voices through the works of Walter Dean Myers, Chris

Crutcher, Laurie Halse Anderson, Christopher Paul Curtis, and so many others. There may be some voices that make a few adults somewhat uncomfortable, but those voices must continue to be heard. ALAN, with its growing number of members, offers an opportunity for just that.

In our five years as coeditors, we hope we've helped a few more of *your* voices to be heard, as well; we appreciate you and thank you for allowing us to drop into your homes and offices three times a year.

And, Jim, it may have been a little intimidating, but I'm really glad I made that phone call.

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**.

Call for Manuscripts

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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, 2009**, submission deadline.

Recovery of Self and Family in Sharon Creech's *The Wanderer*:

Literature as Equipment for Living

Sharon Creech's *The Wanderer*, a Newbery Honor book from the year 2000, weaves a beautiful tale of family, adventure, and love for the sea, creating the perfect space for students to find their own connection to family, as well as essential tools for life. The highly acclaimed novel deals with the important issues of family, home, and identity and is presented as a series of journal entries by cousins Sophie and Cody that recount their adventures with uncles and cousins on a sea journey from the United States to England. Both characters negotiate family issues: Cody has the typical adolescent problems of self-image and conflict with a difficult father (the aptly named Stew); the main character Sophie (Greek for "wisdom") works to come to an understanding of family and self within the context of her tragic and mysterious family history.

By the time students read *The Wanderer*, they are probably familiar with journal writing as a route to self-discovery. This novel models that process with the alternating entries of Sophie and Cody. However, this novel also models reading (particularly of classic literature) and storytelling as ways of understanding self, family, and world. *The Wanderer* can show students that works of literature and storytelling are, in Kenneth Burke's famous phrase, "equipment for living," providing "strategies for dealing with situations" (Burke 293, 296).

No doubt every teacher of literature has heard beloved texts called "irrelevant" or "boring" by students, who often see the classics as a required school chore

that has nothing to teach them. Similarly, students often see storytelling as connected with fantasy and not as a means of problem-solving. But without being at all preachy (as literature teachers sometimes are), Creech weaves, with elements of classic texts, a novel whose resolutions are achieved by storytelling: self-understanding and self-acceptance on the part of the main character, and increased wisdom and understanding for the other characters. The novel ends with the recovery of family in all senses: as the relatives on the boat forge a strong sense of family on the voyage, as they reach their father and grandfather Bompie in England, and as Sophie recovers her memory of her traumatic past, understanding the relation between her "then family" and "now family."

Classic Themes

The novel is such a page-turner that students may not notice that they are asked to consider such serious issues as mortality, fear, identity, and family. Along with the suspense (and danger) inherent in a sea journey, the novel explores a mystery about Sophie's parentage and identity, which is not resolved until the end. As Cody's name suggests, there is much to decode in this novel, particularly since, in Cody's words, "Everyone talks in code where Sophie is concerned" (188).

Sophie begins the story by talking about her parents, though she also shares the stories of her grandfather, Bompie, who she writes is a "third parent" and

“so like me” (6). We learn from Cody, however, that Sophie is an orphan (28) and has never met Bompie (37). The cousins Cody and Brian, who deal with their own family issues on the journey, are curious about what happened to Sophie’s “real” parents and about her unwillingness to acknowledge aspects of her history. How does Sophie know Bompie’s stories when she’s never met him? For Sophie, of course, the mystery is more critical: confronting fear, loss, and death, she must recover and acknowledge her past, represented by fragments of memory and a recurring nightmare about a wave. In the process, she must deal with the connection between her past (family) and present (family).

Because the story is shaped as a journey across the sea, it can be linked with the literature of quest—*The Odyssey* and *The Aeneid*, to name just two—along with more modern renditions, including such adolescent works as *The True Confessions of Charlotte Doyle* and *The Cay*. In addition to a generic affiliation with quest literature, the novel’s connection with the classics is made very specific. It takes as its title the name of an Old English poem, which serves also as the name of the boat. Furthermore, the epigraph, from “The Seafarer,” another Old English poem, initiates the theme of storytelling so important in the novel: “The tale is true, and mine. It tells/How the sea took me; swept me back/And forth.” Both poems tell of loss, memory, exile and isolation, the need for home, and the lure of the sea. Like the speaker of “The Wanderer,” Sophie has “lock[ed] up the treasury of [her] thoughts,” and the novel records her giving voice to her story in fragments, first in her journal and then to others.

The thematic resonance of these poems continues as the story proceeds. We learn that the characters nicknamed Dock, Mo, and Bompie have as their birth names Jonah, Moses, and Ulysses, all characters central to the western tradition who contend with the sea in coming to an understanding of self and world. As in the Old English poems, these quests involve the themes of exile and home, self and family, memory and loss. For Ulysses/Odysseus, the connection with *The Wanderer* is especially apt: he is a storyteller who gets home to family through storytelling as much as through heroic action.

Particularly important is Creech’s presentation of Uncle Dock, the owner of the boat and initiator of

the journey who is involved in a quest for his true love, Rosalie, as someone who uses literary works as “equipment for living.” Dock recites lines from Tennyson’s “Ulysses” and “The Lotos-Eaters,” both based on *The Odyssey* (201; 205). Sophie comments on the effect of Dock’s citations in reference to another poem, this one by Carl Sandburg: “when we had a spell of fog, Uncle Dock recited a poem about fog creeping along on little cat feet, and as soon as he said that, that’s what I saw . . . (53). Thus we learn of the capacity of literature to reflect and to transform experience. Poetry is useful; it is connected to everyday experience, helping us conceptualize and understand a variety of situations.

Most powerful perhaps is the presence of Coleridge’s *Rime of the Ancient Mariner*. Uncle Dock quotes a few lines of the poem as they near land: “Oh! Dream of joy! Is this indeed/The lighthouse top I see?/Is this the hill? Is this the kirk?/Is this mine own countree?” (246–47). Additionally, allusions to the poem are woven into the story: Sophie recounts a disturbing dream “about being adrift in the ocean with no food, and we were all languishing on deck with no energy to do anything, and the boat was tossing and heaving around, and then a seagull flew overhead and landed on the boom and Brian said “Kill it! Kill it!” (57–58). For us, though not for Sophie who is unaware of the allusion, this might recall the unthinking killing of the bird in Coleridge’s poem. The *Rime* is also present near the end of the book, when the family is once again on land: Sophie describes how they are unable to stop telling their stories to strangers in a pub: “We were all chattering away like crazy, talking to anyone who would listen. . . . For hours we went on like that, pouring out the words and at one point I wondered how much these strangers cared about what we were saying, or if they cared at all, and why we felt such an urgent need to tell them our story, and why they told us theirs” (252–53). Like the Ancient Mariner to the Wedding Guest, Sophie and the others are compelled to tell their stories as an aspect of reintegration into a social context.

As in the Old English poems, these quests involve the themes of exile and home, self and family, memory and loss.

At the end, the family comes to Bompie and various mysteries are solved. Through the journey, Sophie has been telling “Bompie” stories, all of which have to do with Bompie’s survival of a dangerous encounter with water, and “little kid stories,” which deal with issues of family, death, and fear of water. Sophie, of course, is the little kid: with these stories, Sophie distances aspects of her experience until she is able to claim her own story. In her journal, she also

recounts her recurrent dream about a giant wave, which she re-experiences in a terrifying scene (209). By listening to Sophie’s stories, Cody eventually solves the mystery. Sophie survived an accident at sea that killed her parents; she lived first with various relatives who died, then foster families, and was

eventually adopted by loving parents: “By this time, she wanted so much to be wanted that she made herself believe that [Bompie’s] was her real family, her only family” (270). We also learn how Sophie knows the Bompie stories: Bompie wrote her letters welcoming her to the family and “in each of the letters he told a story about himself so she would know him better” (284).

Particularly moving are the scenes between Sophie and Bompie. The voyagers discover that Bompie, like the older relatives of many students, is experiencing loss of memory and does not immediately recognize his own children. He does recognize Sophie (though he has never met her), who is experiencing memory loss of her own, even though it is through trauma and not age. In poignant scenes, Sophie tells Bompie his own stories. When, early in the book, Sophie asks her mother, “What if the picture [in Bompie’s head] got erased?” her mother replies, “How’s that going to happen?” (74). Yet it has happened, and as Sophie prefaces each story with “Remember,” she helps him recover his memories (282–83). Hence, the Bompie stories are useful in many ways—from shipboard entertainment to a way for Sophie to come to terms with her own story. Like *The Odyssey* and the Old English poems, the Bompie stories reflect the oral tradition, stories that are changed in the telling.

Sophie has transformed the stories for her own uses, selecting those stories that are about Bompie’s dangerous confrontations with water and adding to each a section on Bompie’s fear of water that was not part of the original (285). Again, this is literature as equipment for living, helping us, as Burke has it, to develop strategies for coping with difficult situations.

At the end of the novel, all return home except Dock, who remains to care for Bompie; all have undergone significant transformation, adults included, involving self-awareness, sense of vocation, and family relationships. Sophie has reclaimed the part of herself that was the “little kid”: Cody comments, “One day the little kid got lucky and she landed in a place where it was okay if she couldn’t remember all the time, and because it was okay not to remember, she started to remember. And along with the painful things came the good things to remember and maybe she felt as if she’d found some things she’s lost” (300–301). The sense of loss, exile, and painful memory that Sophie shares with the speakers of the Old English poems remains, accompanied now by a sense of home and family, much like the end of *The Odyssey* when Odysseus reclaims home and family—and thereby his own identity.

In the final chapter, “Home,” the cousins incorporate into their talk and activities elements of the stories they heard on the voyage: all the Bompie stories ended with the promise of pie, and now the children plan to bake a pie; the uncles reminisced about their childhood adventures on *The BlueBopper*, and now the cousins talk of a journey on *The BlueBopper Wanderer* (304–05). In these small details is the integration of past and present, story and real-life. At the very end, Sophie recalls a baptism witnessed earlier (103): “I’m just right here, right now. When I close my eyes, I can still smell the sea, but I feel as if I’ve been dunked in the clear cool water and I’ve come out all clean and new. Bye-bye, Bompie. Bye-bye, sea” (305).

Although the end of the novel is the usual place to end an essay, we would like to return to the beginning of the novel—to parts of a book students seldom notice: the acknowledgment and the dedication. Creech, who taught literature for many years before publishing her novels, thanks two people “for helping me decode the mystery and to arrive at the ‘end of all our exploring’ (T. S. Eliot, “Little Gidding”). In this line, we see the emphasis on de-coding and the

Like *The Odyssey* and the Old English poems, the Bompie stories reflect the oral tradition, stories that are changed in the telling.

use of literary texts to help give voice to feelings and experience. The next line of the Eliot poem—"will be to arrive where we started"—anticipates the return home at the end of the book, where we last see the characters, transformed through their journey. And Creech, who tells us on her website that two of the Bompie stories are stories told by her father, prefaces her own story with a dedication to her daughter "who journeyed across the ocean" from "the mother who worried." Thus, for the author who wrote the book and for the characters within it, storytelling, whether within the family or by "famous authors," is truly "equipment for living," providing models for coping with and understanding self and world and serving as agents of transformation.

Sharon Creech's novel is a joy to read. Its lyrical language and down-to-earth characters create a rich tapestry, beautiful threads woven together much like the cloth that Sophie's mother, and Odysseus's wife before her, weave as they wait for the return of a loved one from sea. This is a book about heritage and home, courage and companionship, adventure and artistry, but most of all, this is a book about family—about discovering the self through the other. As Sophie, Cody, Dock, and crew adventure across the sea toward Bompie, they each learn more about their own strengths as well as the strength and support of family. Bompie's stories, through Sophie's voice, give the seafarers hope and a sense of belonging, a shared past that beckons them toward the safety of home as well as the dream of the future. Like the apple pie that Bompie's mother bakes for him after each arduous adventure, Bompie himself and the security of family serve as the reward for the crew at the end of their journey. But as wonderful as this book is to read, it is perhaps even more inspiring as a magical book for the classroom. The multidimensional characters, the action-packed sea story, the descriptive details about the places and creatures, the intricate sailing terms and skills, the parallels with classic literature, the layers of storytelling—all of these threads provide a wealth of ideas for engaging students in the text and enriching the fabric of the reading experience.

Using *The Wanderer* in the Classroom

Perhaps this book's greatest strength for classroom instruction is its natural place in differentiating in-

struction. Below, we outline three specific strategies for guiding students in activities that will not only measure comprehension but also allow for creative response and choice in the learning process. In addition, all of these strategies can be easily adapted to many grade levels; while the text may be written at fifth-grade reading level, the content is so rich and its ties to classic literature are so strong that the book could easily be used with high school students, as either a bridge to classic works like *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* and *The Odyssey* or as part of a unit on family or the sea. Our suggested strategies can also be adapted to other disciplines, since this book offers such a rich array of topics for inquiry and investigation. Above all, this is a perfect text for appealing to a variety of learning styles, since the characters themselves serve as examples of diversity in creative expression.

Jigsaw

We begin with a modified jigsaw approach that provides support for student research and development on the book's tremendous variety of topics for inquiry. Jigsaw is a method developed primarily in the social studies curriculum that allows students to cover a great deal of material without the usual heavy reading load, while it introduces the classroom family to the craft of teaching. Students work in groups, with each member of the group assigned a different topic. In this case, each student first researches his or her individual topic, then meets with students from other groups with similar topics for discussion and clarification, and finally "teaches" the material to his or her own group. This approach is ideal with Creech's novel, since each of the voyagers in the book teaches shipmates a skill on the journey—Cody teaches juggling, Uncle Mo teaches radio code, and Sophie teaches knot tying, so each family member learns to appreciate the others' skills and knowledge.

Some possible topics for research, as well as some

This is a book about heritage and home, courage and companionship, adventure and artistry, but most of all, this is a book about family—about discovering the self through the other.

Groups	Sea Life	Sailing	Map Quest	Navigation	Fishing/Skills
Group 1	Albatross	Points of sail	Martha's Vineyard	Sextant	Lobstering
Group 2	Sea flea	Sail types	Grand Manan	Gulf Stream	Clamming
Group 3	Dolphins	Bilge box	Nova Scotia	Labrador Current	Bluefish
Group 4	Whales	Knots	Ohio River	Charts	Weaving
Group 5	Plankton	Boat Terms	Ireland/England	Codes	Juggling

Figure 1. Jigsaw for Research—*The Wanderer*

plans for organizing the groups, are listed in Figure 1. In this modification of the jigsaw approach, students will be grouped so that each member of the group researches a topic from five different areas of study. After their individual research, the members will meet for discussion and clarification with a Topic Group. So, all of the Sea Life members will meet and discuss their findings while all of the Navigation members meet to discuss their research. In this way, students can compare notes and build on one another's research. The individuals will then go back to their original groups to "teach" members about their topic. The research results could then be compiled in a class portfolio so that the rest of the class may benefit from the information.

Each research category can, of course, be modified according to the skill and comprehension levels of individual students. Depending on the time and facilities available, teachers might schedule a library day or computer lab for the research; presentations could run

in PowerPoint, as simple poster board displays, or as an oral delivery of the information. Other alternatives include developing research topics before teaching the novel (to get students engaged in the book) or scheduling presentations throughout the reading.

Think-Tac-Toe

Our next strategy, Think-Tac-Toe, taps into student creativity and allows even more choice in student selection of activities. More advanced classes can even help to generate the categories and topics. The strategy is designed to engage students with the text in creative ways that allow for individual learning styles and interest. The typical Think-Tac-Toe contains at least three categories and is designed to allow flexibility in the topics. We have chosen to control this particular Think-Tac-Toe by requiring students to choose topics connected with the theme of family, but to also emphasize the categories of character, setting, and theme. Figure 2 illustrates our suggestions,

	Performance	Artistic Expression	Creative Writing
Character	Imitate Dock's knowledge of literature by reciting some of the poetry that he mentions. Be able to explain how the poem helps us to understand Dock and this story.	Imitate Mo's artistic abilities and create a sketch or painting of a key scene from the story. Choose a scene that depicts an understanding of a particular character.	Create your own code or use the radio code from Cody's log to create a message or poem written to or about one of the characters from the story.
Setting	Create a tableau of an important scene from the story. Make certain to choose a scene that reflects a clear depiction of the setting.	Create a map or model of <i>The Wanderer's</i> adventure. Choose your own media style for the piece.	Create a children's picture book representing the travels and scenery in the book.
Theme	Create a YouTube style video that explores the importance of understanding diversity in families.	Create a collage that illustrates your view of family and its importance.	Create another Bompie story or your own family story using Sophie's style of writing.

Figure 2. Think-Tac-Toe—*The Wanderer*

Role	Audience	Format	Topic
Newspaper Reporter	Newspaper readers	Feature news article	Write an article about Sophie and her adventure and discoveries about her family.
Dock	Rosalie	Letters	Write several letters pleading with Rosalie to join the family.
Brian	School newspaper readers	Raft log	Write a log like Cody's about the raft trip with the cousins on the Ohio River.
Older Sophie	Sophie's grandchildren	Narrative	Create a Bompie-style story told by a much older Sophie.
Interviewer	Public radio listeners	Interview	Write an interview with Cody after he returns home from England.
Student's Grandparent	School literary journal readers	Narrative	Write a narrative tale like Bompie's from your own grandparent's perspective.
Family Historian	Genealogy website users	Expository essay	Write an essay explaining where your family is from and how they came to America.
Travel Agency	Future travelers	Travel brochure	Create a brochure advertising a family adventure following the same route as <i>The Wanderer</i> .
Ethnographer	Journal readers	Research paper	Investigate current statistics about America's families and write a report.
Student	School class	Expository essay	Research adoption, foster families, and famous adoptees and write an overview.
Sophie, Cody, Brian	Sophie, Cody, Brian	Letters	Write a series of letters from the cousins planning their next adventure.
Literary Analyst	School literary journal readers	Analytical essay	Write a comparison of Sophie's discoveries about family and the sea in relation to one of the poems mentioned in the text.

Figure 3. RAFT Writing Prompts—*The Wanderer*

but with such a rich text, teachers and their students could certainly create much different choices. Our plan requires students to choose an activity from each horizontal row. Students are also encouraged to experiment with a variety of methods of expression for their three activities.

In addition to building more choices into the Think-Tac-Toe model, you also might experiment with varying difficulty levels and learning styles. Some other possible activities from this text might include encouraging students to explore crafts, like weaving or model boat building, or to learn to use tools, like the sextant. They might even investigate family recipes for apple pie or learn how to juggle. As always, these activities are best developed with the students, so that they have more voice in their own learning process.

RAFT

Our last strategy is perhaps the most fitting for this text, since it is called RAFT—certainly an appropriate assignment for a sea story. RAFT is another strategy that allows choice and differentiation of instruction and is usually tied to writing prompts. We have again chosen to center our activities around themes that help students explore the role of family in *The Wanderer*. In this exercise, students are allowed to choose the format, audience, and speaker for their writing assignment, but we have set control on the topic. Our suggested activities are listed in Figure 3, but teachers will surely adapt the assignments to their own students' needs.

RAFT activities could center specifically on one style of writing, if students need practice in a specific

area. For this text, a family history project might be the perfect follow-up. Students could be required to interview an older family member, but still choose their role and format for the final product. Teachers could also plan to publish a class anthology, which would create control over the audience. This is clearly a tool that is easily adaptable to specific classes, grade levels, and individual needs.

Literature as “Essential Equipment”

Students need books like *The Wanderer* to give them the equipment essential for success in life. Like Sophie, her boat family, and the Ancient Mariner before them, some tales must be passed on as necessity for both storyteller and listener. This book helps students understand the importance of hearing, telling, and saving stories like Bompie’s. But the book also helps young adults discover the power of those tales in revealing the complexities and spirit of family. Developing activities and projects like those outlined above will help students engage with Sophie’s story, but perhaps more important, these are also activities that contribute to developing a stronger “class fam-

ily” like Sophie’s “boat family.” Like the tapestry or cloth woven by Sophie’s mother, we create a space for weaving together the lives of our students—each thread important to the strength and beauty of the rich fabric of learning.

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Search for New Editor of *Voices from the Middle*

NCTE is seeking a new editor of *Voices from the Middle*. In May 2011, the term of the present editors (Roxanne Henkin, Janis Harmon, and Elizabeth Pate) will end. Interested persons should send a letter of application to be received **no later than August 14, 2009**. Letters should include the applicant’s vision for the journal and be accompanied by the applicant’s vita, one sample of published writing, and two letters of general support from appropriate administrators at the applicant’s institution. Do not send books, monographs, or other materials which cannot be easily copied for the Search Committee. Classroom teachers are both eligible and encouraged to apply. The applicant appointed by the NCTE Executive Committee will effect a transition, preparing for his or her first issue in September 2011. The appointment is for five years. Applications should be addressed to Kurt Austin, *Voices from the Middle* Search Committee, NCTE, 1111 W. Kenyon Road, Urbana, IL 61801-1096. Questions regarding any aspect of the editorship should be directed to Kurt Austin, Publications Division Director: kaustin@ncte.org; (800) 369-6283, extension 3619.

Dragon-Slayer vs. Dragon-Sayer:

Reimagining the Female Fantasy Heroine

For girls like us who grew up loving fantasy, there weren't very many role models in the books we read. The novels we absorbed were almost always about boys who were chosen by some mystical force to accomplish some great quest or task. The girls in the books were always very pretty and waited around to be rescued or married off; for sure, they didn't go riding off with the boys to find a magic ring or pull a sword out of a stone. We didn't want to be the girl who waited, we wanted to be the hero.

Fortunately, in the late 1900s, a revolutionary new type of female heroine emerged in adolescent fantasy. Robin McKinley, one of the authors who created this previously rare leading character, calls her protagonists "Girls Who Do Things," noting in her Newbery Medal acceptance speech her desire as an adolescent reader for female heroes: "I wished desperately for books like *Hero* when I was young: books that didn't require me to be untrue to my gender if I wished to fantasize about having my sort of adventures, not about wearing long, trailing dresses . . . and . . . [thinking] about my lover who is off somewhere having interesting adventures." McKinley found her first model in Eowyn from J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, but was dissatisfied with the character's lack of development. She chose to create female heroes, rather than heroines, such as the protagonists in her Damar novels *The Blue Sword* and *The Hero and the Crown*. Harry (a nickname for Harriet) in *The Blue Sword* inwardly resents the genteel, lady-like role required of her when living at a provincial military outpost. She—and the reader—are somewhat relieved when she is kidnapped by a local chieftain and

trained as a warrior to protect the local population from the menace of evil's dark forces. Not only does she become a warrior after much labor and practice, she becomes the best in the kingdom save only for the king, and is given a storied sword with which she leads her forces to victory. The source of the sword is the nucleus of *The Hero and the Crown*, a prequel that focuses on the heroic dragon-slaying woman Aerin. Critic Anna Altmann has noted how closely Aerin's adventures follow the quest pattern that Northrop Frye identifies in *The Anatomy of Criticism*:

The central form of quest-romance is the dragon killing theme exemplified by the stories of Saint George and Perseus. A land ruled by a helpless old king is laid to waste by a sea monster, to whom one young person after another is offered to be devoured, until the lot falls to the king's daughter: at that point the hero arrives, kills the dragon, marries the daughter, and succeeds to the kingdom. (quoted in Altmann, 145)

The central inquiry of Altmann's article is whether Aerin is simply "a male quest hero in drag"; has McKinley, in fact, really fulfilled her plan to write "books that didn't require [her] to be untrue to [her] gender"? In other words, Altmann asks, has McKinley simply "welded brass tits on the armor" of her female hero? There is much evidence that supports this, in that Aerin's adventures do follow the typical elements of the male quest story. The popularity of McKinley's books testifies to their appeal as a powerful model for many young female readers who find it empowering to take on the role of the traditional "dragon-slayer" and demonstrate strength through physical power as well as mental cunning. Tamora Pierce's popular Song

of the Lioness series illustrates this type of female hero as well: Alanna switches places with her brother so that she may be trained as a knight rather than as a sorceress. Pierce carries the “in drag” element even further by disguising her protagonist as a boy: neither of McKinley’s female heroes ever pose as anything but women, though they adopt masculine behaviors, and Harry has a masculine name.

While some female readers find the dragon-slayer model attractive and empowering, others resist it, feeling that such female heroes are unrealistic and subvert what they find powerful and attractive about being women. Why, they ask, must girls become boys to have adventures and be successful? Altmann cites one of her students as complaining about McKinley’s *The Hero and the Crown*:

“This book isn’t about a woman. . . . This book doesn’t talk about me. A book that really has a woman as a hero would validate women’s lives as we live them, would recognize that what women actually are and do is worthwhile and central. I don’t ride war-horses and fight dragons and wear armor. I’m sick of books that make women heroes by turning them into men.” (quoted in Altmann, 144)

This student’s desire is reflected in another model of protagonist, a girl who rejects the stereotypic masculine approach to conflict and danger (typically, overpower and conquer) and instead substitutes traditional feminine values of nurturing and caretaking to achieve her goals. Such girls seek to connect and form relationships. Carol Gilligan and her colleagues at Harvard discovered through extensive research in the late 1980s that this is a primary need for adolescent girls as they mature. However, in the search for connection and relationship, Gilligan recognized a dichotomy that many girls feel is difficult to resolve. They must either be selfless (“a good woman”) or face being labeled “selfish,” if they seek to develop their sense of self rather than focusing on the welfare of others (10). The key to successfully negotiating this dilemma, Gilligan posits, is learning to balance self-development while embracing the nurturant aspect of the self. The dichotomy is false, and both quali-

ties need to be achieved.

Heroines such as Menolly in Anne McCaffrey’s Harper Hall trilogy as well as Kaeldra in Susan Fletcher’s *The Dragon Chronicles* offer a melding of these qualities of nurturing and self-development, relying on traditional feminine values to accomplish their quests. They represent an alternative feminist heroism, one not dependent on assuming the traditional masculine role of a dragon-slayer, an armed warrior who conquers through violence. Instead, both of these heroines become “dragon-sayers,” literally taming dragons through communicating with and physically and emotionally nurturing infant dragons. Menolly and Kaeldra become mothers of dragons, offering readers a positive heroism based on love and female identity rather than one based on absorption into male roles of violence and destruction (however self-defensive). In both series, the protagonist takes on three major roles as caretaker of young dragons: she must feed them, heal them, and protect them from harm. By doing so, she develops strengths she did not have (or realize she had) before, thus acquiring agency in influencing others around her: she moves from a passive unhappiness over her lot in life (both Menolly and Kaeldra are victimized by oppressive parent figures) to an ability to direct events as an active participant.

The experiences of Menolly, the heroine of *Dragonson* (McCaffrey, 1976/2003), follow the dragon-sayer pattern closely. She desires to be a Harper (a musician), but is forbidden to make music by her parents, who think only men can become Harpers.

Each time Menolly is beaten down by her parents, the novel gives her the opportunity to reaffirm her sense of self through contact with “fire-lizards,” the local miniature dragons. After her father beats her for unconsciously making up her own tunes, she leaves home for an afternoon and discovers a group of fire lizards bathing by the seaside. When Menolly accidentally cuts her hand badly, her parents’ resistance to her ambition to be a musician is so great that they even go so far as to purposely allow her hand to heal improperly so she will no longer be able to play music. Yet

While some female readers find the dragon-slayer model attractive and empowering, others resist it, feeling that such female heroes are unrealistic and subvert what they find powerful and attractive about being women.

Menolly realizes that her hand may be less damaged than she thought when she rescues a clutch of fire-lizard eggs from an incoming tide; her desperation while saving the eggs makes her forget the physical limitations of her injury. Frustrated by her parents' treatment and desperate to make music, Menolly runs away from home. She comes across the rescued eggs just as they hatch and feeds the hungry dragonet hatchlings so that they will not leave the cave and die in Threadfall, a planetary scourge that destroys living things. Thus Menolly twice saves the small dragons' lives; she develops personal agency only when she leaves home and is forced by desperate circumstances to preserve and protect the lives of infant dragons.

The next section of the novel portrays Menolly's development as a mother of dragons. Initially, her primary role is to feed them; however, she is also rewarded with affection from her dragon children, something she has not received from her parents:

Menolly had been absolutely stunned to wake with the unaccustomed weight of warm bodies about her. Scared, too, until the little creatures roused, with strong thoughts of renewed hunger and love and affection for her As the days went by their appetite drove Menolly to lengths she wouldn't have attempted for her own comfort. The result was that she was kept entirely too busy to feel either sorry for or apprehensive about herself. Her friends had to be fed, comforted and amused. She also had to supply her own needs—as far as she was able—and she was able to do a lot more than she'd suspected she could. (93)

This nurturance results in a strong connection with the creatures, but more importantly teaches Menolly that she has competencies that she did not realize. She hunts for her charges to feed them and undertakes the difficult process of rendering fish oil to keep their hides healthy as they outgrow their skin. Furthermore, she communicates with them through thought and music, and the fire-lizards begin to accompany her when she sings. Thus, Menolly makes the nurturant connections Gilligan identifies as psychologically necessary for girls—but with dragons rather than people. In the sequel, *Dragonsinger*, Menolly is offered musical training at Harper Hall, where she finds a

McCaffrey clearly suggests that cultivating traditionally female traits, like nurturance and relationship, has strong positive consequences.

place within a human community in which to grow the self-confidence she needs to develop the artist within herself. She continues to nurture her fire-lizard friends, whom the rest of the community also reveres. McCaffrey clearly suggests that cultivating traditionally female traits, like nurturance and relationship, has strong positive consequences.

Susan Fletcher's *Dragon's Milk* also exemplifies the dragon-sayer pattern: in fact, it coins the term. Kaeldra is an outsider in her own village; descended from the Kargs, a tall, blonde people, she physically stands out from the small, dark Elythians. Kaeldra has unknowingly inherited an unusual Karg power—she is a “dragon-sayer,” one who can sense the thoughts of dragons and speak with them. When Kaeldra's stepsister Lyf becomes desperately ill, the only possible cure is the milk of a mother dragon. Trying to please her suspicious and unloving stepmother by attempting to save her stepsister, Kaeldra risks her own life by traveling to the hills where she has sensed a recent, and very rare, dragon birth. Kaeldra strikes a bargain with Fiora, the mother dragon: Kaeldra will “babysit” the infant dragons so that Fiora may hunt for their food, and in return, Fiora will share some of her milk to heal Lyf.

As temporary substitute dragon mother, Kaeldra enacts the feminine nurturing role: she feeds the draclings by snaring small animals for them to stay their hunger until their mother returns with bigger game. She also discovers that she can communicate with them through her thoughts, which deepens her emotional bond with them. She assumes the role of protectress of the young by driving off wolves that menace the draclings. When Fiora is slain by local youths, Kaeldra decides she must protect the three orphaned draclings and get them to other adult dragons, despite the dangers of travel and the pursuit of a dragon-slayer.

The rigors of the journey—providing for the draclings and keeping them safely hidden from the people who would destroy them—tax her ingenuity. At journey's end, she must call the adult dragons by activating her powers as a dragon-sayer, in long-established Kargish tradition. The journey widens Kaeldra's

experiences of others and thereby deepens her understanding and acceptance of herself:

Kaeldra thought of all the folk she had seen on this journey, folk of every height and girth and complexion. *I belong to the earth.* She tried on the thought as she would try on a new gown. She had never considered it quite that way before. (235)

Kaeldra here exemplifies Gilligan's point, quoted earlier, that girls have a "need to find connection in the face of difference" (10). She can now accept those who are different from her and equably accept her own differences as a Karg living in a village of Elythians. The Epilogue to the novel shows Kaeldra as wife and mother and seer, able to see the dragons she loves through her visions. Fletcher thus implicitly values the traditional feminine roles through the way she sets up the novel's conflict and resolution. Kaeldra, like Menolly, is certainly what McKinley would call a "Girl Who Does Things," but her adventures all occur with the purpose of protecting the dragons she mothers, rather than assuming the warrior role of the girls in McKinley's books.

Rather than masculinist action masquerading as androgyny, McCaffrey and Fletcher's novels celebrate an alternative feminism—which may in its turn offer a similar model for boys within the fantasy tradition. Notably, the male protagonists of Jane Yolen's *Dragon's Blood* and Christopher Paolini's popular *Eragon* nurture and raise baby dragons, although with a different aim in mind than their female dragon-sayer counterparts. Jakkin, of *Dragon's Blood*, steals a hatchling dragon to raise and train in secret so that it may fight other dragons in competitions when it is grown; if successful, he will be able to buy his way out of servitude and into master status through the winnings of his dragon. Eragon, the eponymous hero of Paolini's novel, accidentally acquires a blue stone, but when it hatches, he discovers it is a dragon egg. Both boys follow the same nurturant pattern described above: they must solve the difficulties of feeding a growing dragon of large appetite, protect the infant dragon from natural enemies, and heal

the dragon from injuries. Both boys have the crucial telepathic communication skills with their dragons common to the dragon-sayer girls. But there is a distinct difference: the boys are raising their dragons for combat. Jakkin intends to use his dragon as a fighter against other dragons in the traditional combats on his world. Eragon trains his dragon Sapphira so that he may ride her as he fights evil forces in true dragonrider tradition. He is aware of his dragon's potential from the moment she hatches: "By raising a dragon, he could become a Rider. Myths and stories about Riders were treasured, and being one would automatically place him among those legends" (40). The dragon becomes half partner, half weapon for the boys, whereas the girls value their dragons as companions. The boys do not become traditional dragon-slayers, *per se*, but their nurturing has an ulterior motive: they do not subvert the traditional role of the male as fighter; rather, they embrace the role of the hero as destroyer of evil. The dragons are the means by which they do so, rather like exceptionally intelligent and useful war-horses. The girls, however, are not destroyers of evil so much as they are defenders of the good.

There is one further example in popular fantasy of a male who embraces the mother role entirely, to the point that it blinds him to the serious dangers that a real dragon poses. This is, of course, Hagrid in J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*. Hagrid openly takes on the role of mother to his Norwegian Ridgeback dragon hatchling, calling himself "Mummy" on several occasions. He researches the

requirements of his new "child" in *Dragonbreeding for Pleasure and Profit*, so that he can properly feed it ("a bucket of brandy mixed with chicken blood every half hour" [170] when it first hatches, followed by "dead rats by the crate" when it is slightly older [173]). He names the baby "Norbert," talks to it in baby talk, and sings it lullabies (172–3). Harry, Ron, and Hermione, however, are dumbfounded by Hagrid's adoption of the egg and the dangers posed by raising a dragon in a wooden house (171), especially given that the baby shoots sparks when it sneezes

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just moments after hatching (172)! Hagrid is brought to recognize only with significant prodding from his young friends that the dragon is growing too fast and is too dangerous to keep (especially given the number of times it bites Hagrid and, eventually, Ron). But Hagrid fears (like any good parent would) what might happen were he to turn the “child” out before it has grown. Harry and his friends are thus the ones who arrange to transport Norbert to Ron’s brother Charlie, who is studying dragons professionally in Romania. Hagrid goes along with the plan only reluctantly, and packs the dragon up as he would a baby: “‘He’s got lots o’ rats an’ some brandy fer the journey,’ said Hagrid in a muffled voice. ‘An’ I’ve packed his teddy bear in case he gets lonely’” (175). Hagrid, though male, obviously embraces the mother role even more self-consciously than the girls in McCaffrey’s and Fletcher’s novels, feeding and protecting the dragon baby, yet he is not the protagonist of the novel, nor is the reader invited to identify with his stance; rather, we agree with Harry and his friends that Hagrid “has lost his marbles” (172) in his desire to mother a dragon. He is not placed in a heroic mode: he is a figure of absurdity in his ambition, and must be rescued from it by his more clear-thinking child companions.

Our brief survey of these eight novels suggests that current popular writers of fantasy have constructed the heroic mode for girls in multiple ways. One, of course, is the traditional masculine dragon-slaying tale of martial valor, but a newer template offers a protagonist who chooses to embrace traditional feminine roles and values as a dragon-sayer. The dragon-sayer girls are not passive models who stay home and wait for men to rescue them; rather, this type of female hero who “does things” uses communication, nurturance, and protective love as means to achieving personal agency and the development of self-knowledge, confidence, and competence. We also see that mothering dragons is no longer only the province of girls in fantasy; both genders are offered the opportunity to

nurture the infant stages of these most powerful creatures of our imagination (though boys notably only within a context of masculine warrior culture). This is an encouraging trend, and one that should be useful in offering girls multiple lenses in seeing themselves as protagonists in the fantasy they read.

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The Newbery Medal: Books about Africa

Historical Overview

Undoubtedly, of all the awards associated with children's literature, the Newbery Medal is not only the oldest, but also one of the most prestigious. Proposed in 1921 by Frederic G. Mercher and approved by the American Library Association in 1922, the medal is awarded annually "to the author of the most distinguished contribution to American literature for children published in English in the United States during the preceding year" (ALA Newbery Terms & Criteria).¹ Since its inception, eighty-eight medals have been issued with hundreds of honor books announced. This award does not only add "prestige [to] children's literature," as noted by Anita Silvey (2002), but also prolongs the shelf life of a book (Kidd, 2007).²

The Newbery, however, has not existed without some controversy. First, it is said to have perpetuated what some refer to as "an institutionalized racism . . . [which in a way was] in keeping with social practices of segregation" (Kidd, 2007, 178). Second, other critics feel that there's "an anxious insistence on the universality of human experience" (Kidd, 2007, 179). These complaints continue to pose challenges to the Medal Committee, which in turn revises the award criteria so the terms are not only clear, but also maintain a semblance of objectivity. Therefore, while emphasizing the aesthetic merit of a book, other components that enhance the overall literary quality are accentuated. The criteria do not, however, overtly address the issue of cultural merit. "Why does this matter," some may ask? It matters because there are studies that have demonstrated that there exist some Newbery Medal books with cultural content that may be inac-

curate or might have been distorted (Kidd, 2007). For example, Kidd (2007) draws our attention to Elizabeth Yates's 1951 award-winning historical fiction novel, *Amos Fortune, Free Man*, "a compelling tale, which unfortunately downplays the horror of slavery" (179). Taxel (1986) raises similar concerns about two other historical fiction novels: Paula Fox's *The Slave Dancer* and Quida Sebestyen's *Words by Heart*.

The Newbery Award: Book Selection Criteria

Like many educators, I have oftentimes wondered how the selection process works. For one thing, if we are to recommend these books to our students and/or their parents, it becomes necessary to understand how excellence is defined by the Medal Committee. Once we figure this out, we must then examine the award-winning books in question to see how well they illustrate this excellence; this familiarity with the texts will give rise to different ways to present them to our students or to interact with them as readers. This can be quite demanding, if we do not know exactly what we are looking for.

In this paper, I will demonstrate how teachers can integrate Newbery award-winning or honor books about Africa in their classroom. I will begin by presenting the criteria for selecting books for this prestigious award. Then I will discuss the literary and cultural strength of each of three specific honor books and share sample activities that would enhance children's experiences with these books in a classroom setting. My hope is that as teachers expose children to literature about Africa, they will not only educate them about Africa's rain forests, but also help them

to think critically about who Africans are as a diverse group of people, and how they have contributed to our ever-evolving global civilization. In addition, these are activities that can be applied to other multicultural literature for children, especially literature set in other continents and in non-western countries.

As of summer 2008, the criteria for excellence are described as follows:

1. In identifying “Distinguished Writing” in a book for children,
 - a. Committee members need to consider the following:
 - Interpretation of the theme or concept
 - Presentation of information including accuracy, clarity, and organization
 - Development of a plot
 - Delineation of characters
 - Delineation of setting
 - Appropriateness of style

Note: Because the literary qualities to be considered will vary depending on content, the committee need not expect to find excellence in each of the named elements. The book should, however, have distinguished qualities in all of the elements pertinent to it.

- b. Committee members must consider excellence of presentation for a child audience.

2. Each book is to be considered as a contribution to literature. The committee is to make its decision primarily on the text. Other aspects of a book are to be considered only if they distract from the text. Such other aspects might include illustrations, overall design of the book, etc.

3. The book must be a self-contained entity, not dependent on other media (i.e., sound or film equipment) for its enjoyment.

Note: The committee should keep in mind that the award is for literary quality and quality presentation for children. The award is not for didactic intent or for popularity.

Adopted by the ALSC Board, January 1978. Revised, Midwinter 1987.

The Newbery Medal Committee, therefore, must examine each book closely following the stipulated criteria to determine which book among the numer-

ous submitted for consideration accurately exemplifies qualities deemed “excellent” to warrant a gold medal. Having served on three award committees, I know firsthand how tedious and challenging the process can be.³ This notwithstanding, the Committee must select the winning book and a few runner-ups as honor books in a timely and professional manner, although as Kidd (2007) rightly observes, “very few honor books are as widely known” (177).

The Newbery Medal and Books Set in Africa

Of the eighty-eight medals awarded between 1922 and 2009, none has gone to an author whose story is set in continental Africa. However, three honor books have African settings: Harold Courlander and George Herzog’s *The Cow-Tail Switch and Other West African Stories* (1947/74), Nancy Farmer’s *The Ear, the Eye, and the Arm* (1994), and *A Girl Named Disaster* (1996). The first of the three honor books is a collection of folktales, the second is a science fiction young adult novel, and the third is a realistic fiction novel. Courlander and Herzog’s collection won the honor in 1948, while Farmer’s novels won in 1995 and 1997 respectively. Because of how old the first title on the list is, some may argue that no one uses such texts in the classroom anymore, making any discussion of it irrelevant. I would disagree, because unfortunately, when Africa is the subject, most teachers’ choice of literature is folktales, some of which may be picture book versions of the stories found in Courlander and Herzog’s book. Thus, I believe it is still necessary to have this conversation in order to remind educators of the subtle cultural nuances embedded in the texts that may be problematic. It is important for us to understand that as simple and direct as folktales may seem to readers, they are

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capable of eliciting certain sentiments about cultures alien to readers—sentiments readers might not be aware that they harbor.

I will provide a brief review of each title in this section before discussing possible ways teachers could integrate the books into their classrooms.

Honor Book #1: *The Cow-Tail Switch and Other West African Stories*

First published in 1947, this collection includes stories from five West African countries: Ghana, Liberia, Senegal/Gambia, & Togo.⁴ True to the folktale tradition, Courlander remarks in the introduction that the stories “tell about clever people, and stupid people, about good ones and bad ones, about how things and animals got to be how they are . . . Some of the stories make you think. Some make you laugh” (3). The stories also adhere to some basic folktale conventions,

sometimes with vague settings, clearly stated morals, flat characters, and, of course, virtue overcoming vice. The seventeen stories in this collection include some tales already familiar to many in the west—for example, the Ashanti folktale “Talk” and the Anansi tales. While all are quite entertaining, others can provoke thought and deep reflection, forcing readers to

ponder first the nature of the story—how it is told, the moral, and, finally, the culture of the people that generated such a story. The protagonists in all seventeen tales are males—be they human or otherwise—with a few female characters in supporting roles.

In one particular tale, titled “Ansigé Karamba, the Glutton” (119–127), the female character figures prominently as she exposes her husband for his greed and stupidity. In another tale, “Kassa, the Strange One,” a female character also plays a major part in the plot development. In the notes section of their collection, Courlander and Herzog (1947/74) acknowledge this element of an African woman’s ability to either outwit her husband or rescue him from a tight situa-

tion. They remark that “while the African man feels superior to the woman, yet in many ways he acknowledges her superiority as he does in the story of ‘Kassa, the Strong One,’ and more realistically here, where the foolish glutton is saved from punishment by his clever wife” (139).

The collection begins with an introduction, ends with a glossary of words from different West African languages, and includes a pronunciation guide. Including these sections, the book is 143 pages long; the longest stories, “Kaddo’s Wall” and “Anansi’s Fishing Expedition,” span 11 pages each; the shortest, “Don’t Shake Hands with Everybody,” covers three pages. All seventeen stories are illustrated in black and white and include images that may not seem flattering to the cultures in question; only the jacket cover has illustrations in color, and these are also stereotypical images of half-naked West Africans with spears.

In the title story, “Cow-Tail Switch,” readers explore the predicament of one family when the father dies. While the rest of the family simply accepts this as a fact of life, the youngest, who knows little about his dad, asks them where he is. This prompts a search, which leads to the return of their father. For gaining his life back, the father rewards his youngest son with a cow-tail switch, reinforcing the belief that “a man is not really dead until he is forgotten” (12). If the son had not inquired about his dad’s whereabouts, the family would have completely forgotten about him. A powerful tale on the need to remember our ancestors and loved ones regardless of whether they are dead or not, the story is as entertaining as it is educative.

All the stories carry on in this vein as some characters make wise or unwise decisions and must deal with the consequences, while others manifest ignorance and greed in their understanding of how their world functions. Meena Khorana (1994) notes that, “The contemplative tone of these folktales offers an opportunity for discussion and philosophic enquiry” (73). However, what I find troubling in the 1974 version is the authors’ and/or publisher’s retention of pre-fifties language in two sections. For example, Courlander and Herzog (1974) write in the introduction, “The peoples of Africa are many things too. They speak many different languages, so that those on the Gulf of Guinea don’t understand the speech of those who live in the Nile Valley and the *Kaffirs* of the south

For gaining his life back, the father rewards his youngest son with a cow-tail switch, reinforcing the belief that “a man is not really dead until he is forgotten.”

don't understand the people of the North" (emphasis in italics is mine; 2).⁵

Another point I take issue with are the stereotypical illustrations. Therefore, even though the Newbery criteria stipulate clearly that attention should not be paid to illustrations and that decisions should be based solely on literary quality, I believe that these features are important to readers. Stereotypes, as we all have come to know, can affect our enjoyment of books and/or affect our sense of selves (Rudine Sims, 1982; Vivian Yenika-Agbaw, 2008).

Overall, the collection is enjoyable. With critical thinking activities, teachers can guide readers so they are able to have a transformative experience as they embark on research projects—comparing life in Africa then and now, comparing life on other continents then and now—paying particular attention to countries with parallel circumstances across the globe. In addition, they can focus on particular characters and how these characters resolve problems in pre-colonial settings vis-à-vis how we resolve problems in contemporary society. Understanding how the characters relate and interact with each other in the tales (for example, how the men interact with the women, husbands with wives, and parents with their children) is important above all because it gives readers an insight into the internal dynamics of this fictional world that was not as materially sophisticated as ours today. It reminds us of our own struggles as we deal with spouses and children and function as a family unit. Therefore, engaging children in specific transformative activities will provide them with a deeper understanding of the indigenous African cultures whose experiences are captured. And as Yenika-Agbaw (1997) and Cai (2008) note, balancing transactional and critical approaches to reading literature will further enhance the reading experience. This way, readers are not only enjoying the literary experience, they are able to analyze the events in the tales from a critical stance that may inadvertently shape their understanding of the culture being depicted.

Honor Book #2: *The Ear, the Eye, and the Arm*

It took forty-six years for a Medal Committee to recognize another author whose children's book is set in Africa for its "distinguished contribution to American literature"; this time, it was Nancy Farmer's science fiction novel, *The Ear, the Eye, and the Arm*,

published in 1994. Farmer's young adult novel, even though on the *New York Times* bestseller list at some point, was not good enough to capture the gold medal in 1995. Set in the year 2194, Farmer tells the story of three siblings who are kidnapped and put to work at a mine. Their father, General Amadeus Matsika, the chief of security in this fictional Zimbabwe setting, then hires three detectives with "special abilities" to search for the children

(51). The Eye, who is brown, can see very far with his super vision. By the same token, the Ear, who is white, can hear sound from afar, while the Arm, who is black, cannot only read people's minds but can sense their emotions. Unfortunately, this multicultural team of detectives must deal with the likes of Knife and Fist, the kidnappers, who work for a disgruntled woman called She Elephant—the person in charge of the legendary Dead Man's

Vlei, where all human beings follow her commands. The story is fast-paced as it engages the reader and induces a thoughtful examination of the events, settings, and characters. General Matsika's children, having been sheltered all their lives from the reality of life in Zimbabwe, cannot make sense of the chaos that surrounds them in their new and hostile environment. Thirteen-year-old Tendai, the male protagonist, and his younger siblings, Rita and Kuda, must quickly adapt in order to survive. The adventure is non-stop, with readers participating in the fun, experiencing the danger and fear, and contemplating the skepticism some of the African characters hold about the effects of modernism on their people and culture.

The 1994 edition has 311 pages, including the glossary of unfamiliar words and an appendix. The colorful book jacket tickles readers' curiosity and encourages us to turn the page and read on. Overall, there are forty chapters and an epilogue in the novel. Farmer has a unique style of interspersing poetry and other stories *within* the story, using italics to draw

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readers' attention to subplots. This coming-of-age story raises all kinds of questions about modernization and the people of Zimbabwe, modernization and African communities, and modernization and our global community. Thus, readers are forced to ponder the role that modernization plays in unsettling traditional practices of the past, thereby further widening the gap between classes and alienating the disenfranchised within this fictional society. Mhondoro, the guiding lion spirit, raises Tendai's awareness to the complexity of the situation, reminding him that regardless of the evil things that people may do, like Tendai, they were all Mhondoro's children. Only then can Tendai understand that She Elephant, who now torments them, was once "a fat, unwanted child," rejected by family and society. He is now able to put things into perspective.

With a multicultural team of detectives and myriad questions about the human condition in this novel, we need to probe further to understand how

events in this fictional society mirror what is happening in our own world. In doing so, our students are able to not only make personal connections with the book, as recommended by Rosenblatt (1978) and Probst (2002), but also cultural connections as they examine the universality of the experience depicted as well as experiences of individual characters and groups that populate the book.⁶ However, one needs to be wary about fostering the kind of reading Cai (2008) refers to as "egocentric"—a reading

that he claims simply assures mainstream readers that "people from different cultures are all like them and judge people of other cultures based on the standards of the mainstream culture" (212, as cited by Dressel, 2003). As pointed out earlier, transactional theory also remains limited unless it is balanced with critical reading (Yenika-Agbaw, 1997).

One thing that caught my attention in this novel

is Farmer's distribution of gender roles. The three detectives, though from different racial backgrounds and possessing different special powers, are all males. This raises issues of gender stereotypes in the novel and makes one wonder how the story would have been different with at least one of the characters being female. General Matsika, who wages a war against crime, and Tendai, who does not like violence but never loses his cool under pressure, are both males. Conversely, the females here are either too emotional or vindictive. Eleven-year-old Rita Matsika is emotional throughout, whereas She Elephant, as powerful as she is, uses her talent to perpetuate violence.

The role of the Praise Singer in this community is another issue that needs further investigation as readers pose questions about the cultural experience being depicted here. What does it mean that the great general who is highly revered in this community has a Praise Singer who is a man from "the English tribe" (19). This insinuates a certain kind of colonial relationship that exists between this former European colony and the west; it is the type that Martin Japtok (2003) believes is based on power struggles, with the Praise Singer and the General consciously or unconsciously switching roles as the person in charge of the other. However, unless students are encouraged to examine this relationship critically, they may simply gloss over it, thinking there is nothing significant about a leader having a Praise Singer. Is it necessary to have a Praise Singer in one's life? If so, what does this mean and why?

These are a few basic questions readers could explore. We need to develop activities that help students probe more deeply into this kind of relationship and this kind of context, thus enabling them to further understand the role that the west plays in our global community. The activity could also help them to understand how the west inadvertently influences the behavior of African leaders, especially those from countries whose colonial histories intersect with specific countries in the west.

Honor Book #3: *A Girl Named Disaster*

Nancy Farmer's second novel set in Africa, *A Girl Named Disaster* (1996), was also recognized for its "distinguished contribution" to American literature in 1997 as a runner-up. Told from a third-person point of view, the gripping coming-of-age story hooks the

Thus, readers are forced to ponder the role that modernization plays in unsettling traditional practices of the past, thereby further widening the gap between classes and alienating the disenfranchised within this fictional society.

reader from the beginning and sustains interest until the end. The protagonist, an eleven-year-old Shona girl, is fiercely independent, regardless of the circumstance. Having lost her mother early and been abandoned by her father, Nhamo must put up with an envious aunt and an impossible workload to keep the family comfortable and going. Even then, Aunt Chipipo is not content with her being around and will stop at nothing to see that Nhamo is married off to an undesirable suitor with three wives already; however, Nhamo will not be married off that easily. Instead, she runs away from the village in Mozambique that has been her home all her life and sails to Zimbabwe, a foreign country, to search for her father. It is not an easy journey, for it takes not only physical and emotional strength to survive, but also a lot of ingenuity on Nhamo's part.

By the end of the journey, she has not only grown physically into a young woman, she has also matured psychologically and is ready to navigate the modern society she encounters in Zimbabwe. Michelle H. Martin (1999) describes her as a "Cinderella Character" because "Nhamo does the majority of the housework, wood-gathering, and water-fetching for the family under the watchful eyes of her antagonistic Aunt Chipipo, while her kind, beautiful cousin, Masvita, Chipipo's daughter, performs the lighter chores" (399). Nhamo is aware of her marginalized position in their family compound, but cannot understand why until her dying grandmother tells her the entire story and advises her to leave.

The novel spans 309 pages, including the glossary; notes on Zimbabwe, Mozambique, and Shona culture; and a bibliography of works consulted. While reading this novel, I was enthralled with Nhamo's character throughout the journey. First, I watched how she negotiated space among family members in the village, quietly interrogating aspects of the Shona culture that puzzled her. I was also mesmerized by how she survived in the wilderness, observing how she learned to co-exist with the wild animals—her new neighbors—who understood the rules of the jungle better than she. In addition, I marveled at her tenacity when dealing with the new relatives in Zimbabwe who accept her with ambivalence. Although the transition from life in the village to life in a modern, foreign town is bumpy, Nhamo, in her typical steadfast manner, gradually adjusts to it.

In typical Farmer style, this captivating story—also a semifinalist for the National Book Award—raises questions about family life, modernization, and African village customs. Acutely aware of the fact that most authors who set their stories in Africa tend to focus mostly on the jungle, I was pleasantly surprised with the way Farmer balanced her narrative to capture the complexity of the African reality. The novel clearly demonstrates that there are competing forces within different regions in Africa that contribute to the overall well-being of the inhabitants of the continent. Thus, while modernization has its strong points, it becomes necessary to ponder why the village customs that have sustained African communities for centuries should be discarded. Like in *The Ear, the Eye, and the Arm* (1994), Farmer insinuates that Africa is a complex place, and Zimbabwe and Mozambique are small representations of this complexity. Her writing style is engaging as she intersperses victory verses and other stories to drive home the need to remember and to connect with one's past. Teachers can explore all these aspects further in the classroom, guiding students not only to enjoy the novel as a literary piece, but also to be able to make connections with it as a cultural artifact that offers them a sneak peek at a segment of Shona culture and the people from that part of Africa. We hope to teach them the ability to question certain practices within the cultural space and to examine how the author decided to share this experience.

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Reflecting on Possibilities

Inasmuch as it is promising that I could find three Newbery honor books about Africa, it would have been exhilarating to find even more, especially some that had actually won the Medal. All three books are written by white authors who have lived or traveled extensively in the African countries whose stories they write about, although we may not know what motivated them to focus on Africa or to tell these particular stories. As we educators share these books

with students and/or recommend them to parents, it is important to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of each text in the context of their literary and cultural merits. Regarding cultural merit, we need to ask and encourage others to ask specific questions that will enable us to further understand the dynamics at play in the different books. For example, how accurately do Courlander and Herzog's folktales reflect the cultures of the villages to which the authors have ascribed each tale? How accurately has Farmer depicted the Shona village customs and the relationships between Southern Africans and the west? By paying attention to specific cultural markers in the texts—such as the tools farmers use, the male/female relationships, the leadership styles of the heads of clans or nations in these stories, and the response of the people to this leadership—we will be helping readers to become socially responsible global citizens. Thus, as they interrogate these images and seek answers to specific questions, perhaps they may be able to revise their preconceptions of the African countries in question and even their attitudes toward the people from that region.

The goal then is to help these “world citizens” develop the necessary skills and strategies to interrogate events in these books like they would in all literary texts—in a systematic manner, negotiating personal meanings and making connections with specific cultural experiences depicted in the texts. Cultural authenticity of literary texts remains a concern among educators (Fox and Short, 2003), especially in regards to books that have won awards, primarily because this becomes a sort of testament to their merit and inadvertently an endorsement from the organization that offers these awards.

Before sharing the following sample activities that may work well with the Newbery honor books discussed in this paper, review Table 1, which highlights some of the key characteristics of each book.

Ideas for Classroom Activities

I begin this section by suggesting a few reading comprehension activities to enable students to understand some basic information about Africa in general and specific countries (or cities, towns, and villages) in Africa. I will also offer some sample critical reading activities that can help students to interrogate the images of Africa prevalent in the books and issues raised by the authors about the human condition. The activities target students in the middle grades and up, with necessary adjustments as teachers see fit. I do not necessarily condone censorship of books, so it is important that we develop relevant critical thinking activities that enable students to transcend obvious stereotypes. By challenging stereotypes, such as those that dominate Courlander and Herzog's collection of folktales, students seek to understand who Africans are, how complex their cultures are, and what they have contributed to our global civilization. The activities presented here are based both on research and on what I have used with preservice teachers in my children's and young adult literature courses at the college level.

Efferent Reading

Rosenblatt (1978) describes efferent reading as a reading stance that privileges information over pleasure. This stance represents a functional purpose for reading as readers read with a keen eye to specific information about the subject they wish to explore. Within

Table 1. Significant characteristics of three Newbery honor books

Book	Genre	Award	Protagonist	Setting	Grade
Cow-tail	Folktale	Honor/1948	Males	5 West African Countries	4 and up
Ear	Science Fiction	Honor/1995	Male	Zimbabwe	7 and up
Disaster	Realistic Fiction	Honor/1997	Female	Mozambique/ Zimbabwe	6 and up

classrooms, however, for this strategy to be effective, teachers may need to develop activities that require active participation from the students. I have attempted to provide four examples of possible activities.

Activity #1: Gaining Entry & Generating Interest

To introduce a unit on literature about Africa to students in grades 6 and up, have students complete the first two columns of a KWLR chart (see Table 2) and later watch a short [15–25 minutes] documentary of pre-colonial Africa. These two pre-reading activities may help to prepare them for the rest of the unit. Collect these half-completed charts and save in a folder for future reference.

Table 2. A KWLR chart about Africa

	K	W	L	R
What I know about Africa				
What I want to learn about Africa				
What I learned about Africa				
What I think of Africa <i>now</i> [my reflections]				

* Adapted from Kelly Callagher’s: *Deep Reading* (2004)

Activity #2: Map Quest

Have the entire class read at least two of the books, making sure all three books are read within the class. Now break students into groups of four (e.g., 24 students = 6 groups). Have two groups focus on one honor book. Every member of the group must read the group’s selection. Have students keep individual logs identifying important information from the literary texts (e.g., names of countries, towns/villages, and/or ethnic groups) mentioned in the particular story (see Table 3 for template). Do these villages and/or towns/cities exist today? Do they go by their original names? For example, if the countries or cities no longer use the names that appear in a story, what might account for this change? Follow up this activity with a library or Internet research on key questions about Africa revealed by the authors in their books. As students conduct research, they should also confirm and/or revise previously recorded information about Africa retrieved from the group’s text. Have them do a MapQuest to find the location of key settings.

Table 3. Learning Log about Africa [Honor Books 1, 2, 3]

Settings of Story	Region in Africa	Economic Activities	My Reactions
Ghana	West	Hunting	People have expectations. Some work really hard.
		Fishing	
		Trading	
Mende	West		

Activity #3: Map Drawing

Have each group draw a map of Africa with complete information about the countries that appear in the text, and other information they retrieved about the countries from research. Then have them draw a map of the dominant setting in the story. For example, in Courlander’s collection, it would be Ghana; in Farmer’s first honor book, it would be Zimbabwe. In her second honor book, it should be Mozambique. On this map, have them place the villages and towns mentioned.

Activity #4: Paired-Book Comparison Chart

Have each group select one of the following pairs and reflect on their similarities and differences (themes, style, characters, and settings). Which of the two books do they prefer and why?

- a. Folktale Comparison
 - Cow-Tail Switch and Other West African Stories* and Julius Lester’s (1987) *The Tales of Uncle Remus: The Adventures of Brer Rabbit*
 - Cow-Tail Switch and Other West African Stories* and William J. Faulkner’s (1977) *The Days When the Animals Talked: Black Folk Tales and How They Came to Be*
- b. Science Fiction Comparison
 - The Ear, the Eye, and the Arm* and *The Giver*
 - The Ear, the Eye, and the Arm* and *A Wrinkle in Time*
- c. Realistic Fiction Comparison
 - A Girl Named Disaster* and *Island of the Blue Dolphins*
 - A Girl Named Disaster* and *Hatchet*

Aesthetic and Critical Reading

Rosenblatt (1978) defines the aesthetic reading stance as one whereby the reader attends to the beauty of the text and other personal meanings. Readers using this stance set their own purpose for reading and negotiate

meanings that will serve their purposes. While this kind of reading helps students to claim ownership of the story text, critical reading enables students to pay attention not only to ways that authors use language to manipulate readers, but also to the different ideology embedded in texts (Yenika-Agbaw, 1997, 1998). Both reading stances serve different purposes in that they enable students to enjoy the reading experience as they also think critically about the issues explored in the texts and the way they are presented

by the author. I have provided three possible activities that teachers may use to initiate some kind of dialogue with the honor books discussed here.

Activity #1: Revising Stories

Have pairs of students within groups rewrite the folktale “Younde Goes to Town” in a comic strip, setting the story in their state of choice in the United States. Or they could opt to rewrite the ending of one

of Farmer’s novels. In addition, after each pair shares their story, they should explain what they did to make it new, and why they made those specific changes. For more information on comic strips, teachers can check out the following website: www.teachingcomics.org.

Activity #2: Cultural Connections

Have students individually identify one item or experience with which they are familiar in the story, one they find unusual, and one they find interesting (see an example in Table 4). Encourage them to also explain what about the experience makes it familiar, interesting, or unusual. In pairs, they should compare items on their lists as well as their reasons. Then as a class, students should be encouraged to share their notes from their discussion as the teacher prompts them to further reflect on their responses.

Activity 3: Personal Connections and Reflections

Return KWLR charts and have students complete the remaining columns: What I learned about Africa; what I think of Africa *now*. Collect these and consider using as extra credit. Exit the unit by showing a short documentary on Africa in the Twenty-first Century while focusing on one of the three countries that served as a setting in the honor books: Ghana, Zimbabwe, and Mozambique.

These are some effective strategies and activities that teachers can use to engage children with award-winning books or quality literature about Africa in the classroom. The three reading stances: Efferent, Aesthetic, and Critical are broad enough to address a variety of reading purposes, and yet specific enough to target a variety of strategies that enable children to enjoy literature about Africa, learn more about Africa, and reflect about the representations of Africa prevalent in books.

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Table 4. Cultural Connections: Characterization, Setting, Issues, Life Style

Title: *Cow-Tail Switch and Other West African Stories*

What is familiar?	Interesting	Unusual	Reasons
a.			
b.			
c.			
d.			

Endnotes

- ¹ In another site, it is stated that “The Newbery Medal is awarded annually by the American Library Association for the most distinguished American children’s book published the previous year.”
- ² John Gillespie and Corinne Naden (2006) remark in the preface of their book that “parents often purchase copies or borrow copies from libraries for their children; teachers frequently make assignments involving these titles; and librarians scramble for copies as soon as the award winners are announced in January of each year.”
- ³ I have served on the selection committee for the Children’s Book Africana Award (housed by African Studies Association) since 2003; I am currently serving on selection committees for the Notable Book for a Global Society (housed by the International Reading Association) and the Phoenix award (housed by Children’s Literature Association). My term on both committees will be over in 2010.
- ⁴ In the notes at the end of the collection, the authors repeatedly refer to Senegal and Gambia in connection. I have maintained this two-country combination in my paper as Senegal/Gambia, even though they are clearly two separate countries in West Africa.
- ⁵ The word “Kaffir,” although used in its historical context in this collection to describe Blacks in South Africa, can have a derogatory connotation. According to Wikipedia, it was a general term used in the past; however, “[d]uring the twentieth century the word gradually took on negative connotations.”
- ⁶ See Rosenblatt’s transactional theory and her statement on aesthetic and efferent readings of texts.

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Frankenstein's Children:

Ethics, Experimentation, and Free Will in Futuristic Young Adult Fiction

Literature often engages societal preoccupations with issues of free will related to social, scientific, and medical experimentation. In *Brave New World*, Aldous Huxley describes a dystopia that results from the stripping of free will by social engineering. In *The Bell Jar*, Sylvia Plath explores the pitfalls of psychiatric practices, including shock therapy and confinement. Finally, in *A Clockwork Orange*, Anthony Burgess reveals the social implications of experimentally altering individual free will.

Contemporary fiction surveys these same preoccupations. As technology allows for a vast number of scientific advances, the literature of our world continues to ponder the dangers inherent in our ever-increasing ability to play god. Coming-of-age novels occupy a crucial space in the body of work that addresses the ethical dilemmas accompanying medical or scientific experimentation. By investigating these social issues, novels that trace the maturation of young adult protagonists pose significant questions regarding the formation of identity, not the least of which is *In what ways do medical and/or scientific interference enable or disable the autonomy of young adult protagonists striving toward selfhood?* M. T. Anderson's *Feed* (Candlewick, 2002) and Peter Dickinson's *Eva* (Dell, 1988) engage these questions and offer compelling arguments regarding the process by which

young adults develop into adults in environments shaped by aggressive social experimentation.

M. T. Anderson's *Feed*

Titus, the protagonist of *Feed*, is part of a generation into which science has introduced revolutionary technology that affects individual health and autonomy as well as the health and autonomy of the group. This technology comes in the form of a "feed," a constant stream of corporation-controlled information that is transmitted into people's brains by way of an implanted chip. Because this feed literally invades the human body, it becomes part of the fabric of personality. However, rather than enhancing personality, the feed demolishes free thinking, turning individuals into rampant consumers and trend-crazed drones for whom the idea of autonomy is virtually nonexistent. As the main character, Titus, who comes of age in

a world cluttered with noise, is faced with the choice of resisting the feed; his decision determines whether he will achieve autonomy and a healthy state of adulthood or languish in a world defined by empty uniformity.

In Titus's world, teenagers exhibit the same desires to be fashionable and to conform that are common during adolescence. They succumb to peer pressure, rebel against authority, and speak in slang. However, their world differs

As technology allows for a vast number of scientific advances, the literature of our world continues to ponder the dangers inherent in our ever-increasing ability to play god.

in significant ways from, say, the world of 2008. For example, teenagers act jaded, but they are jaded about trips to the moon, not the mall or the coffee shop: “[T]he moon was just like it always is, after your first few times there” (4). At the same time, their slang reveals an important shift in the way human beings perceive themselves. The word “man” has been replaced by “unit” (6), a replacement that implies the emphasis on commodities in their lives. As creature commodities, they are only as good as their ability to remain current. For example, when Titus comments that his female friends go to the bathroom “because hairstyles had changed” (20), he is not being facetious. Finally, although Titus and his friends rebel against authority by drinking underage or going “mal,” which is equivalent to doing drugs, they fail to criticize the true authority in their lives—the corporations who send the “feed” into their brains and have hijacked their ability to think or act independently. The fact that corporations control their every desire is not lost on Titus, who claims, “[I]t’s not good getting pissy about it, because they’re still going to control everything whether you like it or not” (49); however, the perks of being able to have a feed that “knows everything you want and hope for, sometimes before you even know what those things are” (48) keep Titus from rebelling against authority in any notable way.

What Titus and friends miss is that the changes to their bodies—the implantation of the feed chips—disables them both intellectually and physically. Intellectually, they are void of independent thought and, as evidenced by Titus, resist being alone: “You need the noise of your friends, in space. I feel sorry for people who have to travel by themselves [. . . .] When you’re going places with other people, with this big group, everyone is leaning toward each other, and people are laughing and they’re chatting, and things are great, and it’s just like in a commercial” (4). Titus also fears “that silence when you’re driving home alone in the upcar and there’s nothing but the feed” (5). Titus’s longings for companionship and the comfort he finds in groups may be common expressions of the teenage experience. However, while the technology available in his world increases his ability to maintain constant contact with others, even communicate telepathically, this same technology has disabled his ability to be alone or think independently. Therefore, while the feed ostensibly has improved Titus’s life

by providing constant access to an incessant flow of information, it has disabled him in significant ways.

Yet, Titus and his friends do not question the dangers of this type of technology. Although, technically, they have free will, the feed has disrupted their ability to exercise it or even to desire it. Titus’s generation is not built to question the feed because it is, for them, one more functioning organ, an integral part of their body systems:

I don’t know when they first had feeds. Like maybe, fifty or a hundred years ago. Before that, they had to use their hands and their eyes. Computers were all outside the body. They carried them around outside of them, in their hands, like if you carried your lungs in a briefcase and opened it to breathe. (47)

Because the feed has become an integral part of their bodies and their personalities, even after Titus and his friends temporarily lose access to the feed—after being attacked by a hacker in a club—they fail to recognize that its absence might improve their lives. For example, Titus admits that the day after he loses the feed is

“one of the greatest days of my life” (57), but he lacks the analytical skills to understand *why* the day is extraordinary. He describes how he and his friends invent creative ways of entertaining themselves, but he fails to recognize that they had to think on their own to devise the activity. He comments that his friend Loga tells the best story she’s ever told, but he fails to realize he derives pleasure from watching her physically act out the story rather than

passively receiving her chat over the feed. He also provides a long, detailed description of the way his girlfriend Violet walks down the hallway, as well as the description of a garden that he says looks like “a squid in love with the sky” (62), but fails to understand that the emotional boost he feels is caused by his new awareness of the physical world, the world outside of his head. Even when Violet compliments him for being the only one of his friends who “uses

As creature commodities, they are only as good as their ability to remain current. For example, when Titus comments that his female friends go to the bathroom “because hairstyles had changed,” he is not being facetious.

metaphor” (63), Titus does not process that his creativity is enhanced by the absence of a functioning brain chip.

Titus’s coming of age is catalyzed by his relationship with Violet, who comes from a different background than Titus and his friends, having had her chip implanted late in life—at the age of seven—because her parents were both poor and unconventional.

However, Violet has remained an outsider to the rich and wealthy teenagers like Titus because she has been raised to be free-thinking and resistant to conformity.

Violet’s parents had resisted the feed until it seemed inevitable that Violet would be left behind in the world if she did not have its advantages. However, Violet has remained an outsider to the rich and wealthy teenagers like Titus because she has been raised to be free-thinking and resistant to conformity. She questions the authority of the feed to the extent that Titus’s friends

complain, “She’s always looking for like evidence of the decline of civilization” (184). When Titus’s friend Quendy gets trendy, “sexy,” lesions cut into her body so that muscles and ligaments are visible, Violet is the only one who expresses outrage: “Look at us! You don’t have the feed! You are the feed! You’re feed! You’re being eaten! You’re raised for food! Look at what you’ve made yourselves [. . .] She’s a monster! A monster! Covered with cuts!” (202). Her behavior prompts Titus to think, “The fucking party is over” (203), which signifies his transition into a new stage of maturity: awareness that he must make a choice between the lifestyle offered by Violet and the lifestyle he has always known.

When Violet’s chip starts to deteriorate and she slowly begins to die because the corporations who control the feed refuse to come to her aid, Titus gains an education about how detrimental the feed can be to the human body because it is connected to the whole limbic system. After losing control of certain body parts, Violet has been told she is “susceptible to malfunction” (170). When Titus asks her what that means, she responds, “Nobody knows. The feed is tied to everything. Your body control, your emotions, your memory. Everything. Sometimes feed errors are

fatal” (170). Revealing his naïveté about the feed, Titus asks, “They can’t just turn it off?” (171). Violet clarifies for him that the feed, once implanted, becomes part of the body, “part of the brain” (171). Titus’s ignorance of how the feed operates underscores his enduring refusal to think for himself or to question his world. While Violet insists that he is “not like the others” and that he is “someone people could learn from” (276), he has done little more than turn an odd poetic phrase or two to prove his ability to think creatively. Other than dating someone like Violet, he had done nothing to pursue autonomy.

In fact, as Violet nears the point when she loses total control of her body, Titus deserts her, a move that suggests he is incapable of handling the emotional impact associated with suffering, a condition from which he has been sheltered all of his life. When Violet reaches out to him to help her experience the world before she is no longer able, he finally breaks up with her, arguing, “I didn’t sign up to go out with you forever when you’re dead. [We’ve only been dating] a couple of months. Okay? A couple of months” (272). His callous behavior reflects his unwillingness to give up the status quo and join in her dream of finding a life “without the feed” (262).

Ultimately, though, Titus experiences an epiphany and, at the end of the novel, begins to resist the feed and push toward autonomy. This climactic scene occurs when Titus visits Violet in her comatose “death” state and is confronted by her father, who tells him bitterly, “Go along, little child. Go back and hang with the eloi” (291). Not understanding the allusion to members of the elite yet ignorant upper class in *The Time Machine* by H. G. Wells, Titus prompts the father to explain the insult and is told to read the book for himself:

“Read it.”
“I’m sick of being told I’m stupid.”
“So read it, and you’ll know.”
“Tell me.”
“Read it.”
“Tell me.”
“You can look it up.”
“You can tell me.”
“Will you ever open your eyes?”

Titus’s response is to race home and tear his clothes off until he is “completely naked” (293) and then furiously order merchandise from the feed until he has

“no credit” (294). Although he does not admit it to the reader, it becomes apparent that Titus has registered Violet’s father’s message. As he strips himself down physically and financially, he prepares to enter a new stage in life.

Titus’s final coming of age is signified by his taking ownership of his own body and mind and exercising free will. When he returns to Violet’s house two days later, he is reborn. He not only has begun to educate himself about the “strange facts” Violet would have liked, but also he is actively trying “not to listen to the noise on the feed” (296). Most important, he has initiated a plan to become a storyteller, engaging his talent for using metaphors and saying “things no one expects you to” (276)—the talent that only Violet saw in him. As he pledges to Violet to keep her story alive, he begins to cry for the first time in his life, signifying a move toward humanity and, ironically, adulthood. Finally, the focus of the story he begins to tell her clarifies his commitment to independence: “It’s about this meg normal guy, who doesn’t think about anything until one wacky day, when he meets a dissident with a heart of gold [. . .] They learn to resist the feed” (297–298). Ultimately, Titus not only reveals self-awareness that signifies a transition into adulthood, but he also demonstrates selflessness and love that transcend the physical. Thus, he has learned to use his mind and spirit to master his body, which is in many ways as hampered by the feed as Violet’s.

Peter Dickinson’s *Eva*

While Titus is part of a generation that has been victim to invasive technology, the title character in Peter Dickinson’s novel *Eva* is the subject in a unique and individualized medical experiment, one that saves her life but forces her to renegotiate her identity. After Eva is in a near-fatal car accident, her brain is placed into the body of a chimpanzee as part of an experimental procedure, and she awakes to a radically different existence. While Eva is less shocked than another 13-year-old might have been, since her father is a scientist and she is familiar with the work he has done with chimpanzees, Eva struggles to adapt to both the workings of her new body and to the expectations of the corporation that has preserved her life by sponsoring the experiment, an expensive procedure that her willing parents couldn’t afford.

While Eva spends the opening pages of the novel adjusting to her new body and realizing that she will have to integrate the chimpanzee urges (for the chimpanzee body remembers its former chimpanzee life) with her human thought processes to forge a new identity, the most controversial issue with which she deals is the issue of ownership. In other words, several groups threaten to claim ownership of Eva in her new form, and she resists them all. World Fruit, the main advertiser of SMI, the “shaper people” who are essentially a future version of television media, has sponsored Eva’s operation and has the option of using Eva “in some of the Honeybear commercials” (41) as recompense. As a research wonder, Eva is a hot commodity, and World Fruit has taken out an exclusive contract on her.

However, “the Pool” to whom Kelly the chimpanzee belonged, threatens to claim ownership of Eva’s physical body. Jane Callaway, a legal representative for SMI explains the risk:

I believe that when animals from the Chimpanzee Pool are sold for research they are sold outright, and the organization doing the research buys them. But in Eva’s case, because the experiment was carried out by the Pool itself, in cooperation with the Pradesh Institute, no such arrangement was made—in fact, no arrangement was made at all [. . .] There might therefore be an argument that Eva’s body, at least, still belongs to the Pool. (69)

While on one hand, Jane Callaway argues that Eva has become “an extremely valuable piece of property” (69–70), on the other hand she suggests that her company accept “that Eva is fully human, with all that implies” (70); she is ready to defend Eva if a legal battle ensues. Because Callaway seems to be offering a certain level of protection, the family signs a contract with SMI, but Eva—who is rebelling already against everyone involved, including her scientist father—tells herself, “I’m going to see that I own me” (72). Thus, her struggle to exercise free will begins.

As in *Feed*, *Eva* highlights the struggle to achieve autonomy and exercise free will in a society character-

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ized by rampant media coverage and consumerism, as well as irresponsible medical experimentation. Published in 1988, Eva anticipates a future media that is chillingly like the media that exists today, twenty years later. In Eva's world, Public Response Indicators constantly monitor audience reaction to

programming, people view things that happen in the "shaper zone" as "more important, more exciting than anything that happened in their own lives" (74), and the paparazzi aggressively swarm the famous, even when fame comes accidentally, as it does to Eva. SMI, the company that runs the media, intimidates even the police from interfering to provide citizen safety because "the shaper people always got their own back by putting on programs that made the [police] department look like crooks or idiots" (64). Thus, it is this corporation that in many ways threatens Eva's autonomy.

Eva's loss of choice is reflected also in the loss of control she experiences over her body. She cannot exercise human free will because the body she inhabits is still driven at times by animal instincts that she cannot control. Frustrated with her father, who fails to acknowledge the depth of her struggles to satisfy both her human and chimpanzee needs, she flies into a primal fury: "Her whole body was electric with the impulse to rush around the apartment, breaking and destroying. She had watched the eruption almost as if from the outside, powerless to stop it, only able to direct it a little" (85–86). Thus, Eva's attempts to achieve autonomy are complicated by her situation: freedom to Eva's human brain means one thing, freedom to her chimpanzee body means another.

As Eva progresses, she learns that the chimpanzee side of her personality is stronger than scientists predicted. In fact, after spending time with other chimps at the Reserve, where she is free to roam alongside them in a natural setting, Eva's connection to other chimpanzees grows stronger. Combined with her ever-increasing realization that the scientists who made her are continuing to create new cross-breeds with no regard for the suffering caused to both human beings and chimpanzees, this affinity for chimpanzees drives Eva to take a daring leap toward autonomy, which requires a surprising and irreversible step away from

In the human world, Eva's rights are infringed upon as both science and the media limit her freedoms.

her human life. The first step of this leap toward freedom is the rejection of the human world.

In the human world, Eva's rights are infringed upon as both science and the media limit her freedoms. Even two years and five months after Eva wakes up in her new body, Jane Callaway is quick

to point out that "the legal question of whom [Eva] belonged to was still unresolved" (148); therefore, Eva's rebellious attempts to use the media to expose the unethical exploitation of chimpanzees backfires on her. After speaking out against this exploitation on a shaper program, she is told that she will have to "restrict her appearances" and that she must only answer questions that have been pre-approved (148). Reminding Eva that she does not have free will to spread her incendiary ideas, Callaway warns, "SMI owns complete rights to all reproductions of any performance by Eva, and this includes the unfortunate episode last night. They will refuse permission for all future showings of it, and any such showings will be illegal. Any support by you for such a showing, public or private, will be treated as a breach of the contract" (148–149). Therefore, despite the public's support of her tirade, Eva is unable to publicly speak out further. Even in class when her teacher wants to hold a discussion of animal rights, Eva "told him she wasn't allowed to" (149). Thus, the human Eva who seeks freedom of expression is stifled into silence.

Faced with these unbearable restrictions, Eva decides that her best chance for autonomy is to join the chimpanzee world completely; her body craves it and her mind reasons that it is the only option for real freedom and growth. Once she and the other chimpanzees are placed into an experimental jungle on Madagascar, Eva leads an escape into the wild in hopes of truly freeing herself and the others. During this time, she makes the conscious decision to pursue as a chimpanzee the autonomy that has eluded her as a human. First, she starts to identify as a chimpanzee, noting that "humans" have arrived on the island to reclaim the escaped chimpanzees; Eva even infects the other chimps with a "wariness of humans" (191). Also, she begins to eat like a wild chimp, learning "to gnaw the meat raw off the thin bones [of a marmot] without thinking "about it with her human mind"

(191). Most important, she has made the commitment to mate with her chimp companion Sniff: “Eva had already decided that when [estrus] happened, she was going to let Sniff mate with her, if he wanted, which presumably he would. Why not? You couldn’t choose some of this life and not all of it” (192). Eva’s decision to sever all ties with the human world is a bold step toward a new identity; however, her decision also seems inevitable, a choice that was determined for her in many ways when she was placed into a non-human body.

Eva’s dilemma begs the question: *To what extent is identity tied to the body?* From the moment Eva wakes up in a chimpanzee’s body, she is no longer viewed as human, which allows for companies like SMI and scientists like Maria to exercise dominance over her. These attempts at domination and ownership speak to the role of the body in determining identity: If Eva had had a chimpanzee brain put into her human body, she would certainly still have been viewed as human, and there would be no question about who had “ownership” of her. Also, Eva’s struggles between her chimpanzee urges and her human reasoning suggest that the brain alone does not control self-actualization. In other words, Eva’s body drives her behavior as much as her human brain does—so much so that the disability of being placed into an animal’s body eventually, and perhaps ironically, enables her successful development of an adult identity.

Eva’s arrival at adulthood is, ironically, much like that in the original bildungsroman model as conceived by Goethe; she successfully integrates into a society, ready to adopt the principals of the status quo. However, Eva’s coming of age differs radically because the society into which she integrates is not a human society, not the society into which she was born. Only years into her adulthood as a chimpanzee, just before her death, do readers understand the level of integration she has achieved and the fulfilling life she has lived as a chimp. Eva has come to understand chimps in a way that “has nothing to do with any human” (205); she even understands that the human part of her must be passive, as she wills “the human Eva [to be] no more than a guest” (205). As

Eva’s dilemma begs the question: *To what extent is identity tied to the body?*

a result of Eva’s ability to turn her disability into an opportunity, Eva creates a fulfilling life for herself by breeding with males, bearing intelligent children, and teaching the other chimps skills that will help them survive after her death. In this way, Eva becomes not only a member of chimp society, but also a leader, which confirms her maturation into an adult.

Moreover, Eva’s successes are highlighted by the contrasting failure of human civilization, which seems to be facing extinction: “It’s the same all over. You can’t get a bridge built or a solar replaced. You can’t get a road repaired. People won’t pay their taxes. They won’t invest or save. Some districts there’s trouble getting the farms planted—just enough to feed the planters another year, that’s all. A few kilometers north of where I live there was a community meeting last year where they passed a resolution to stop eating” (214). In the human world, life has become so bleak that populations of people are committing mass suicide by starving themselves to death or drowning themselves in groups. Thus, as humans decline, chimps become the hope for Earth’s future, and Eva becomes the hope for chimps. This process could never have occurred if Eva had not insisted upon finding a way to exercise free will. Ultimately, and accidentally, the medical interference that allowed Eva to live, albeit in a non-human body, allows for potential survival of the chimps, who are viewed by some as “the Inheritors” and “the human future” (215).

The Transformation of Self

In both *Feed* and *Eva*, the journey toward adulthood and autonomy becomes complicated by scientific experimentation with human lives. But is this type of interference any different than the environmental interferences found in any young adult novel? One could argue that the disabilities presented in these two novels are similar to those in many contemporary novels in which a young adult protagonist faces a

central crisis that catalyzes him or her into a reshaping of the self. In this respect, anything that disables the protagonist from staying the same—a rape, a car accident, the death of a family member—is a mechanism of change and necessary to the main character’s trans-

formation. However, while the trials faced by protagonists often lead them to desire a return to normalcy, the trials faced by Eva and Titus lead them to insist upon change, to escape from what was once normal.

The same process that has brought Eva and Titus to adulthood has also brought them to rebel against societies that have allowed technology to advance without ethical concern for individual rights. Their rebellions lead them into dire situations that threaten to destroy both their bodies and their minds permanently, preventing any type of coming of age. Thus, when M. T. Anderson and Peter Dickinson imagine extraordinary futures for their protagonists, they also

anticipate extraordinary threats to personal identity and free will. Ultimately, these threats to mind and body not only spark personal growth, but also inspire these young adults to change their worlds.

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I Love Your Book, but I Love My Version More: Fanfiction in the English Language Arts Classroom

At midnight on August 2, 2008, the final installment of Stephenie Meyer's Twilight Series, *Breaking Dawn*, hit bookstore shelves across the globe. But, regardless of whether Bella would chose Jacob Black or Edward Cullen as her final paramour, or whether she would become a vampire or remain mortal in Meyer's grand finale, millions of children and teens had already finished the novel. For months they had been formulating extensions of Bella's story—alternative narratives, new twists, and their own endings. Many of them, after finishing the final book . . . again . . . pressed their computers' power buttons, connected to the Internet, navigated to their favorite websites, and began typing their own versions of what might have happened or what they hoped would happen to bring the series to its conclusion. They returned to what has become a favorite literary destination for so many young people: fan fiction, or fanfic.

Fan fiction is just what the name implies: it is fiction written by fans, often teenagers, of novels, movies, television, or other media. This fiction is based in the worlds created by the authors, but young fans extend, elaborate, or appropriate the text for their own purposes. Fanfics come in many different recognized genres, and some innovative, even multimodal forms, as well. The world of fan fiction is inhabited by a community of authors and readers, where critics argue that the point of intersection between reader and text is the only true place where the work "exists" (Keeseey 128). English language arts teachers can tap into this community and intersection to engage learners on their own virtual turf. Although fan fiction can

be written about a vast array of popular and classic novels, the fiction arising from the wildly popular Twilight series by Stephenie Meyer works especially well for introducing how this genre can be used in the classroom. Beware, "spoilers" for the Twilight series are necessary to best illuminate this sensation.

The Language of Literature

A glance at the popular Internet site fanfiction.net hints at the popularity of the fan fiction phenomenon. For the Twilight series alone, there are 68,824 fan fiction titles listed, second only to the Harry Potter series, which has a staggering 362,364 fanfics on this one site alone! There are fics associated with diverse books ranging from *Wuthering Heights*, to *Romeo and Juliet*, to *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, to *The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants*. Despite the diversity and sheer volume of fics, there is surprising conformity to the standard conventions of writing and use of the literary terminology.

Authors of fan fiction, many of whom are young adult readers, take their work seriously and have adopted the language of literature to discuss and describe their own fiction. Authors categorize their work by "genre," separate it by "chapters" and "sequels," and ask for "reviews." Fan written stories that are considered out of alignment in style, characterization, or plot development compared to the inspirational text are described as failing to be "canon." While these authors use previously extant recognized language with newly understood meanings, they also create new terms, such as "song fic" to describe a piece that is

organized around song lyrics. Internet slang words are a part of the conversation as well, such as “flaming,” a verb that describes an angry remark or review of a piece of writing. Participants join online communities or create their own, and most fanfics and fanfic sites begin with a disclaimer that the author does not own the characters or the situations, and that contributors are only “borrowing” them. Some young writers have actually crafted rules for writing a fanfic, such as “The Twilight Fanfiction Etiquette” (http://www.fanfiction.net/s/3626338/1/Twilight_Fanfiction_Etiquette). These teens and young adult writers are developing online communities and emerging in various roles devoid of the adult gaze, and they are policing themselves. Not only do they seamlessly structure their own roles, but they also appropriate real world signifiers.

Finding a way to get students to enjoy reading and to respond to literature spontaneously and personally is the holy grail of the language arts educator. Fan fiction provides evidence that young people can not only read and respond to literature, and do

Through fanfics, today’s youth are not only more effectively engaging with texts they enjoy, but they are also repetitively recognizing and using archetypes and motifs that have been utilized in canonical literature for centuries.

so voluntarily, but can also craft their responses in sophisticated, polished writing. These young adult writers create a subjective, fluid interpretation of the readings and subsequently write at the highest cognitive levels of Bloom’s Taxonomy. Their writing exhibits complex interactions with text and the ability to judge, predict, and apply their understandings. In addition to exhibiting in-depth literary analysis, these authors are also engaging in the

creation of extensive written works and incorporating the writing process through the use of critique and revision. When they purposefully apply their reading and demonstrate an understanding and engagement with the text, they reflectively act through their composition of fan fiction. Cope and Kalantzis (1999) agree, “When learners juxtapose different languages, discourses, styles, and approaches, they gain substan-

tively in metacognitive and metalinguistic abilities and in their ability to reflect critically on complex systems and their interactions” (15).

Through fanfics, today’s youth are not only more effectively engaging with texts they enjoy, but they are also repetitively recognizing and using archetypes and motifs that have been utilized in canonical literature for centuries. The recent adoration for Stephenie Meyer’s work extends beyond mere enjoyment of contemporary young adult vampire and werewolf novels; it moves readers toward an understanding of literary concepts, helps define what constitutes “canonical,” and reminds *us* that these elements are “worthy” of time and attention in our schools. Rather than these concepts being presented by licensed educators, however, written responses from teen readers about their favorite works and their relationships to each others’ stories are generating a new online learning tool and school of criticism.

The Structure of Fanfic

Historically, rhetorical approaches to literature focused singularly on the formal arrangement of the writing itself. It was not until around 1925 that I. A. Richards began to examine the affectiveness of literature, and we began to see the very rudimentary origins of Reader-Response Theory, which is founded on the understanding that “readers need to learn to read and interpret literature for themselves and to make meaning of their reading themselves. Doing so results in true engagement” (Blasingame 29). Internet fan fiction is an exciting manifestation of this engagement. Readers engage with the text by extending the author’s narrative, elaborating on it, or combining various works into a single creative narrative or “crossover” by appropriating characters, building curricular connections, and developing multimodal compositions based on the original narratives. For example, a crossover author might combine characters and/or plot details from Star Trek with Harry Potter, thus attempting the creation of a harmonious balance between and among worlds birthed by popular authors, worlds to which they can relate and respond. Entire websites are dedicated to crossover fan fiction, such as <http://community.livejournal.com/crossoverfic>, where “Anything is welcome . . . , any fandom, the only requirements are that all stories are crossovers” (Crossover, par 1). On

this website, stories can be found combining imaginary worlds from movies, books, television programs, comic books, and mythology, if not more.

Fanfics often expand upon an author's story or, in some cases, fill in empty spaces in a story, such as "The Murder of Bella's Heart," a fanfic that elaborates upon the moments in *New Moon* (book two in the Twilight series) immediately following Edward's departure and Bella's rescue from the woods where he left her (Poplikeapop-trt3). In the original book, these moments are absent, replaced by blank pages that represent time passing. In the fanfic, the author speculates on Bella's thoughts and feelings as they might have appeared on those blank pages.

Readers of various genres and works of literature synthesize their reading and the effect characters have on them. This juxtaposition becomes evident in crossover stories that combine characters and settings from two more sources into one fanfic. These complex pieces explore what the implications might be if characters from different works were to meet in the same text, or the effect of a character from one work having to deal with the circumstances of another work. In "Abandon All Hope You Who Enter Here," the fanfic writer explores just what might happen if the soul of Meyer's beloved protagonist, Edward Cullen, were, in fact, damned as he fears and he were sent to Dante's Inferno. Consider the following excerpt:

Hell hath known no limits to keep me bound here and yet I am captured like the proverbial Virgil through each level I have passed, far beyond the gluttons and the sodomites. I am farther down than where liars dwell. In so many ways I was undead and then to top off the pain I stand with the traitors for denying and turning my back on her. My angel has dimed [sic] hopefully alive where I left her. Trapped in my iced containment I am left to think, to suffer, to reminisce about the last century or so of my life. (Andy Iron)

This insightful story exhibits the author's understanding not only of the characterization of Meyer's Edward, but also of the elaborate structure of Dante's Hell. The author had to decide which level of the In-

Other examples of Twilight crossover fics include crossovers with *Romeo and Juliet* and "Thanatopsis," both illustrating an equally deep engagement with the classics as well as with Meyer's work.

ferno Edward would inhabit based on what Edward himself believed to be his greatest sin. Other examples of Twilight crossover fics include crossovers with *Romeo and Juliet* and "Thanatopsis," both illustrating an equally deep engagement with the classics as well as with Meyer's work.

Often fanfics maintain the major elements of the primary source (in this case, one of the Twilight books) but change or add to a main character in some significant way. These appropriations often make the character more "real" to the fan author. In "Scared," Bella's move to live with her father in

Forks, Washington, is explained by changing her back story (Lon-Dubh). This fic posits that Bella's stepfather was abusive. The fanfic also uses the abuse to explain parts of Bella's character, such as her love of reading and her apparent clumsiness. Further, Bella's reluctance to see herself as beautiful is explained by a prior date-rape trauma. In this fanfic, Bella's character has very real problems beyond Meyer's vampires and werewolves, enabling the story's author and readers to engage with real world problems through the safe outlets of reading and writing. In a sense, fanfics can help their young writers to escape and heal; their responses to these fantasy worlds are ways to communicate their own difficult realities to others.

In a more positive manner, other fanfics make exciting connections across different curriculum content areas. In "Triangles with Linear Qualities," a fan author explores the love triangle of Bella, Edward, and Jacob through the use of geometry, organizing the narrative around mathematical properties and using the language of mathematics to explain the complexity of the characters' relationships:

1. Any two points can be connected by a straight line.
2. The distance between La Push and Forks has never seemed shorter.
3. Given any straight line segment, a circle can be drawn having the segment as radius and one endpoint as center.

Bella is the center of everything. Always. (La-La)

This creative response acts as an elaborate analysis of the relationships Meyer sets up in her novels, but it also examines a cross-curricular response where the young writer combines literature and mathematics to better understand both.

Beyond Linear Narratives

Not all fanfics need to be written. The definition of “composition” is evolving in our technology-heavy world. The working definition of composition is no longer limited to informal or formal writing meant to be read; today’s teens have broadened that defini-

tion to encompass not only print narrative, but also visual narrative—photos, drawings, graphic art, and video. Maxine Greene (1995) suggests that multimodal demonstrations encourage young adult readers to think alternatively about the worlds of literature. For instance, “fanart” includes such visual creations as drawings, paintings, and computer-generated images centered on sources, much as fanfics are written pieces centered on sources. Talented artists render visual interpretations of the texts that illustrate their engagement with the

literature. Meyer herself has a section on her professional website where she has pictures of covers that were not used for her series (“Other Novels—Crap-tastic Covers”). Visual responses to the written work enhance the cognitive response to reading. In other words, by adapting and extending the written work, young adult readers discover new ways to make meaning of their reading.

“Song fics” are another example of multimodal composition that incorporate two or more medium into the fic. A recognized genre among fanfiction writers, song fics organize the story around song lyrics that tie to the theme of the piece. A work of fiction such as “100 Years” (TwiLigHtDancEr93) uses song

lyrics from the musical group Five for Fighting’s song “100 Years,” explicating and elaborating on the source text by drawing parallels between the story theme and the lyrics. Meyer herself provides playlists on her website for each of her novels, supporting the connection between music and books.

Although the original works upon which fanfiction is based are most often books or movies, the forms used in responses crafted by readers are limited only by their creativity and imagination.

Techno-literacy of Emerging Writing Communities

K–12 students in the 21st century do not remember a time when life did not include the possibilities provided online, and the current generation’s techno-literacy evolves virally. While many adults remain uncomfortable or suspicious of the Internet, many young people find the cyber universe to be the space where they are most comfortable expressing themselves personally, as well as artistically, and may even be the safest place they know. They have maneuvered their interests and education outside the walls of the traditional classroom and engaged with their own pedagogical processes, which evolved naturally for them online. Young adult readers are mouse clicks away from massive amounts of information, much of which is created by their peers, including the fanfics written by young avid readers such as themselves. In this way, they are contributing to and participating in a form of collective intelligence. For today’s “Net Gener,” a term coined to describe youth who grew up online, new bilateral interaction with literature offers an outlet through which they can respond critically to both the authors they read and the literary characters they love (Barnes, Marateo, and Ferris 2007). Moreover, they can respond to one another in online communities that emerge around their passion for these narratives.

While there are thousands of sites based on fanfiction, teens have discovered one powerful and free online tool for use with their writing: wikis, derived from the Hawaiian word for “quick.” Wikis (such as the simple one we set up at <http://fanwriting.wet-paint.com>) are quick to start, so the readers can build their own online narratives. Other fans can collaborate on these wikis, change portions, edit, or add to these compositions by creating their own free accounts.

The stigma educators associate with sites like

While many adults remain uncomfortable or suspicious of the Internet, many young people find the cyber universe to be the space where they are most comfortable expressing themselves personally, as well as artistically, and may even be the safest place they know.

Wikipedia and the nature of the “quick” and easy editing by anyone with an account is disregarded by fan writers. They feel perfectly comfortable participating in collective intelligence, where peers gather to generate the extensions of their own readings and knowledge. Free wikis are completely editable by any member, though permissions can be set to allow full or limited access.

Applying Fan Writing in the 21st Century Classroom

As teachers, we must educate ourselves about the value of technology and the collective intelligences in our language arts classrooms. No longer can we perpetuate Luddite fears about the lack of regulations controlling the Internet compared to the strictly regulated environment of a library. Instead of fearing and focusing on negative ramifications surrounding online pedagogy, we must encourage smart online presences for our students of all ages. Even though many schools focus primarily on content, some educational programs are moving toward a concept-based approach to educating that supports teachers who move away from teaching content only in their own disciplines. We must develop curriculum that addresses today’s techno-savvy students’ bidirectional relationships with technology. The freedom of information and fan writers’ willingness to draw from the vast resources of the Internet provide an opportunity for educators to broaden curriculum to include lessons on source evaluation and reliability, as well as emerging research methods that today’s students will surely need. Utilizing the growing number of online tools allows teachers to assess intangible aspects of learning, such as engagement and process.

As previously mentioned, there are numerous websites that publish fanfiction, and these tend to monitor themselves through system administrators. We suggest teachers who want to set up their own sites begin with smaller networks where the teacher still retains some control. For example, we have been using online discussion boards in the classroom for years. We have noticed with some bewilderment that when the online writing was assessed, students completed only the bare minimum, if they wrote at all. However, after creating a section called “This & That,” where students could discuss anything appropriate

without grades, the board quickly filled with posts, writings, responses, and students building communities that extended online. Now we include such a section on every site we create.

Young adults want to have agency over their own learning. They want less monitoring and no reductionist assessment. We find that the less monitored they feel and the less pressured they feel to create mandatory pieces online, the more they do it. During the 2007–2008 school year, we used a discussion board set up through Google Docs for our AP Language class. This site was barely monitored, left mostly in the hands of the students, and it flourished. A few times, someone wrote something inappropriate, and within minutes other students began emailing the teacher to remove the offending posts. Students monitor one another and learn from one another, especially when the pedagogy is packaged as anything but schooling. As Michael Wesch, founder of Kansas State’s Digital Ethnography project, claims, students love to learn; they just hate school.

As educators, we need to build more online outlets for young readers through which they can respond and collaborate on their readings. We have created and used multiple wikis with our classes and found this to be easy and effective. These sites work especially well for cooperative learning because of the true collaborative nature of the wiki plat-

form. Writers have access to respond simply through a comment thread below each page, or they can actually edit the pages themselves. This open forum requires that a moderator or the owner (usually the teacher) make all members moderators through an open or closed system. Two of the more popular free wiki builders are WikiSpaces (<http://www.wikispaces.com>) and Wetpaint Wiki (<http://www.wetpaint.com>); on many free online platforms, advertising pays for the site. In Wetpaint, if the owner can prove the site is educational in nature, moderators will remove the ads.

Moreover, tech-savvy educators who own their

Instead of fearing and focusing on negative ramifications surrounding online pedagogy, we must encourage smart online presences for our students of all ages.

own server space can set up discussion boards. While these differ from wikis, in that writers cannot collaborate and actually edit, change, or add to other people's writing directly, writers can thread discussions more easily. One of the more robust discussion boards, or bulletin boards as they are sometimes called, is PhpBB. Educators can check with host services like GoDaddy.com or HostGator.com to easily set up these bulletin boards for their classes. We built one of these bulletin boards for one of our classes, and within the first week, student writers posted more than 1,000 messages to one another in response to their reading and work.

A third free platform worth mentioning is Google Apps. Google is not merely a search engine; it also

has an impressive suite of applications that include, in part: Google Scholar (<http://scholar.google.com>) to access online research articles; Google Books (<http://books.google.com>) to access online books; Google calendar (<http://calendar.google.com>), where educators can build course calendars to share with their students; and Google Docs (<http://docs.google.com>), which we

have consequently used to collaborate on this article. Google Docs is a free online word processor where users can simultaneously collaborate on documents, spreadsheets, and presentations. This tool can eliminate the paper trail as educators "share" files with an unlimited number of students. Fanfic writers can use Google Docs much the way they use a wiki, although to access the fanfics written in Google Docs (but not published online through Google), viewers need to be invited by the owner. This procedure essentially makes it impossible to collaborate with people the writers don't know.

Educators can use the three above tools to tap into the creativity of our 21st century youth by extending their writing classrooms onto the Internet. While some students balk at teachers having Facebook accounts or "lurking" on sites like Fanfiction.

net, others love having instructors whose teaching methods feel familiar and comfortable. We assert that when educators are developing these online platforms for their students, it is important to set up norms and expectations early. Once in use, though, they should step back and allow the students to develop their own threads, their own collaborations, and their own communication through the systems. Though largely invisible to students, they will be able to access not just student products, but also student *processes* through revision histories; these processes not only support students' creative responses to literature, it also holds them more accountable through their digital footprints.

Helpful Tools

Online Word Processing

Google Docs - <http://docs.google.com>

Zoho Writer - <http://zoho.com/>

Free Online Wikis

Wetpaint Wikis - <http://www.wetpaint.com/>

Wiki Spaces - <http://www.wikispaces.com/>

FanFiction Sites

Fan Fiction - <http://www.fanfiction.net/>

Harry Potter Fan Fiction - <http://fanfiction.mugglenet.com/>

Lord of the Rings fan fiction - <http://www.lotrfanfiction.com/>

Stephenie Meyer Links

Home Page- <http://www.stepheniemeyer.com/>

Fan Site- <http://www.twilightlexicon.com>

Fan fiction and Fan art- <http://www.rambling-sandthoughts.com/twilight/>

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Search for New Editor of Language Arts

NCTE is seeking a new editor of *Language Arts*. In July 2011, the term of the present editors (Patricia Enciso, Laurie Katz, Barbara Z. Kiefer, Detra Price-Dennis, and Melissa Wilson) will end. Interested persons should send a letter of application to be received **no later than August 7, 2009**. Letters should include the applicant's vision for the journal and be accompanied by the applicant's vita, one sample of published writing, and two letters of general support from appropriate administrators at the applicant's institution. Do not send books, monographs, or other materials that cannot be easily copied for the Search Committee. Classroom teachers are both eligible and encouraged to apply. The applicant appointed by the NCTE Executive Committee will effect a transition, preparing for his or her first issue in September 2011. The appointment is for five years. Applications should be addressed to Kurt Austin, *Language Arts* Search Committee, NCTE, 1111 W. Kenyon Road, Urbana, IL 61801-1096. Questions regarding any aspect of the editorship should be directed to Kurt Austin, Publications Division Director: kaustin@ncte.org; (800) 369-6283, extension 3619.

Writing and Teaching Historical Fiction:

The Lantern of Learning with L. M. Elliott

The world of young adult literature is fortunate to have so many amazing authors of historical fiction. Sook Nyul Choi, L. M. Elliott, Karen Hesse, Trudy Krisher, Julius Lester, Lois Lowry, Harry Mazer, Walter Dean Myers, Linda Sue Park, Katherine Paterson, Richard Peck, Ann Rinaldi, and Jane Yolen are just a sampling of the great authors of historical fiction providing a lantern for learning about history and the connectedness of humankind in times of peace and prosperity, as well as in poverty, war, and transition. Historical fiction plunges readers into the past in a way that allows them to think, feel, and reason with greater complexity; awareness heightens and understanding deepens.

L. M. Elliott, author of ten books, including five YA historical novels, has been particularly appealing to my students at Ohio University, but I did not have the pleasure of meeting her in person until the Assembly on Literature for Adolescents of the National Council of Teachers of English (ALAN) Workshop in New York City in 2007. I had used Laura's books primarily in my young adult literature classes, but in 2007, I assigned *Annie, Between the States* (2004) to my English Education methods class as the book around which they were to build an instructional unit. Having spent a quarter with the novel and developing a wide range of strategies for teaching it, this group of students traveled with me to NCTE's Annual Convention, where they met Laura during one of her autograph ses-

sions. The students were thrilled, and Laura recalled their enthusiasm when, a day later, I introduced myself and told her that my students were so compelled by *Annie*, it was as if they had added the protagonist to their group of friends.

Laura is a bright and beautiful person who cares deeply about history and about sharing the past with young people in meaningful and memorable ways. As one of my students, Ashley Aldrich, said after reading *Under a War-Torn Sky* (2001), "This book took me on an emotional roller coaster. I was constantly turning the page to see what was happening next, and I felt sadness and exhilaration right along with Henry during his journey. When [Henry] finally made it home and Clayton drops the eggs to embrace him, I felt the bottom drop out from under me, a whole rush of emotions. I found it so easy to be engrossed in the book and to lose myself in Henry's story."

Besides having a passion for history, the award-winning L. M. Elliott also genuinely cares about teaching and teachers. What began as a casual but energetic discussion at the ALAN reception in November 2007 continued over the course of a year as Laura answered questions that I and my students had about her, her writing process, and specific details from *Under a War-Torn Sky* (2001), *Annie, Between the States* (2004), and *Give Me Liberty* (2006). This article also gives a sneak peek into the author's latest book, *A Troubled Peace* (a sequel to *Under a War-Torn Sky*, available September

Besides having a passion for history, the award-winning L. M. Elliott also genuinely cares about teaching and teachers.

2009), and brief explanations of five projects, each supported with examples of student work.

Writing Historical Fiction: An Interview with L. M. Elliott

You must have a real love of history to write the kinds of books you do. How did this become a passion of yours?

I grew up outside Washington, D.C., very aware of history in the making. Although it has since been swallowed up in suburbs, my hometown then was a small, close-knit community. Neighbors took time for garden parties and drop-by conversations over lemonade. Elderly and young mixed readily, and anecdotes about deceased friends wove their way into the conversation as easily as politics of the day. History was personal, told through ancestors' tales of hard times or unlikely romances—that of a local young woman with the Union officer who arrested her was a particularly intriguing story to this impressionable, budding author and became the seed for *Annie, Between the States*.

I lived in the house my grandfather built, near my great-grandfather's home. So I was used to the permanence of old things and deep roots. I just felt part of a natural continuum. It wasn't unusual to discover Civil War bullets in our rose beds or old documents crammed into desk drawers, like a decidedly unromantic letter from my great-grandfather telling his soon-to-be-bride that he loved her enough to marry her despite the fact it would ruin his political career—she was Irish Catholic, another inspiration for *Annie*.

How was history taught when you were in school? Are there any particular projects or experiences that stand out as especially wonderful or horrible (i.e., boring) ways of learning?

I see what intrigues my son. For WWI, his eighth-grade teacher assigned a series of short projects—a report on a poet and another on a military leader (my son chose the colorful Red Baron); a fictional journal of a day in the trenches; and a personal response to propaganda posters. The students conducted their research mostly on PBS's really fine website. Once my son clicked onto it, he spent hours browsing, absorbed by its collection of photos, letters, diaries, music, newspaper headlines that make the tragedy of that war very tangible, very human.

What are some of your favorite historically based novels and/or films, particularly about the eras about which you have written, and why?

For 1940s lingo and fly-boy swagger—*Twelve O'clock High*, *Memphis Belle*, *The Best Years of our Lives*, *Casablanca*. To understand occupied Europe: *Charlotte Gray*, *Au Revoir Les Enfants*, *The Pianist*, *Schindler's List*. Irene Nemirovsky's *Suite Francaise* had a tremendous impact on my upcoming sequel, *A Troubled Peace*. A Russian Jew émigré, her ability to portray a German officer with compassion was remarkable, humbling. She died in Auschwitz. A line in its afterword, about her daughters—truly, one line—told me where Henry should find Pierre. I worked backwards from there. For the Civil War, *Killer Angels* and *Across*

Five Aprils provide many differing perspectives. The movie *Cold Mountain* powerfully shows how imperiled the women left alone on isolated farms were.

Which of the following are most influential in informing your writing of historically based novels: interviews, travel, library research, or other? Please expand a bit on how you approach writing novels so that they are rich, contextualized, and accurate reflections of past eras, conflicts, and ways of life.

All these things are part of "reporting" fiction, just as I reported magazine articles. They tell me what to write—I don't start out with a premise that I then try to prove. For instance, in *Annie, Between the States*, I grew up with the story of two young women of the area, one accused of spying who married the Union officer who escorted her to prison, and another who was celebrated in poems by the flamboyant cavalry general, J.E.B Stuart. But the bulk of that book came from reading dozens of journals, letters, battle reports, interviewing historians and re-enactors. For *Give Me Liberty*, I read the *Virginia Gazettes* of 1774-75 through Colonial Williamsburg's Digital Library. I stumbled onto ads run by a loyalist carriage-maker whose competitor responded by blasting him as "the Palace Street Puffer." Further searches showed notices

**A line in its afterword,
about her daughters—
truly, one line—told me
where Henry should find
Pierre.**

about his runaway indentured servants and pleas for his customers to pay him. The real-life Elkanah Deane became the irritable taskmaster for Nathaniel and a way of showing the plight of loyalists or those who simply wished to remain neutral.

Travel was particularly important to *Under a War-torn Sky* and its sequel, *A Troubled Peace*. Climbing France's Vercors mountains

showed me how truly terrifying it must have been to walk those cliffhanging passes in the dark, as escaping flyers had to. Standing in a small Resistance museum in the Morvan before a wall of photos of the youth who simply disappeared, I was reminded—starkly—that my story had to be as much about these idealistic, courageous civilians as about a lost American pilot. It's estimated that for each of the 5,000 American and British flyers saved, one French child, woman, or man died.

For the sequel, after learning returning deportees were processed through the elegant art deco Hotel Lutetia, I went to Paris and stayed in it. My descriptions of the irony of those emaciated concentration camp survivors being housed there are far richer as a result. I also discovered a statue in the park across the street that ended up being quite important symbolically. I never would have known it was there had I not wandered into the park one afternoon. Also, standing in the Gare de l'Est train station, I witnessed the scene I wrote to conclude the afterword. The book's most palpable details came from primary sources—journals that told of being rationed to one hour of electricity a day; people being jailed for fighting over matches because replacements wouldn't be found; the heart-breaking pleas of starved deportees to taste cherries that would kill them in their frail condition; deportees being sprayed with DDT to remove typhus-carrying lice.

What themes did you aim to develop in *Give Me Liberty*, and what else helped you to develop the novel?

We forget how truly radical a notion it was that common man, no matter how poor or ill-educated, had the inborn capability—intellectually and morally—to

I stumbled onto ads run by a loyalist carriage-maker whose competitor responded by blasting him as "the Palace Street Puffer."

govern himself. No longer were kings, noblemen, church officials *the* authority. The stirring words of Thomas Jefferson and Patrick Henry literally turned the world upside down. Of course, the "power of words" theme can't carry a whole novel, but seeing how abstract philosophies can push ordinary boys, yeomen, and farmers to take up their Brown Bess muskets and face off with the most powerful empire

in the world—now there's a story!

My first decision was to make my young protagonist, Nathaniel, an indentured servant so that his journey from a frightened, timid servant to a willing volunteer in the 2nd Virginia Regiment could symbolize how immense a leap it was to go from being a king's subject to someone who could potentially carve out new laws for a new country. After that, all I needed was a plot! In a rather dry historical journal, I read of a little known but pivotal battle in December 1775 at Great Bridge, just outside Norfolk, Virginia. Here the Chesapeake Bay opens onto the Atlantic Ocean. Had the British won, they would have bottled up the bay, cutting the colonies in half. Goods traveled mostly by water in those days. A blockaded bay might mean that no supplies or reinforcements from Virginia or Maryland could get to the Atlantic Ocean to sail up the coastline to George Washington and the Continental Army struggling in New York. The Revolution might have ended before it could really begin.

But the British didn't seize the bay because of a rag-tag group of resolute, ordinary men, who crouched behind makeshift barricades and refused to run even as line-after-line of British regulars crossed the bridge. The well-armed professionals were routed in a mere twenty minutes by patriots who brought their own muskets and tomahawks to do battle. Their uniforms were merely hunting shirts they'd sewn themselves and embroidered with "Liberty or Death," Patrick Henry's galvanizing call to fight. See? The power of words!

It was the perfect climactic ending for the book. But the facts of the battle contained even more. Runaway slaves fought at the Battle of Great Bridge, not for the Americans, but for the Redcoats, as part of Lord Dunmore's Royal Ethiopian Regiment. They

mocked Patrick Henry’s rousing “Liberty or Death” by wearing a sash that read: “Liberty to Slaves.” That terrible irony insisted that my protagonist, Nathaniel, have a dear friend with an opposing story line, a slave with the Ethiopians, whom he must face in battle.

So research forms your ideas and helps your stories to unfold. Can you expand on that a bit, particularly considering the negative responses teachers get from students when we suggest they “research.”

But that’s where the gold lies! Research is the treasure hunt, the fun. I’d much rather research than write! Unearthing that one little battle provided me with an ending, two main characters, an important moral dilemma, and the thematic spine of my novel—independence, its promise, its responsibilities. It even suggested a double-edged title.

For Nathaniel, the plea “Give Me Liberty” offers the gift of being able to make his own choices; it ultimately redeems and redefines him. Conversely, the slave, Moses, personifies the tragic irony that defined American history for a hundred years. Moses cries out in despair when he and Nathaniel stumble onto one another as enemies in the Battle of Great Bridge: “You fighting for people who whine for their own liberty and keep me in chains?”

What do you see as important aspects of writing historical fiction?

Good historical fiction fills a reader’s mind with the *human drama* that is history. As a child, hearing my dad’s stories of surviving behind Nazi lines, I used to play “French Resistance” in the woods behind my house, darting from tree to tree, creeping up on my poor, hapless dog told to sit and be an Aryan sentry. What was I doing? I was mulling over what I’d learned, wondering—what would I do given a Nazi occupation and neighbors who might be collaborators? Would I step out of the shadows and take the hand of a lost American boy, knowing I could be executed for doing so?

This is what historical fiction can do for our young people. Not just stuff their minds with sterile timelines, battles, speeches, and the bios of national leaders that they

regurgitate like multiplication tables. Good historical fiction will plopp readers into the shoes of a person of that era so they can walk the emotional journey from doubt to belief, from fear to courage, from danger to peace. Doing so, they will far better understand who we are today.

To fully accomplish this, historical fiction must be rich in “telling” details—like a Vermeer painting, with their painstakingly lush backdrops. If it’s done well, teenagers will absorb all sorts of knowledge without really realizing it!

What are some examples of these “brushstrokes” as they apply to *Give Me Liberty* or *Annie*, *Between the States* that you can share to help our readers understand what you mean?

To catch their attention, the grittier the detail the better—like the fact that common colds were treated in the 18th-century with a concoction of curdled milk, wine, and pickled deer antler slices. Rich women would dress their hair with bears’ grease and cinnamon before powdering it, or pop small balls of cork in their mouths to prevent their cheeks looking sunken due to lost teeth. To earn 40 shillings, the poor with good teeth might sell one to a “surgeon” advertising in the *Virginia Gazette*, who also happened to teach sword play and tune harpsichords. I don’t suppose he offered any painkillers.

But in terms of building a character, it’s essential to “show rather than tell” personality, motivation, what constrains or challenges her; the opening pages of *Annie* provide a good example of the power of little details. Journalism taught me not to pussyfoot around in the lead—to drop the reader straight into the thick of things. So I start in the middle of the First Battle of Manassas, cannons blasting, cavalry jumping fences,

wounded men staggering through cornfields, groaning. How to insert a 15-year-old girl? From reading, I knew that the ill-prepared armies left hundreds of wounded on that battlefield. I knew medicine was primitive—lint scraped from sheets was used to staunch bleeding (think of that fluff you pull out of your dryer); wounds were stitched together with long strands of horse’s tails. Victorian society

For Nathaniel, the plea “Give Me Liberty” offers the gift of being able to make his own choices; it ultimately redeems and redefines him.

frowned on women dealing with blood, and yet, here were all these boys—blue and gray—lying on the ground before the women of Manassas. Soldiers were often saved from death by bundles of letters or books they carried in their breast pocket deflecting bullets. And from a list of 1860s sayings I had compiled came a great phrase for being stupid: *pea-wit*. Isn't that poetical?—a brain the size of a pea!

So here's my opening: Annie, whose brother is fighting out there somewhere with the Virginia cavalry is confronted with a Union soldier lying on her aunt's front porch, bleeding from his chest. She tries to steel herself to cram a ball of lint into his wound with the thought: "Stop being such a pea-wit." But she hesitates to unbutton his jacket—decorum forbid such a thing. Ultimately,

her mother treats the man and discovers that a book of Keats poetry in his jacket had stopped a bullet from piercing the officer's heart. Annie, a voracious reader, is stunned to find her "enemy" would enjoy such gentle verse.

It is the beginning of a cloistered girl having to face the brutal realities of war, the beginning of her questioning its dogma. It is the beginning of Annie, caught "between the states"—all within a few hundred words that also display the medicine, propriety, language, and popular literature of the time.

Besides using these brushstrokes to paint a clearer picture of the past, what are some ways that you try to ensure the stories will resonate with today's readers?

It's not as if the past can't address conundrums of today. For instance, to place my thirteen-year-old Nathaniel into the 2nd Virginia regiment, he would have to be a fifer. A soldier's minimum age was sixteen. To learn about fifers, I read a first-person account by Samuel Dewess. It is full of their hardships and hopes, but the most disturbing nugget in it is the fact that these boys—some as young as ten—were the ones who had to dole out the corporal punishment ordered by officers—lashings with cat-o-nine-tails.

One of the sad realities I learned covering family

issues is that abused children often grow up to abuse others. Such patterns exist on lesser degrees—ostracized teenagers, once accepted, often shun others like them; young athletes pushed to the ground often get up and foul their opponents as badly or worse. People have to make a conscious decision to act differently and better. So, I present Nathaniel the chance to revenge himself on a bully. He is ordered to whip that boy for stealing food (a typical offense, by the way, that could bring forty lashes). It takes real moral fortitude and compassion for Nathaniel to choose *not* to whip Jeremiah, to *not* replicate the abuse he suffered. He remembers what a character told him, that one of life's greatest challenges is "deciding to not let past sadness or mistreatment rule the way we act, to live as if each day presents a new, hopeful possibility." Our teens can use that message.

You seem to have some of the concerns of young adults in mind when you write. What are some other age-appropriate themes for teens to be found in history?

There are hundreds. In *Annie, Between the States*, for instance, the largest quandary Annie faces is choosing her own course, what she believes is right amid the pressures of family, regional culture, and friends. One specific—she must assess the flirtatious rhetoric of a very charismatic, incredibly charming man who inspired hundreds to join his romanticized "cause." Is what he preaches truly valid? Our teenagers are presented with such challenges all the time by pop culture and the "popular" kids in school hallways. I hope my characters help build empathetic, *independent* thinkers of our future.

How did you get your start as a writer? What formal training do you have, and do you think that formal training matters more or less than other factors?

I wrote for school newspapers and literary magazines, and edited the yearbook at Wake Forest University. I do have a masters in journalism from the University of North Carolina, but I suspect the day-to-day practice of being an editor on the *Daily Tarheel* was ultimately more beneficial than the class work for the degree.

You worked as a journalist for over 15 years before launching your career as a novelist of young adult literature. Would you expand upon the influence of

your journalistic background and share any strategies you would suggest for aspiring writers?

My “beat”—family issues, medical and mental health narratives—taught me to make issues human, to write about ordinary people pushing themselves with stubborn fortitude to do extraordinary things in tough circumstances, like the civilians in my novels. To clearly illustrate the stresses of cancer treatments, for instance, I followed a very young mother through her harrowing bone marrow transplant. Such stories are best told through scenes, and if I was not able to witness them, I reconstructed them by interviewing everyone involved, asking: what did the doctor say, what about the nurse, what frightened you, what gave you strength, what did you hear, smell, who held your hand, what did you tell your children? I learned that good writing is like building a drip sand castle at the beach, detail upon detail to build a sentence, a paragraph, a chapter.

In terms of basic techniques, columnist/novelist Anna Quindlin says the best training for her novels was her work as a journalist. I agree. Journalism teaches a writer to make deadlines, to be observant, to use the pithiest words possible. Interviewing and recording verbatim what sources say is the perfect preparation for creating believable dialogue. Writing to space forces self-discipline—throwing out what is extraneous or not well turned. Journalism also introduces the writer to editing, that extra pair of eyes, that mentoring.

In short, journalism teaches professionalism. Writing is about sweating it out—10% inspiration and 90% perspiration, as Thomas Edison said of science. It’s not about hypothesizing or whining about writer’s block. What about that 10 percent, then? That ephemeral inspiration? A writer must catch that. She must watch, listen, and try to imagine what the person across the room feels about his situation. She is a little bit of an eavesdropper with a painter’s eye and lots of empathy, a wind chime sounding as the world brushes past.

Carry a notebook for that eureka moment when life presents an idea. Or use that cell phone to leave a message. Because life dangles ideas right in front of us—the best ideas, in fact. The thinnest stories, the ones that don’t resonate, are the ones that are spawned by essentially saying, “Hmmm, what should I write about today?” The best stories are the ones life

makes you write—that so capture or baffle you that you need to comment or try to understand better. I also write picture books. My first was simply a bedtime story for my son when he got busted at preschool for following the antics of a classmate—it was to help him think through strategies to avoid such trouble in the future, not simply lecture him with “if your best friend jumped off a cliff...?” Had I been assigned a story on peer pressure, I don’t think I would have come up with something as authentic as what real life handed me. *Be that wind chime.*

Your novels *Give Me Liberty* and *Annie, Between the States* deal with conflicts that took place on American soil but well over 100 years ago. When you consider the events of September 11, 2001, alongside the American Revolution and the American Civil War, what thoughts go through your mind?

9-11 is a tragic reminder of how violence can come so unexpectedly. The world is still a dangerous place, peppered with cruel, fanatical individuals who clearly do not understand the American spirit or our tenacity. The common thread between those wars and 9-11 is the phenomenal quick-response courage of our citizens, their stubborn devotion to others even within a firestorm.

Whether a formal award or a more personal moment, what has been the highlight of your career as a writer?

This will sound corny—the envelope arriving with the very first copy of *Under a War-torn Sky* was pretty thrilling. I am proud of the articles people said helped them get out of damaging situations. Same thing when I receive letters from boys that start out, “I don’t like books, *but after reading Under a War-torn Sky*, I want to read more” As a mother, that moment is watching my children smile or nod as they read one of my first drafts. And it’s always gratifying to see students’ creative responses to something I started and to know my characters have touched readers enough for them to worry about what happens next. They are like children, you know, so you want people to care about them!

The dust jacket of your books says that you live in Virginia with your husband, daughter, and son. Can you tell us about your children? How old are they?

Which of your books have they read (especially interested in *Annie*, *Between the States* and *Under a War-Torn Sky*), and what kind of feedback do they give you about your writing?

My children are my muses, truly. They are voracious, inquisitive readers, my first and often my best editors. Because they were so widely read, if something I've written is unclear to them, I definitely need to rework it. And, happily, they aren't shy about telling me so. Their questions, their wanting more about certain elements, direct my plot choices and character development.

My son, Peter, now 15, has a wry sense of humor. His laughter at *Give Me Liberty's* eccentric old schoolmaster, Basil, inspired me to push that loveable character a bit to flesh out the gentle humor he offered. Peter helped name the characters, walked the streets of Williamsburg with me, and patiently fielded my questions about what personas in town and which events interested him most. Recently, his reading of Elie Wiesel's *Night* and his horror at Nazi atrocities told me how much to include in *A Troubled Peace*. He has a strong moral compass, a great respect for life and others. He easily befriends peers, both teammates and opponents, on his travel and school sports teams. I hope all boys can read this book with the kind of concern for humanity my son does. I see now, in hindsight, why I might have named Pierre as I did. And certainly, now that Peter is 15 and only three years away from the age of many of those aircrew, I feel even more urgency to create books that advocate peace over the brutality of war.

My daughter, Megan, now 20, traveled to Paris with me when I researched the sequel. With her educated love of French culture and literature, she was my astute and unflappable translator and editor. Her insights into Claudette—a passionate and sometimes reckless teenager—were particularly helpful. Megan is partly responsible for my tailoring *Under a War-torn Sky* for young adults. We were at the beach when she was in third grade and reading *Number the Stars*. When she closed the book, she wanted to know exactly who were Axis powers and who were Allies. *Exactly*. I

His laughter at *Give Me Liberty's* eccentric old schoolmaster, Basil, inspired me to push that loveable character a bit to flesh out the gentle humor he offered.

ended up drawing a map of Europe as best I could in the sand. We attracted quite a crowd—grandparent veterans, preteens actually asking questions. I could see the youth knew about the Holocaust, but not about the brave civilians who fought Hitler's genocide.

Without my realizing it, my children's personalities often seep into my characters. When a friend read *Annie* for the first time, he laughed and said, "Well, Annie is Megan"—a courageous, independent, book-loving tomboy with a lot of grit and compassion. Megan also happens to be the model on the novel's cover. HarperCollins needed a 15-year-old, and Katherine asked if Megan would pose. We had great fun together at that shoot.

Do your children realize their mom is a famous author, and if so, what is that like for them and for you?

I certainly hope that they don't take me that seriously! In fact, there was a time when my husband was working for National Wildlife Federation. I was writing for a magazine, and a very young Megan asked, "Daddy is helping save the world [animals are very important in our household], what do you do, Mom?" I see writing as more of a craft than an art, myself more artisan than "artiste." Real life is my inspiration and, therefore, the art in it, if that makes sense. They see that I don't lock myself in a closet to write—I have edited chapters in carpool lines or while waiting for their soccer games and horse events. I watch movies for details of clothes, lingo, etc., while I fold laundry. Their cats lie all over my desk, so it's no ivory tower around here! They hear my silly phone messages—"Not *Stuart Little*, too soon"—things I couldn't jot down while

driving that make sense to me. The only schools I'm nervous talking to, though, are theirs—I don't want to embarrass them somehow! The real joy has been my sharing all of this with them—I am lucky to have a profession they can witness and be actively involved in. And right now, anyway, my son hopes to be a newspaper reporter.

What about your husband's role in your career as a writer?

[My husband John] has been a

constant, steady support of me since college. He is a high school English teacher, and he is exceedingly good at reminding me of things that capture teenage readers—boys in particular. After all, he needs to catch their attention daily to teach them well. Henry eats a bug in *Under a War-Torn Sky* because John encouraged me to do that—“they’ll love that stuff,” he said. I foolishly didn’t listen when he gently advised me to change the way I initially opened *Under a War-Torn Sky*. I “book ended” the story, starting with Lilly [Henry’s mother] worrying about Henry’s whereabouts as she prepares Thanksgiving dinner, then dropped back in time to bring Henry and the reader forward to the day at which the book started. He told me, “They won’t care about the mother.” Well, I was a mother—how could they not care about the mother? It was the first thing my editor said to me—change the opening.

Because of John’s work, I am very aware of high school curriculum. I was thrilled that Camus was a large voice in the Resistance and in Paris after the war and naturally warranted a spot in *A Troubled Peace*. John teaches *The Stranger*, and teenagers struggle so with existentialism. With Henry and Pierre, on the ravaged streets of post-war France, they can hopefully come to better understand the context of Camus’ philosophy on the absurd.

Under a War-Torn Sky

The Afterword indicates that your inspiration for *Under a War-Torn Sky* came from your father, who seemed to resemble Henry. Can you share how the story came about? What was it like for your father to share his story and for you to hear his story? Were there details you left out because they were too personal or traumatic?

Under a War-torn Sky grew out of a factual account I wrote of my father’s WWII homecoming—the result of my being assigned the task of writing a heartwarming article, one that would remind readers of the meaning of the December holidays. Such assignments strike horror in the hearts of writers because it is so easy to be hackneyed. Thankfully, it hit me that one of the

One of the most moving stories I’d ever heard was that of my father, who’d been missing in action and presumed dead, walking up the driveway of his farm the week before Christmas 1944.

most moving stories I’d ever heard was that of my father, who’d been missing in action and presumed dead, walking up the driveway of his farm the week before Christmas 1944. He was so gaunt, so unexpected, that at first only the family dog recognized him. WWII is full of such poignant, breath-taking anecdotes. Frankly, if someone can’t write a good WWII story, given all the pathos and triumph of the time, he/she is just a bad writer!

My father had shared his homecoming only a few times—quietly and with great emotion. He tended to recount the more swashbuckling escape stories with the matter-of-fact bravado typical of flyers. But I had never heard the entirety of his trek across France, of thinking he was about to die, over and over again. It was quite an experience. Hard. Touching. Revealing.

Because of the types of stories I tended to write, I instinctively saw the magazine piece and eventually the novel as primarily a homecoming story, a resolution of a father and son’s troubled relationship, an odyssey of a boy becoming a man, finding his way through a tortured land to home. But *Under a War-torn Sky* is not my father’s story. Yes, Henry Forester’s personality, his relationship with his father, and the homecoming are modeled on my father’s experiences. Everything else, though, came out of my imagination—from reading memoirs of Resistance fighters, flyers, newspapers, even culinary guides, so that when Henry ate, the food was correct, indigenous to that French region.

I didn’t purposefully omit some of my father’s experiences. It’s more that I used him as my springboard; he launched me. I added the wings through the reading and research. For instance, my dad told me about a Resistance worker the maquis called the “hatpin lady.” She would approach Germans seductively, lure them into an alley and, while they embraced, pull a long hatpin from her hat and stab into their ear, killing them. She struck me as a little too bitter, a little too bloodthirsty for young adults. However, you can see how Claudette might have evolved so tragically had Henry not helped her keep her instinctive humanity.

My dad never saw *Under a War-Torn Sky* in print. He was dying of skin cancer as I finished the manu-

I didn't purposefully omit some of my father's experiences. It's more that I used him as my springboard; he launched me.

script. I gave him galleys to read, and I regret it. The air battle chapters shoved him into a false memory of a very bad mission in which I was a gunner. But this will tell you everything about what a family man my father was. In the midst of that flashback, he suddenly cleared and asked me if it wasn't time

for me to leave the hospice and pick up my children at school. I hadn't noticed the clock. He was exactly right.

You incorporate both French and German in the book. Why did you do this? What role did you want language to play?

Flyers had to cope with it. Readers should experience—briefly—the discomfort, the confusion, the terror they felt. In his very first encounter, Henry bumbles his French, saying he is a woman and likes America—instead of he is American and hungry. Anyone who's studied French knows how a slight misstep in pronunciation yields that embarrassing gaff. From that moment, Henry realizes that he can't use his school-French. In fact, it will imperil him in a land occupied by German-speaking Nazis where his only hope for survival are French-speaking strangers he can't really understand and who might be maquis or collaborators.

Although Henry, the protagonist of *Under a War-Torn Sky*, is obviously male, several strong female characters (Madame Gaulloise, Patsy, and Claudette) are influential in helping him on his journey; they are even crucial to his staying alive. Were any of these women influenced by people in your own life or from your dad's stories?

I've been blessed to know some really amazing, strong-willed, and eloquent women. My surrogate grandmother was a State Department lawyer during the 1920s and '30s. Believe me, that woman was bodacious. The influence for Madame Gaulloise, though, came mainly through my research—reading about

women like Lucie Aubrac, who saved her husband from the Gestapo by marching herself into their office and pretending her "boyfriend" had impregnated her without marrying her. The Gestapo could certainly execute him if they wanted, she said, but not before a marriage ceremony was conducted. Aubrac had an ambush waiting at the church, and her husband survived.

Did you ever consider ending the story with Henry's death? Why or why not?

No. The story was spawned by its ending, that moving homecoming. I did pause over the ending of *Annie, Between the States*, however. That misfired shot from Jamie's gun could easily have struck Thomas, Laurence, or Annie. I realized at that moment how glad I was to be writing for young adults. For adults, that bullet would have had to strike in such a way as to leave everyone ruined. But I didn't have to do that. And that's not to say that the ending is sugarcoated. I don't know if Charlotte will find the courage to marry Laurence, or if he will shed his pride to propose. I don't know that Annie will be so happy up in Massachusetts. Certainly Jamie is broken emotionally. But the *possibility* for those characters to find their way, to redeem their humanity, exists.

That's a possibility handed the writer by the YA lit genre. Teenagers want truth, they want reality, but they want it wrapped in hope—that they can make a difference with their dedication, their energy, their new ideas. So, I could keep Henry alive and write—about the Nazis' racism and brutality, the tragedy of the French people who died standing against them, and the fear of those American boys who fell out of the sky—not as a testament to the "evil" in man, but more as a celebration of the flicker of humanity that remained amid such carnage.

What was your reasoning for keeping the fate of Pierre, Claudette, and Madame Gaulloise untold?

Because that's the way it was in 1945. My father never knew what happened to the people who helped him. Ever. Their identities were purposefully kept secret so that it would be less likely that he might accidentally betray them if caught. Honestly, I hadn't planned a sequel. But I've written *A Troubled Peace* because readers seem so worried about Pierre, Claudette, and whether Patsy and Henry marry.

Can you give us a glimpse into the sequel? A little sneak peek? When can we anticipate this book being in print?

The sequel explores the aftermath of WWII. Henry is home physically, but not emotionally, suffering symptoms of what we now know as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). In trying to resettle, to begin life anew, he realizes there are questions that must be answered first, such as what happened to Pierre? He returns to a France in upheaval, much of it left in rubble by Allied bombing and battles for liberation, reeling at the return of concentration camp survivors. I hope it's another compelling journey of redemption. I think it has a timeliness, given the return of our soldiers from Iraq and the withdrawal of our troops.

Annie, Between the States

Virginia was the last state to leave the Union and the state with the most inhabitants voting against secession. No doubt this made it a pivotal state in the American Civil War. Can you expand a bit on this context as it affected your writing of *Annie, Between the States*?

Virginia withstood the overwhelming portion of the war's battles—123 of the 384 pivotal ones. Tennessee came next with 38. Virginia was the feedbag, hospital, camp, and burial ground for two armies that staggered back and forth across its lands, neither quite establishing lasting dominance over the other. Warrenton, near Annie's home, changed hands 67 times. Each time soldiers went through, the men needed water, chickens, fresh horses and grain for them, whether friend or foe, kind or belligerent. Annie's farm—anyone's farm in their path—was necessary fodder.

Why did you choose to put *Annie* on the Confederate side?

One reviewer wrote that my novels tend to deal with choices—individuals growing enough internally to make their own, potentially controversial, decisions. And certainly that guided me as I cast Annie's personality. I wanted her to be a thinker, someone motivated by love and loyalty to family, yet also smart enough, inquisitive enough, moral enough to question the rhetoric of her community. Presenting her with that kind of challenge basically required she be a Confederate, uncomfortable with the practice of slavery and its horrific prejudices. As a Virginian, she would be right in

the middle—in the middle of battles, disturbing ethical questions, and political disagreements within her own family. I think the thematic challenge of Annie having to weigh many influences and reject a few—like slavery—to come up with her own unique beliefs is an important example for teen readers. I applaud YA literature's and cinema's current willingness to delve into the “bad side” to discover the good human beings there, like *Soldier X* and the movie *Valkyrie*.

How about an example of how research informed your creation of other characters?

I read about 20 history texts just to track battles and decide where to locate Annie's house. Little things I found expanded and enriched characters, even created some. I read a woman's account of trying to save the life of a boy by sticking her finger into a severed artery in his neck. She prayed with him before letting go, since there was nothing the doctors of that day could do to save him. That heart-wrenching anecdote deepened my portrait of Annie's kind mother. The report of a “high-spirited girl” in Warrenton making a good-natured bet with a Union officer occupying her town regarding the Federals' ultimate defeat embodied the strange

convivial repartee between Confederate and Union leaders, and spawned Eliza, Annie's rival for friendship with Charlotte. Reading *Lee's Lieutenants*, I came across the photo of a beautiful young man, with huge sad eyes, named William Farley, killed at Brandywine Station. I had to include that Shakespeare-loving youth—he was the perfect romance for Annie, thus making a point of the travesty of all those boys killed so young.

In America's history, the Civil War is second only to World War II in its number of casualties and injuries. Clearly war is dirty and dangerous. Of the various injuries incurred by war veterans, was there a particular reason you chose for Laurence to lose an arm?

One reviewer wrote that my novels tend to deal with choices—individuals growing enough internally to make their own, potentially controversial, decisions.

Seeing farms burned and crops destroyed in a kind of scorched earth policy, as ordered by Grant, would have embittered forever a boy like Jamie.

doing old things. He carries the wounds of war, but must also get past them.

After Laurence is injured and can no longer fight in the war or take proper care of the home, it seems Jamie might wise up and become the responsible, bread-winning male of the family. But instead he fights in the army. Was this his way of protecting his family, even though Annie and Laurence thought otherwise? Can you expand a bit on Jamie's choices and connection with family?

Jamie is ruined by the war. He was a hothead to begin with, a boy who felt competitive with his older brother, Laurence, and was driven to prove himself. At that young age, he could only see the glory, the glamour of the cavalry. Mosby's rangers were especially romanticized, legendary in their daring. His band of riders would be particularly alluring to a boy like Jamie. Loudoun and Fauquier counties experienced some of the worst retributions doled out by Union troops, who were sick of dealing with Mosby's surprise, hit-and-run attacks. Seeing farms burned and crops destroyed in a kind of scorched earth policy, as ordered by Grant, would have embittered forever a boy like Jamie. He was stunted in his emotional growth, caught forever in that absolute black-or-white thinking of the young teen.

Historians are mixed in their assessment of Mosby, by the way. As much as he is credited with protecting the Northern Virginia area from deserters and rogue groups, many feel residents suffered far more reprisals and raids than they would have had the Union not been trying to ferret out Mosby. He was autocratic, extreme, and self-righteous in his opinions, a Lord Byron aficionado—not one to seek others' counsel. Not a great role model for a boy like Jamie.

Amputations were common during the Civil War, but it also serves a symbolic purpose. Losing an arm hampers Laurence physically and spiritually without rendering him helpless. He can still ride, for instance. But he will need to figure out how to chop wood, to write with his left hand—new ways of seeing and

Jamie provides an important foil to Annie's growth. The cruelties of war have taught her to see beyond what she has been told to think. Laurence, too, can rise above hatred and prejudice because he has such a strong code of ethics and the ability to respect the same in his opponents. Tragically, Jamie is left only with his anger.

Teaching Historical Fiction: Student Responses to L. M. Elliott's Novels

Whether teaching the American Revolution, the Civil War, or World War II, L. M. Elliott's young adult fiction helps history come to life for students. As one of my students, Erin Katherine Sykes, stated:

Novels make history more powerful, more real, more tangible. I've never had a history teacher who used novels to teach history. We always used textbooks alone. But I imagine how powerful my education would have been if my history courses were augmented with young adult novels. Reading books like *Give Me Liberty*, *Annie*, *Between the States*, or *Under a War-Torn Sky* in a history class would have made history more than just events and names and places to memorize. . . . Connecting with the characters would have increased my compassion for those who lived through wars, and also for those who currently live through war.

In this next section, I will offer brief explanations of projects used to prompt students' deeper exploration of the novels. Having shared several of these examples of student work with L. M. Elliott (Laura), I am also including excerpts from her responses, another sign of the immense caring Laura has not only for history and writing, but for their impact on student learning.

Strategy 1: Explore the Theme of Separation.

Each of Laura's young adult novels deals with separation in some way. After carefully considering one of these moments of separation, imagine what one of the affected characters was thinking and feeling. Compose a response.

Example by Jen Ator in response to *Give Me Liberty*: Jen titled her response "Goodbye, My Son" (see Fig. 1). When asked about her approach, she said:

I wanted to imagine what Nathaniel's father was thinking as he walked away from his son. The novel is based so tightly on Nathaniel's memories and feelings about his father, but I was curious to explore what his father might

truly be like. Had he felt regret for leaving his son so long ago? Had he wished to find him again? Or had he truly just given up on life with the death of his wife? After their final scene together, I wrote this based on my perception of who Mr. Dunn was as a man.

Asked to respond to “Goodbye, My Son,” Laura especially noted Jen’s voice and unique perspective, stating, “[Jen] really captured Dunn’s emotional isolation, the sad perversion of his hope in the future that brought him to the New World... I am so glad that [Jen] wanted to know what Dunn’s reaction would be to seeing his son alive and thriving without him.”

Strategy 2: Map the Journey of a Character.

This can be mapping the geographical or emotional journey. Create a visual map of some sort, and accompany it with a written explanation of how this project contributed to your understanding of the character’s physical and/or emotional journey.

Example by Ashley Aldrich in response to

***Under a War-Torn Sky*:** Ashley used maps of Spain, France, and Germany to depict the journey of downed fighter pilot Henry Forester, the book’s protagonist. Most compelling was Ashley’s written response; an excerpt follows:

While reading the novel, I found it hard to actually picture the distance Henry had to walk to get to Spain. While all the action happening in the story, it’s easy to forget about the many miles of travel and how hard it would be on someone’s body physically. I wanted a greater understanding of the physical distance Henry traveled. . . . Seeing the actual map of his journey created in me an even deeper respect for Henry, particularly when paired with his emotional journey.

A section of the story that stuck out in my mind while completing this project was when Henry was so close to crossing over into Spain and then was captured by the Germans, who slowly took him back into France and away from his goal. He is dragged even further back into France after being caught a second time with Claudette. This illustrated the almost hopelessness of Henry ever reaching home when he was so close; for me, this brought the struggle to life even more than just words alone. . . . The map also helped me to imagine the difficulty the French Resistance had in coordinating the evacuation of the people it helped. While France is not a large country as compared to the United States, the Resistance still has to cover a lot of ground, especially in Henry’s case; had everyone not been working together, Henry may not have made it home.

Strategy 3: Examine Contrasts through Creative Writing.

Elliott’s novels are filled with contrasts. Find two contrasting scenes and merge them in a creative writing of your choice. Follow your creative work with a short essay explaining what you set out to accomplish.

Example by Michael Rinaldi-Eichenberg in response to

***Under a War-Torn Sky*:** In response to this project option, Michael wrote a poem entitled “Give Me Wings to Fly Away” (see Fig. 2). Michael describes his poem as being told in Henry’s voice, starting with “the scene in which Henry is locked in a cell with a dying dog and begins to hallucinate.” With great detail and full engagement of the senses, Michael’s poems depict a dream-like encounter in which Madame Gauloise helps to build up Henry’s strength and willpower to carry on, then the dream is interrupted as the Gestapo wakes Henry. In Michael’s own words, “the twist of events from despair, to hope, and ultimately

Goodbye, My Son
by Jen Ator

The walk home to this isolated cabin has never been so lonely. Just seeing Nathaniel, all grown up and matured, fighting as a free man for his cause, has made me realize how little of me is in him. I am not strong or brave--the only reason I came into battle was for the blood of the British who had ruined my life. Nathaniel, he came for a cause. He fought for liberty. He remained loyal to his men and stayed true to his beliefs. Loyalty is something I’ve never known much about. I think the only loyalty I have ever known is my commitment to my misery after my beloved wife passed. To think, I willingly gave up on my own flesh and blood; I abandoned a son who needed his father, and I don’t know how or if you can reconcile that. But in the deepest part of my heart and conscious, can I even truly say that I want to? It was true, I had not once tried to find him or even so much as thought about his safety and wellbeing. I was too cooped up in my own selfish fears that I completely forgot about the son I abandoned, left to survive on his own in this new country. Even now, I am certain that my intentions to find him once war has passed us will not become reality. I might think about it, but never will I put in the work it takes to find my son. I will live out my days only to die alone, but I guess it’s what I deserve. My only hope is that Nathaniel will continue to be strong, continue to live a life full of inspiration, passion, and dedication to others. I only hope that, in my absence, Nathaniel will grow into the man that I never became.

Figure 1. Student response to an “Explore the Theme” assignment

back to despair is indicative of Henry’s journey.” Having read Michael’s poem, Laura responded that she was “impressed by the juxtaposition of the inspiring and the frightening within the novel. Henry’s journey exposes him to the best and worst of human nature—bravery and cruelty, triumph and loss. And he has to find his courage in the midst of his own despair. The poem captures all that well.”

Strategy 4: The Sestina. Admittedly, the sestina is a very challenging poetic form; however, it also provides a structure for creative writing that is often helpful to students who find it difficult to start with “free verse.” A sestina is a 39-line poem comprised of six 6-line stanzas and a final tercet. The end words used in each of the six lines in stanza one are repeated in a specified order as end words in the remaining five 6-line stanzas; in the final tercet, all six end words are used in a specified order as well—three as end words, three in the middle of each line. Many websites offer detailed instructions for the sestina. A particularly good, scholarly example is that by Alberto Rios, which can be found at <http://www.public.asu.edu/~aarios/formsofverse/reports2000/page9.html>. In terms of choosing a topic for the sestina, the form works particularly well to convey characters and situations that create a sense of entrapment or circular thinking, so beginning by exploring such tensions in the novels may prove helpful.

Example by Auburn Fauver in response to *Annie, Between the States*: Auburn’s sestina entitled “Annie’s Light” (see Fig. 3) draws on the events that occurred throughout the protagonist’s stay in Carroll Prison. The sestina effectively captures Annie’s transformation from her loneliness in prison to her optimism for the future in the end. The details of the poem show how carefully Auburn read the novel; for example, she mentions that Annie saved bits of candle in her bonnet. In her reflective paper that accompanied her poem, Auburn wrote: “When I first began to work on the sestina, I found its strict structure very frustrating and limiting. However, the more I worked with it and moved things around, the more I began to enjoy its restrictive form. It forced me to re-arrange things and think of various ways to get my point across.” This reflection might be worth sharing with students to help them anticipate how the processes of perseverance and critical thinking will help them through the initial challenges they encounter as they

write. In response to Auburn’s sestina, Laura commented on its effectiveness as “very potent in displaying Annie’s emotions. [There was] a good sense of the prison’s starkness *and* Annie’s resilient ability to

Give Me Wings to Fly Away

by Michael Rinaldi-Eichenberg

Bang!

I had half-hoped I was truly dead
I even dared the Gestapo officer to “Go ahead.”
because death, as I saw it, was my only hope for escape.

I envied the dog beside me
Because the puddle he was in was one of death,
One with an end.
While mine stinks of fear and torture yet to come.
I can’t go on any longer. “I can’t dad.”

Love’s got responsibilities.

Things you gotta do even if you don’t want to.

Dad? Dad? Do you love me?

Shoot the dog, boy.

Dad?

The sound of Beethoven’s “Moonlight Sonata”
played slowly and deliberately, with an intangible force
that drew me off the couch.

Madame’s face glowed with a purity
that elevated her beauty.
Music gave her wings like a butterfly,
wings to carry her far, far away.

Her glowing aura radiated the very strength
that attracted me to her.
Inches from her face
I could feel a renewed strength within me,
a determination to persevere and travel
my road no matter the difficulties.

When her hands began to falter
I realized my face stood only inches from hers,
the minor-key chord still reverberating in the air around us.

I glimpsed her face long enough to see a smile
but her whispers to me were soon suffocated by
a sinister laugh that cut my dream short.

The Doberman’s cold, still body lay silently in my lap.

Figure 2. Student response to an “Examine Contrasts through Creative Writing” assignment

remain hopeful—one of her greatest strengths.”

Strategy 5: Scene with Stage Directions. Readers Theater has become fairly routine in the English Language Arts classroom as a way to help students creatively explore and delve deeper into important character traits, perspectives, conflicts, and themes found in literature. Drawing on the same skills needed for a Readers Theater, creating a Scene with Stage Directions pushes students even further as they must consider the broader atmosphere in a deliberate fashion. Considerations should include props and lighting; facial expressions and posture; stage positioning and movement. Even pauses, tone, and gestures should be taken into account. The more specific, the better; the goal is to create as rich a sense of context as possible while still being concise in the manner of a stage play.

Example by Shannon Hunt in response to *Annie, Between the States*: Shannon’s Scene with Stage Directions appears in Figure 4. When I shared it with Laura to see what she thought, she specifically noted Shannon’s attention to detail and her way of showing a deep understanding of the protagonist. “I love all the stage directions. What a smart choice of scenes. We writers are always trying to ‘show rather than tell.’ This drama conveys very quickly the growing up, the hard recognitions Annie must undergo, as well as the tragic romanticizing of the war that lured so many into a bloodbath. Within two pages, we see clearly that Annie is a thinker, that she has compassion for others even if they have hurt or disappointed her.”

Closing Thoughts

As I conclude this article, one that I have worked on over a period of two years in order to add to my experience teaching L. M. Elliott’s novels and engage in a year’s worth of back-and-forth correspondence with the author, I reflect on how grateful I am to be in a community such as ALAN where people place such a high value on literature, history, experience, teaching, and learning. Where else would award-winning writers take so much time to share? And where else would readers be so excited to try out new ideas in their classrooms, to ignite a deep and personalized understanding of the past as a way to illuminate the future? For all who carry the lantern of learning through writing, reading, and teaching, be encouraged, for you make a difference.

Annie’s Light

by Auburn Fauver

Carrol Prison is far from an ideal place.
It is filthy, grimy, and frigid; infested with rats and roaches too.
Oh, have I mentioned lonely? Prison is so lonely.
The darkness at night has become unbearable
I have been saving bits of candle in my bonnet so I may have some light.
This little bonnet of light has become my only source of happiness.

I squeeze my eyes as tight as I can and try to remember happiness.
Was Hickory Heights always a happy place?
The memory of my family pours in and creates a wave of hope and light
In me. Carrol Prison and Hickory Heights; I can’t even begin to compare
the two.
This war between the North and South has made so many dimensions of
life unbearable.
My home at Hickory Heights was not always happy, but it was never
lonely.

Maybe when morning comes, it will chase away my lonely
Thoughts and with it bring some happiness.
The anticipation of daylight has become unbearable
Closing my eyes is no longer an escape from this place
I can’t even remember how many months I’ve been here. One? Two?
Through my cracked window I begin to see the approaching daylight.

I have not slept a wink on this moldy straw mattress, but now the light
Is here to save me. I have a feeling that today will not be so lonely.
But I will not get my hopes up; it may be too good to
Be true. However, any change to this string of nothingness would be
some happiness.
The guard comes to tell me that a visitor has come to see me in this awful
place.
Cousin Eleanor is waiting in the parlor; perhaps she will make my day
less unbearable.

The cake, dried apples, and clean clothes she has brought keep Carrol
Prison bearable
Tucked underneath was the best part; a true gem, a shining light.
A book of Longfellow’s poetry sent by Thomas with a certain place
Marked. I memorize this poem, “The Day Is Done,” and recite it when I
feel lonely.
Oh, the thought of sweet Thomas has given me a new happiness;
A happiness that I never felt before. I wonder if he feels it too?

It seems that my Union soldier Thomas Walker does feel it too!
Today he has come to take me away from this most unbearable
Confinement. I am overwhelmed with happiness.
Thomas has convinced them that I am not guilty of treason and now they
see the light.
We marry at Cousin Eleanor’s and now I know that I cannot be lonely
Again. Now I must say goodbye to Hickory Heights and go with Thomas
to his place.
Thomas and I are a lucky two and I see a great light and hope
For our country. This unbearable war will end soon. Many will be left
lonely.
I can only hope that Northerners and Southerners alike can find
happiness, as I have in this place.

Figure 3. Student response to a “Sestina” assignment

Scene with Stage Directions for *Annie, Between the States*
by Shannon Hunt

Act 18, Scene 1

The stage is dimly lit with soft yellow, brown, and gray lights. Stage right there is a large tent made of dirty canvas and thick rope. The tent is of an A-frame construction. One of the tent flaps is tied up and to the right side with a canvas strap. From inside there is a light shining; most likely from a lit lantern. The light casts shadows on the tent walls; there are shadows of a man, cot, lantern, and cross-legged side table. Stage left is slightly more lit- but not a full brightness- the hue of just after sunset. The backdrop is of a trampled field filled with similar canvas tents but smaller in size. Interspersed amongst the tents are small cooking fires and tethered horses.

ANNIE SINCLAIR is upper stage left when the curtain rises. She is wearing an everyday dress; it is pale blue, corseted at the top with open bell sleeves. The hoop skirt is starting to lose its fluff since it is the end of the day. The sleeves and hem lines are lined with white lace. Over the dress she is wearing a lap apron of white opaque fabric and rose patterned lace. Her hair is pinned neatly and tightly in a bun at the back of her head. Her cheeks are flush from the cold and excitement.

Enter- ARMY LIEUTENANT, from lower stage left—moving toward upper center stage. He looks frantic and worn. He is wearing a Confederate gray uniform—it is dirt- and gun powder-stained, and doesn't look as if it has been washed since the start of the war. The right cuff is marooned with dried blood—most likely of Yankee soldiers, as he doesn't appear to be hurt.

ANNIE intercepts the LIEUTENANT before he turns to enter the large tent.

Annie: I wanted to know if the General needed anything else for the night.
Facing the audience- all cast on stage at a freeze position. Aside: The simple inquisitive comment kept me from sounding like a lovesick school girl.

Lieutenant: I'll ask, miss. Please, may I announce you?

Annie: Yes. Tell him it's Annie Sinclair.

The LIEUTENANT steps inside the large tent. Decipherable voices are heard. ANNIE waits outside, fidgeting and anxious. Quickly the LIEUTENANT comes back out of the tents, ducking between the flaps as he exits.

Lieutenant: He asks that you wait just a moment, miss, and that you forgive his delay. *(He looks back at the tent and then moves closer to ANNIE. He leans in to whisper)* He has just received bad news, miss. His daughter is gravely ill.
(Pause, casually exits stage right)

Annie: *(Anger and frustration visible on her face. She abides by the request and waits outside the tent. She speaks in a quickened and irritated pace, facing the audience) Aside: Daughter!? What Daughter?! (Pause for realization)* If he has a daughter, that means he has...a...a...wife! *(Take a step upstage)* What a fool I've been to read anything into that poem, his flirtatious banter. *(Thrust hands into apron pockets, pull out letter. The letter is on heavily yellowed parchment paper)* Here is the treasured letter I've carried for more than a year now, hanging on each and every word he wrote. *(Crush the letter with both hands, then stuff it back in to apron pocket)*

Enter- GENERAL STUART. He is dressed in a Confederate officer's uniform. There are no gold sashes on this occasion, no plume, no braided epaulets. His hair is brushed back and his bread is ungroomed. He stands just out of the tent, pulling on his gray coat and tucking the hair behind his ears. The wiping of his eyes lets ANNIE and the audience know he has been crying.

Stuart: *(in a somber voice)* Is that Lady Liberty? I am sorry to hear of your mother's illness, Miss Annie. Please tell her how much I enjoyed the mutton she graciously shared with us.

continued on next page

Figure 4. Student response to a “Scene with Stage Directions” assignment

Figure 4. Continued

Annie: (*facing the audience—all cast on stage at a freeze position*) *Aside*: I wanted to slap him, to shout my disappointment at him, to accuse him of leading me on. But suddenly, I just felt sorry for him, sorry for myself, sorry for them all in this cold, stark night. (*Turning to STUART*) Perhaps we could bundle Mother down in the morning, so she could meet you, General. I know that would mean a great deal to hear. But (*pause*) you must forgive her if she is quiet, General. She is not herself just yet. The diphtheria has left her very weak.

STUART turns toward ANNIE with a blank and empty expression—as if he is looking through her rather than at her.

Stuart: We must all bear the sadness that sickness brings with Christian fortitude and resignation. (*Shaking head in disbelief*) (*Mumbles*) My own little Flora, just barely five year of age...such a sweet nature, so devoted to her papa.

Annie: (*facing the audience—all cast on stage at a freeze position*) *Aside*: I didn't know what to say. This wasn't the raucous, charismatic Stuart I had known, the larger-than-life man who could embolden a thousand men by his speeches or reduce women to swoons by a glance. He looked small, hairy, dirty, unmoved by my presence. (*pause*) I had been so sure of his interest in me. But, then again I have never been courted before. How would I know the difference? In the cold moonlight, I realized that his poetic tribute to me was just part of the fun, the game, the lore of the crusade, the precious Southern cause. Flattering? Yes. Heartfelt? Probably at the moment of penning it. Serious affection? It couldn't be. At least I had enough sense not to burden this critically important general with my infatuation while he was in the middle of a confrontation with the enemy. I also had absolutely no idea what to say, my sense of embarrassment ran so deep. So I waited.

Stuart: Well. (*sigh*) Theirs is sure to be a fight tomorrow. I cannot leave my men to see my daughter, as my wife asks. God's will be done. Flora will live or die whether I am with her or not. My place is here. (*attempting a smile, but failing*) After all—(*voice swelling with a bit of his accustomed bravura*) I am the knight with the golden spurs. (*lift a foot to show ANNIE an elegant, long, gleaming spur*) They're gold, sent to me by a lady in Baltimore. Aren't they marvelous?

Annie: (*facing the audience—all cast on stage at a freeze position*) *Aside*: There was something very childlike in the question. (*Turning to speak to STUART*) Indeed, General, they are very handsome. (*forcing a smile to her face*) They befit the man who will lead the Confederacy to victory.

Instantly STUART's face is beaming, and his posture straightens.

Stuart: You see, Miss Annie, you do soothe the soldier.

Annie: (*facing the audience—all cast on stage at a freeze position*) *Aside*: I recognized the line from the poem he wrote to me. So he remembered. Or was it a line he used on all women he hoped to inspire- or impress? I felt a new wariness, a new understanding of how words could have many meanings. And yet, on this night, this moment of changing history, did it matter whether I was one of many he so flattered? His honeyed words inspired, even romanced Southerners into patriotism. That's probably what should matter most.

End scene. Curtain fall.

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Literature: Novel Guides to Promote Socially-Responsive Learning (International Reading Association, 2007). She currently serves the College of Education as the Associate Dean for Outreach and Undergraduate Studies.

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with Guest Book Reviewer Jim Davis

Memoir: Reading Life

This column will explore several aspects of memoir, particularly coming-of-age memoirs of interest to young adults and their teachers, as well as memoirs written by young adult authors. We will also review some memoirs and look at a pedagogical book about teaching memoir in the secondary English classroom.

An aspect of being a column editor for *The ALAN Review* that I have most enjoyed is the guilty pleasure of receiving dozens and dozens of free review copies from publishers who hope I will review the books in my columns. It is a guilty pleasure because the books are free and because I can only review a few of them. The best thing is that I get to look at, handle, and sometimes read many kinds of books that I would never choose in a bookstore or check out of a library. One such book—a great, five-pound hardback—arrived a couple of years ago and sat on my office bookshelf unnoticed until I began thinking about a column on reading memoirs. Once I took up *Remembered Childhoods: A Guide to Autobiography and Memoirs of Childhood and Youth* by Jeffrey E. Long (Libraries Unlimited, 2007),

I was profoundly amazed. In his brief and succinct introduction, Long defines and describes memoirs of youth in a way that reminds us why we love them so much.

Coming-of-age memoirs and autobiographies open up and guide us through worlds of human experience in a visceral and immediate way that we could not know any way else. Like a time machine, memoirs take us back to the trappings of another era, a place that is best encountered, explored, and analyzed in its own terms, rather than in the terms familiar to us in the 21st century.

An effectively composed coming-of-age memoir[’s] . . . rewards to the reader are great, presenting the opportunity for us to consider which factors and rites of passages (as of family or school life) most critically aided, or hindered the development of the mind and character of a fellow human being. (xxiii)

Long’s 500-page reference book offers briefly annotated bibliographies of 2800 books that “cover some part of the first twenty-one years of the author’s lives” (xvi). The book is divided into sections with chapter headings we might expect, such as “Connections with Nature: On the Job, in the Field, at Home,” and “The Play’s the Thing: Sports,

Recreation, and Athletes,” along with some more contemporary and unique sections such as “Multicultural Heritages: Lives and Cultures in Transition,” and “Inside and Outside the Law: Lawyers, Judges, Police, Criminals.” For teachers who are interested in building library or classroom collections of coming-of-age memoirs, this book is a great guide. And, of course, there is a chapter on memoirs by writers for children and young adults, guiding readers to the early lives of Beverly Cleary, Roald Dahl, M. E. Kerr, Gary Paulsen, Jerry Spinelli, and Paul Zindel, among others.

*** **

Of course, no bibliographer can know all of the great books in any category. A book Long missed is one of the best coming-of-age memoirs I have read in a long time, Chris Crutcher’s *King of the Mild Frontier: An Ill-Advised Autobiography* (Greenwillow Books, 2003). It is not that anything so bad happened to Crutcher in his young life growing up in the ’50s and ’60s in Cascade, Idaho—it was a “mild frontier.” It is just that he experienced very few triumphs and

victories. If he did, he did not write about them. Crutcher paints himself as a below-average kid, struggling along like most of us struggled—trying to become himself, to matter in some special way to those who know him, and to understand how his family and community are shaping him. He is given to attacks of rage and bouts of tears into his early teens. He loves his benignly alcoholic mother and his hard-working, WWII bomber-pilot father. Chris admires his older brother who excels in everything. Last string on the basketball team and a failure with the girls, he tries to impress. Chris survives his high school classes by copying all of his homework from his brother's scholarly archives.

My brother, John, was nearly three years older than I but preceded me in school by only two years, due to our birth months. John took his studies seriously and graduated as valedictorian of his class From me, [my parents] could expect Cs. I came to imagine myself the perfect C student, to which there was a certain poetic balance, all of my initials being C. . . . I could earn Cs with a minimum of time and effort directed at schoolwork, but what I really wanted was to earn them with no effort

[At this opportune moment, searching for a favorite baseball card lost in a fraudulent trade, Chris sneaks into John's private closet.] The closet is a huge walk-in with unfinished walls and a single blub dangling on a frayed cord from the ceiling just above the entrance. The switch is broken, so you simply screw the bulb tight. I open the door, reach up and twist the bulb, and immediately hear celestial music . . . because in the back of my brother's closet is every assignment he has ever done. They are separated by year and by class I instantly become what I now believe is one of the first recorded academic ecologists, because the rest

of my high-school career I will recycle every bit of that at which I now stare in awed and thankful reverence.

I'll have to do a *little* work, because I don't want to be stuck with As and the expectations that go with them, so I'll misspell some words, come to some wrong conclusions, miss some math answers by a decimal point or a few digits, [and] hand those babies in. (211–213)

Crutcher's memoir has much humor, and more pathos. When he recounted the scene of his unlikely first emergence as a creative writer, I was hearing celestial music and grinning from ear to ear. There is true joy and wonderment in Crutcher's statement, "Sometimes I stand before an auditorium filled with students or a banquet room filled with librarians and/or teachers, and I shake my head at the fact that I am living proof the universe will allow almost anything" (209).

Crutcher fans will love this book.

*** **

Having been an English teacher for almost 40 years, sometimes I think I should write a teaching memoir. If I do, I know of no better model and inspiration for such an endeavor than reading *Educating Esmé* by Esmé Raji Codell (Algonquin Books, 1999—an ALA Alex Award-winner in 2000). The book makes me cry and then laugh aloud. With humor and heartbreak, Esmé's diary of her first year of teaching fifth grade addresses many of the issues

Crutcher's memoir has much humor, and more pathos.

and experiences all young teachers face—balancing personal and professional life, avoiding exploitation by unethical school administrators, learning from older colleagues, dealing with parents, handling crises in students' personal lives that force their way into the classroom. Even though Madame Esmé (as she invites her students to call her) is writing about helping open a brand new school in a tough Chicago neighborhood in the late 1990s, almost every diary entry resonates with something I experienced in my first years of teaching in rural Iowa 37 years ago—the exploitive principal, the desperate parent, the student who needs more than we have to give.

After teaching fifth grade for a few years, Esmé became a school librarian and successful children's author. Her books include the award-winning companion novels *Sahara Special* (Hyperion Books for Children, 2003) and *Vive La Paris* (Hyperion Books for Children, 2006). For more information about and interaction with Madame Esmé, I invite readers to visit Esmé's website: <http://www.planetesme.com/>. That is where I contacted her and asked her what comments about memoir writing and reading she wanted to share with *TAR* readers. Here is some of her email response:

I was lucky that I wrote *Educating Esmé* without the thought of an audience, as a real diary, even though I sometimes don't come off so well. I've taught for several years since that diary, and if I had "do-overs," I'm sure I would have written more about other teachers and what they were accomplishing and been more self-conscious about language, but now I can read it myself and look back and see the true

frustration and isolation that was part of that first year. If I had some advice to give, I would recommend teachers journal truly for themselves before trying to write a memoir for the world. That's how they will find their voice, not only as an educator but as a writer. And that voice may surprise them . . . Explorers keep logs, and scientists meticulously chronicle their data, so why shouldn't teachers journal? In these times of so much attention to accountability, it's such a meaningful tool for educators to authentically track their own professional growth, frustrations and successes, as well as those of the children in their charge. It's not always pretty, but it's always useful to determine what works and what doesn't. I didn't publish my real diary to talk about myself; I published as a battle-cry for other teachers to tell their stories, and to value their anecdotes as documentation, whether first-year teachers or golden apple veterans. There's a lot of room on the shelf!

Here's an informal and multicultural bibliography of some other memoirs that I like, and that I like to share with children:

- The Abracadabra Kid: A Writer's Life* by Sid Fleischman (Greenwillow, 1996)
- Knots in My Yo-Yo String: The Autobiography of a Kid* by Jerry Spinelli (Knopf, 1998)
- 26 Fairmount Avenue* by Tomie DePaola (Putnam, 1999)
- How Angel Peterson Got His Name: And Other Outrageous Tales about Extreme Sports* by Gary Paulsen (Wendy Lamb Books, 2003)
- Looking Back: A Book of Memories* by Lois Lowry (Delcorte, 2002)
- Bill Peet: An Autobiography* by Bill Peet (Houghton Mifflin, 1989)
- A Day of Pleasure: Stories of a Boy Growing Up in Warsaw* by Issac Bashevis Singer (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1986)
- Chewing the Cud: An Extraordinary Life Remembered by the Author of Babe, the Gallant Pig* by Dick King-Smith (Knopf, 2002)

Down a Sunny Dirt Road: An Autobiography by Stan and Jan Berenstain (Random House, 2002)

Five Pages a Day: A Writer's Journey by Peg Kehret (Albert Whitman, 2002)

A Girl from Yamhill: A Memoir by Beverly Cleary (Morrow, 1998)

Homesick: My Own Story by Jean Fritz (Putnam, 1982)

Childtimes: A Three-generation Memoir by Eloise Greenfield and Lessie Jones Little (Harper Trophy, 1993)

Knucklehead: Tall Tales and Mostly True Stories of Growing Up Scieszka by Jon Scieszka (Viking Children's Books, 2008)

I hope this is of some help.
Best,
Esme

*** **

So, you and your students read a lot of memoirs and you start to think that memoir is the perfect platform for integrated reading and writing instruction. You might get so wild as to think of restructuring your whole ninth-grade language arts semester around memoir. When that happens, Dawn and Dan Kirby, authors of *New Directions in Teaching Memoir: A Studio Workshop Approach* (Heinemann 2007) have written the book for you.

We like memoir because we can use it to develop a large, inclusive framework that gives us the opportunity to work with our students as readers and as writers. Memoir offers possibilities for in-depth literary study and analysis and for connecting literature to personal experience through writing. (Kirby and Kirby 8)

In my opinion, before most English teachers get to page 25, they will be saying, "I have to try this. Let's see, what can I jettison to make room for memoir?" One of the best things about this 196-page, 12-chapter book is that it is more of a *why-to*

One of the best things about this 196-page, 12-chapter book is that it is more of a *why-to* than a *how-to* discussion.

than a *how-to* discussion. Especially in early chapters, such as "Memoir as Genre" and "Studio-style Teaching," readers are treated to a very accessible discussion of writing and literature pedagogy, lightly but purposefully salted with foundational citations. And I love the arguments Kirby and Kirby use to promote memoir as a vehicle for student literature study:

Contemporary Memoir is also an ideal genre for study as literature because its rules have not been set in concrete. Mercifully, there are not "five elements" to the memoir, as traditionalists will claim about the short story. Rather, CM (contemporary memoir) as a form continues to surprise and confound its readers. Its conventions and constraints are seemingly challenged by the publication of each new memoir book . . . Readers, who are teachers and students alike, are witness to an emerging genre that has not been overly dissected by critics or flattened by instruction. Here is an authentic opportunity for students to share in the process of literary criticism and in the analysis of an emerging genre. (Kirby & Kirby 7)

Kirby and Kirby convince me that as text to read and to compose, memoir is clearly about constructing meaning. Here is how they explain that Contemporary Memoir is something different from autobiographical writing by famous people:

No longer merely heroic epics of lives

well lived, CMs explore both what writers can remember and understand from their lives and also take readers with them on journeys into unknown territory where writers use the form to try to understand and make sense of unexplained experiences they have yet to fully comprehend. CM has become the genre in which any reasonably reflective individual can construct a version of his or her own life. (2)

Sounds like Kirby and Kirby are talking about *King of the Mild Frontier*.

I want to say another word about some of the most important and, in my mind, *fresh* concepts for teaching and learning that Kirby and Kirby offer.

Memoir writing requires that students write about their lived experiences, which they know far better than we. We can neither tell these students exactly how these stories should go nor what meanings they should ultimately make of them. That's because the knowledge of their experiences resides within our students, not within us as omniscient teachers. (12)

Finally, a review of this book needs to mention the very cool and extensive bibliography of contemporary memoirs provided on the twenty-two pages of Chapter 12. The only problem *TAR* readers will have with reading those lists is the height to which the pile of memoir books will grow on their bedside tables.

*** **

Now my friend and colleague Jim Davis will further help fill your bedside reading stand by reviewing two recent memoirs (one that continues this column's crusade for books about WWII) and four books about writing memoir.

Two Worthy Memoirs

Peck, Robert Newton. *Weeds in Bloom: Autobiography of an Ordinary Man*. Random House 2005.

By late middle school, most readers know, through *A Day No Pigs Would Die*, of Robert Newton Peck's challenging childhood. They will not know the array of people who enriched that young life and his adult life as well, some of whom he encountered because he had written novels. In *Weeds in Bloom*, Peck offers "a tarnished treasury of plain people, mostly poor and uneducated, who enriched me, taught me virtues, and helped mold a mite of manhood." In short, readable vignettes of people encountered and lessons learned, Peck accomplishes the self-understanding and revelation of memoir: "You shall know me by the people I have known."

One cluster of pieces comes from Peck's Vermont boyhood. In addition to his family, young Rob learned from his "gods," the local baseball team, and from a wealthy summer resident nearby who taught him to save (i.e., the difference between income and capital). He saw the work ethic, the strength

and gentleness of the local farrier, and the generosity of an unnamed fireman on the locomotive passing through town. How he cherished his one-room schoolhouse education is clear when he writes about Miss Kelly, source of his first nudge toward writing. An early manhood cluster begins with a chance encounter, as a 17-year-old private in the Army, with "Mr. Gene Autry." Peck expresses the appreciation for an impromptu concert that he never offered in person. More of the influences on Peck as a young man were encountered at work: at the saw mill, the paper mill, and later in a Manhattan office. In a final cluster from "the Florida years," life lessons come from, among others, an old man and his dog, a senior Seminole, and a woman selling her hand-sewn quilts. All are swatches in "the crazy quilt of my life," and they confirm that "hardship is not always yoked with hardness of the heart," a major theme of the collection.

Weeds in Bloom ends with thirty-three epigrammatic conclusions, "guide-irons" with which Peck invites the reader to disagree, especially if you "forge a few of your own." They resonate with material on his website, which also can provoke as well as inspire. *Weeds in Bloom* could welcome a younger or reluctant reader to the realm of memoir, perhaps leading to Gary Paulsen's *Eastern Sun*, *Winter Moon*, Eudora Welty's *One Writer's Beginnings*, or Marian Wright Edelman's *Dream Me Home Safely: Writers on Growing Up in America*. Some rich lessons are to be harvested from among these weeds.

The only problem *TAR* readers will have with reading those lists is the height to which the pile of memoir books will grow on their bedside tables.

Moore, Gary W. *Playing with the Enemy: A Baseball Prodigy, World War II, and the Long Journey Home*. Penguin Books 2006 (paper 2008).

Without a long-avoided father-son conversation triggered by the father's heart attack, Gene Moore's coming-of-age story would not have been written. Many veterans, from World War II and other conflicts, are reluctant to talk about their experiences. Gene Moore had the additional excuse of Top Secret classification, but his emotional pain was as great a restraint. Gene Moore's story begins as a fifteen-year-old local baseball phenomenon. In 1941, he was a hometown hero and a top prospect as a catcher and power hitter for the Brooklyn Dodgers. When the United States entered World War II after Pearl Harbor, the Dodgers arranged for Gene to play baseball for a team in the Navy, entertaining troops at training bases as well as in North Africa and Italy. In 1944, the Navy team was assigned to guard German sailors captured from a submarine carrying an Enigma decoding machine, something the German Navy did not know the Allies had. The POW base was secret; the assignment was classified.

Gene Moore's strengths as a catcher included the ability to control a game with his arm and his bat, to manage pitchers, and to direct more experienced players. He loved and understood the game. Facing the boredom of guard duty, and deterioration of skills he planned to take to the major leagues after the war, Gene persuaded his commander to let the Navy team teach the German crew to play baseball. His effort changed

Without a long-avoided father-son conversation triggered by the father's heart attack, Gene Moore's coming-of-age story would not have been written.

the dynamic and developed mutual respect between the teams. Their ultimate game, marking the end of the war in Europe, also ended Gene's career. Despite one last chance with the Pittsburgh Pirates, he fell into depression and alcoholism, to be saved finally by a woman who found him on a barroom floor, got him back on his feet, and married him. Gene became a successful, even inspiring businessman. Still, the pain of losing a Hall of Fame baseball career kept him from sharing his story with his son, and from enjoying his son's love of the game.

Playing with the Enemy, like many memoirs, was not written by an established author, which can be part of the appeal. Gary Moore was fifty years old when he tackled his father's story, wrote his first book, and negotiated the movie rights. The result is, at times, a slightly didactic but capably written book carried by a compelling story. It offers unique insights into little known facets of history—World War II, baseball, and even business. For many young readers, it might lead to other memoirs, like Pat Jordan's *A False Spring* or A

Nice Tuesday, perhaps Pat Conroy's *My Losing Season*. It suggests the possibility of worthy memoirs in the untold stories of those we think we know. *Playing with the Enemy* should be added to the memoir shelf in the high school classroom.

Books On Writing Memoir

Given online searching and ordering capacity, teachers and others interested in writing and in helping students write memoirs might find the following titles helpful. (Ordered by original copyright date.)

Selling, Bernard. *Writing from Within: A Guide to Creativity and Life Story Writing*. Barnes and Noble 1988 (1998).

Strong on techniques for overcoming fear and uncovering memory, Selling offers a readable text and practical, but hardly mundane, advice. He mirrors William Stafford, for example, in his emphasis on warming up and discovering *by* writing, not before writing. He also stresses rewriting as a means to insight, and advocates building a "library of significant moments," as well as writing family histories, the stories of others. A section on "Expanding and Managing Your Creativity" is followed by life-story selections from the work of students in his classes. His "Life Writing Checklist" encapsulates key points from the book and is a handy reminder to post over a desk or in a writer's notebook.

Ledoux, Denis. *Turning Memories into Memoirs: A Handbook for Writing Life Stories*. Soliel Press 1993.

Ledoux is grounded in storytelling and considers lifelists the backbone of memoir writing, although memory jogs are acceptable companions. He emphasizes craft in interviewing and researching and writing, and considers theme the life of the story. He also stresses the importance of the writer being a reader, both as a source of perspective on one's own text and as a way to learn from the writing of others. A chapter on "little things"—active voice, point of view, appropriate vs. perfect grammar, concise and precise wording—is helpful, as is the advice to "cut 10%." Numerous lifestories are included from students in Ledoux's workshops.

Roorbach, Bill. *Writing Life Stories*. Story Press 1998.

Because the writer can't tell it all, the secret to memoir, according to Roorbach, is in "scenes." Following useful thoughts on getting started and uncovering memory, his focus on the scene as the vital heart of dramatic writing, "nearly always what's missing when a piece of creative nonfiction fails to come alive," energizes the writing student and provides foundation for further work with character and "stage presence." Roorbach includes helpful chapters on research, "Finding the Facts," and on

the relationships between metaphor and meaning in the construction of memoir. Useful exercises permeate each chapter, and a narrative thread from a particular workshop enhances the early going. Roorbach also appends a solid list of suggested reading.

Phifer, Nan. *Memoirs of the Soul: Writing Your Spiritual Autobiography*. Walking Stick Press 2002.

Recognizing that "external facts about a life can be researched generations later, but the inner life is irrevocably lost unless written during one's lifetime," Pfifer seeks to help the memoirist who probes for the essence, the activating principle and center of existence. She values memoir's ability to access the keen moments, the quickening experiences, the significant fragments that together feel whole in a life. Grounded in writing process, she emphasizes gathering material, drafting, and refining text into insight. The writing itself is a quest, and she offers reminders of much to notice along the way. Generative lists address ages and concerns, but lead to ways to change perspective and focus, to craft the emerging book, and to mine the rewards of retrospection. Pfifer includes suggestions about using her guide in community, with fellow travel-

ers, and adds a considered list for further reading.

Directed to writers, but written by writing workshop leaders, these guides are rich resources for writers and teachers alike. They, too, can strengthen the nonfiction shelf in a classroom.

James S. Davis was born and raised in the southwest Missouri Ozark Mountains and began teaching high school English in 1966. Following graduate work at the University of Arkansas and at the University of Missouri, he joined a regional agency in Cedar Rapids, Iowa in 1973 as a language arts consultant. Co-founder and director of the Iowa Writing Project since 1978, he has also served the Iowa Council of Teachers of English and NCTE in many roles. He "retired" from his consultant position in 2003 to join the faculty in the English Department at the University of Northern Iowa, where IWP simultaneously relocated under his continuing direction. **Bill Broz** is assistant professor of English Education at the University of Texas-Pan American. He has published several articles and book chapters on teaching writing and literature in high school, including "Hope and Irony: Annie on My Mind" which won the 2002 English Journal Hopkins Award. He is currently promoting the idea that literature from students' home cultures is an essential component of multicultural education.

<p><i>Absolutely Maybe</i> by Lisa Yee Arthur Levine Books, 2009, 288 pp., \$16.99 ISBN: 978-0-439-83844-3</p> <p>Maybelline “Maybe” Chestnut is in high school trying to avoid anything that has to do with her mother’s charm school students and pageants. Maybe loves her mother but realizes that she just doesn’t have the mothering skills of the other moms. Her mother refuses to talk about Maybe’s birth father and does not try to protect Maybe from her latest boyfriend. When Maybe’s friend, Hollywood, wins a scholarship to USC’s film school, Maybe tags along. What Maybelline does not realize is that it takes money and looks to survive in California. All those charm school rules will come back to haunt Maybe and perhaps even help her in this new real world. She will realize what true friendship means along the way and gain a new perspective on what defines a parent in her generation.</p> <p>Mary E. Schmutz Junction City, KS</p>	<p><i>Beneath My Mother’s Feet</i> by Amjed Qamar Atheneum Books for Young Readers, 2008, 198 pp., \$16.99 ISBN: 978-1-4169-4728-8</p> <p>This captivating story is about the courage of a young girl named Nazia who has to fight tradition and family to make her own destiny. Nazia has reached a point in life that every young girl in Pakistan must face—marriage. Her mother has been saving for her dowry since the day she was born and was beginning to finish her wedding dress when tragedy strikes. Now faced with the burden of her father not working and older brother not sharing in the responsibility, Nazia has to leave school to help earn money for the family with her mother. It is through her leaving school and cleaning houses to earn money that she is faced with the thought of how she will live the rest of her life.</p> <p>In a heart-wrenching story of struggle, self-discovery and determination, <i>Beneath My Mother’s Feet</i> is sure to touch the pulse of readers.</p> <p>Taneshia Jones Tallahassee, FL</p>
<p><i>The Best Bad Luck I Ever Had</i> by Kristin Levine G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 2009, 266 pp., \$16.99</p> <p>Although many people in Moundville are upset that the Walkers are black, Dit is upset because Emma is a girl; he decides that this is the worst bad luck ever. Dit becomes friends with Emma, and because of their friendship, begins to question why Emma can’t go to his school, why the sheriff is allowed to steal, and why some townspeople won’t allow Emma to be in a school play. Dit’s emerging social and moral conscience causes him to reconsider previous actions and make difficult choices. When Doc Haley, the town barber, who is black, is accused of a terrible crime, Emma and Dit concoct a daring plan to rescue him. This novel is based on the author’s family stories.</p> <p>Melanie Hundley Nashville, TN</p>	<p><i>Between Us Baxters</i> by Bethany Hegedus Westside Books, 2009, 306 pp., \$17.95 ISBN: 978-1-934813-06-5</p> <p>Twelve-year-old Polly’s life is changing as quickly as the world around her. Set in the rural south at the beginning of the Civil Rights Movement, this novel juxtaposes a community torn apart by racism against the struggle of one girl to protect her family and preserve her friendships. One part coming-of-age story, one part social commentary, the novel details Polly’s struggle to make sense of all sorts of changes, from the uncertainty of her own body to the chaos of her larger society. Violence in this small town exposes family secrets, forcing Polly to decide for herself what she believes. An authentic description of race relations in the 1950s, this novel places larger social issues of desegregation within the lives of two families.</p> <p>Catherine McTamane Nashville, TN</p>

<p><i>Bird</i> by Rita Murphy Delacorte Press, 2008, 150 pp., \$15.99</p> <p>The protagonist and narrator of this story is not quite sure how she ended up in a large tree outside Bourne Manor. All she knows is that the wind carried her, as if has carried her all of her life. Wysteria Barrows, the mysterious and enigmatic inhabitant of the home, gives the girl the name “Miranda,” makes her steel boots so she’ll never fly away, and puts her to work mending nets for the local fishermen.</p> <p>With the help of Dr. Mead and a young Irishman named Farley, Miranda discovers the great mysteries of the house, as well as the great mysteries of her own heart and identity. Students will enjoy the fantastic elements of the narrative and setting, and teachers will appreciate the Mrs. Haversham-esque character that Murphy creates in Wysteria Barrows.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Jacob Stratman Siloam Springs, AR</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">Magic Realism ISBN: 978-0-385-73018-1</p> <p><i>The Book of Michael</i> by Lesley Choyce Red Deer Press, 2008, 267 pp., \$12.95</p> <p>This is the story of Michael Grove, who was convicted of killing his girlfriend, Lisa, and his release from prison after his ex-girlfriend, Miranda, confesses to the crime. Michael struggles with depression, loneliness, and fear as he re-enters the “real” world. With the help of his family, friends, and his kooky grandmother, Phyllis, he learns to look past the stares and ignorance of others. He is haunted by the memories of his drug-addicted past, sexual misadventures with his ex-girlfriend Miranda, and the wonderful memories of Lisa.</p> <p>Michael learns to turn his life around and resorts to reading, running, and school work to tame his memory-drugged mind. However, an interesting twist occurs at the end of the novel when letters from Miranda, the murderer of his true love, appear at his door. Letters begging for help and compassion suddenly trigger a whole new route in Michael’s life.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Tyler Quinvilan Tallahassee, FL</p>
<p><i>Crushworthy</i> by Sara Lawrence Penguin, 2008, 272 pp., \$9.99</p> <p>After a tough semester, Jinx Slater can finally relax on her holiday break—until she discovers her best friend, Liberty, has been dramatically pulled out of England by her strict father to live in another country. As her semester at Stagmount begins, things begin to turn around for Jinx: Liberty is allowed to stay at Stagmount, and it seems as though the stylish, suave Jamie might be interested in Jinx. Jinx’s entire crew even seems to rule the school this year, with their gorgeous looks, name-brand fashions, and the new additions to their clique.</p> <p>With things looking up for Jinx, drama always seems to follow her around every corner. Jamie flirts with Jinx, but then he refuses to call her for a week afterwards. When Jinx and her friends decide to let loose by sneaking out of Stagmount, they put themselves at risk.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Emily Watt Tallahassee, FL</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">Relationships ISBN: 978-1-59514-173-6</p> <p><i>Dead in the Water</i> by Robin Stevenson Orca, 2008, 169 pp., \$9.95</p> <p>In this fast-paced high-seas adventure, there are many vivid details based on the author’s real-life experiences sailing from Canada to the Bahamas. Simon embarks on an incredible journey of terrifying adventure and self-discovery. He is never sure who to trust and must do battle with poachers, bullies, and his own ineptitude. By the time he realizes that he must rely on others instead of just himself, he is trapped in the hull of a boat with his homicidal captors. This suspenseful novel holds the reader’s attention from beginning to end with very specific descriptions of nautical skill as well as the ominous power of the sea. It is well suited for middle level and early high school students. This novel would also work well as part of an integrated thematic unit on oceanography, geography, and nautical measurement.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Kenan Metzger Muncie, IN</p>

<p><i>Gringolandia</i> by Lyn Miller-Lachmann Curbstone Press, 2009, 290 pp., \$16.95</p> <p>Historical Fiction/Social Justice ISBN: 978-1093189-49-8</p> <p>It's been five years since Daniel's father was imprisoned and tortured by the Pinochet regime. After being exiled, he rejoins Daniel, now seventeen, his sister, and their mom in Madison, Wisconsin. Battling alcohol and pain from years of torture, Papà is consumed with returning to Chile to continue his revolutionary activities. This story chronicles Daniel and his girlfriend Courtney's relationship with Papà, once known as the underground journalist, Nino, as they follow him back to his home country so that he can continue the fight to liberate Chile.</p> <p>Curbstone Press is committed to publishing multicultural young adult novels that focus on issues of social justice. <i>Gringolandia</i> is a journey through the past which offers a stark glimpse into life under a ruthless dictator and his regime. Just as compelling is Miller-Lachmann's depiction of family and friends torn apart and then brought back together by a revolution.</p> <p>Jacqueline Bach Baton Rouge, LA</p>	<p><i>A Little Friendly Advice</i> by Siobhan Vivian Push, 2008, 248 pp., \$16.99</p> <p>Friendship/Love/Divorce ISBN: 978-0-545-00404-6</p> <p>This is an engaging story told in first person through the eyes of a sixteen-year-old girl named Ruby. Ruby has the ability to understand her friends and read their actions and words so that the reader knows all the characters very well. Ruby and her friends struggle through disappointments with parents and broken families and form bonds that provide support in times of need.</p> <p>The girls argue, get into trouble together, fight with their parents, and navigate the perils of teen society. With the exception of a few flashbacks, the story takes place in real time as we discover with Ruby the truth about her father and her friends. This would be an excellent book to talk about relationships and broken homes. It does contain some mild references to sex as well as specific references to teenage drinking, so it may not be suitable for younger readers.</p> <p>Kenan Metzger Muncie, IN</p>
<p><i>Living Dead Girl</i> by Elizabeth Scott Simon Pulse Books, 2008, 170 pp., \$16.99</p> <p>Abduction/Child Molestation ISBN: 978-1-4169-6059-1</p> <p>Childhood is a time of innocence, a time of imagination, and a time of bliss. School should be a place of discovery filled with opportunities to explore the world through textbooks, playing, and fieldtrips. A fieldtrip shouldn't be the beginning of a five-year nightmare. But for Alice, it was that and much, much more.</p> <p>Ray, an older guy, abducts her from an aquarium where her classmates have abandoned her over a silly argument. The author's short chapters and vivid imagery paint a portrait of a young girl who is subjected to the cycle of abuse. When Alice's body matures, Ray demands that she find a replacement, or he will murder her family. Will Alice assist Ray with the creation of another <i>living dead girl</i>?</p> <p>Due to the mature content of this young adult novel, teachers are advised to use it with 9th–12th graders or mature 8th graders.</p> <p>Anjeanette C. Alexander-Smith Tallahassee, FL</p>	<p><i>1968</i> by Michael T. Kaufman Roaring Brook, 2008, 148 pp., \$22.95</p> <p>Historical Nonfiction ISBN: 978-1-59643-428-8</p> <p>For any American history buffs out there, <i>1968</i> is a must-have. This enchanting book includes the now historic sit-ins, teach-ins, and demonstrations of that year. Filled with exceptional photographs that capture the images emblazoned in people's minds, <i>1968</i> delivers a powerful punch. Kaufman's storytelling and commanding pictures take us all back to 1968.</p> <p>The book includes interviews and moving first-person accounts to help us recall those times. With award-winning photographs and headline newspaper articles included, it brings to life the tone that existed in <i>1968</i>. The book captures the feelings of people in America who opposed the war and people who were for the war. This book even goes so far as to show the Vietnam War from the other side of the fence.</p> <p>Kaufman delivers with a story like no other.</p> <p>Kendra Nichols Tallahassee, FL</p>

<p><i>Nothing Pink</i> by Mark Hardy Boyds Mill Press, 2008, 109 pp., \$16.95</p> <p>Homosexuality ISBN: 978-1-932425-24-6</p> <p>Sin is a major part of Vincent's life; it must be identified and then destroyed. Every moment since hearing the word "queer," Vincent has known he was gay and prayed for salvation. He prayed every day until he met Robert. Now, as he revels in the joy of being loved, he must also face the prospect of awaiting damnation. However, the discovery of his homosexuality is accompanied by a freeing religious revelation. <i>Nothing Pink</i> by Mark Hardy opens up the closed book policies when talking about gays and religion. Placing a homosexual young man in the family of a Baptist minister produces the unique conflict present in this novel.</p> <p>Hardy writes about issues that adolescent readers are deeply invested in. Written with a strong voice, yet still filled with topical sensitivity, <i>Nothing Pink</i> will allow students to validate their own thoughts and experiences concerning homosexuality.</p> <p>Caroline Coy Tallahassee, FL</p>	<p><i>Peace, Locomotion</i> by Jacqueline Woodson G.P. Putnam's Sons, 2009, 136 pp., \$15.99</p> <p>Family/War/Loss ISBN: 978-0-399-24655-5</p> <p><i>Peace, Locomotion</i> is the lyrical and thoughtful companion text to Woodson's National Book Award Finalist, <i>Locomotion</i>. Lonnie Collins Motion, aka Locomotion, struggles to find his place in his new foster family. He loves his new family but misses his sister, Lili, who was placed with a different family. He is dealing with the loss of his parents while his new family is struggling with his foster brother's war injury. The novel's backdrop is a country questioning what peace means during the time of an unwanted and unpopular war and provides a timeless quality to the story. Woodson once again shows her ability to create a thoughtful and reflective character who confronts and grows from dealing with his fears and insecurities. While this story deals with social issues and societal concerns, it does so without the bleakness often present in texts focusing on loss, grief, war, and foster families.</p> <p>Melanie Hundley Nashville, TN</p>
<p><i>Piggy</i> by Mireille Geus Front Street, 2008, 110 pp., \$14.95</p> <p>Autism/Emotional Problems ISBN: 978-1-59078-636-9</p> <p>Lizzy Bekell, whose nickname is Dizzy, is a 12-year-old autistic girl who possesses some interesting quirks. Dizzy struggles to fit in; she is different, and is made fun of by her classmates for it. The other kids call her names, while her mother tells her she is special. One day, a girl named Margaret, or Piggy, approaches Dizzy at her bus stop hangout. Margaret finds that she can easily manipulate Dizzy to get what she wants, even going so far as to create a fair-weather friendship. This begins a sequence of events that will change Dizzy and Piggy forever.</p> <p>Even though the book was translated from Dutch to English, it retains all of its emotion and vigor. The significance of autism and its effects are truly brought out by author Mireille Geus. <i>Piggy</i> is short and sweet, with a rollercoaster-like pace that doesn't let up.</p> <p>Alex Platt Tallahassee, FL</p>	<p><i>The Postcard</i> by Tony Abbott Little Brown, 2008, 354 pp., \$15.99</p> <p>Action/Adventure ISBN: 978-0-316-01172-3</p> <p>Jason is finally a teenager and is excited to have the summer all to himself and his best friend, Hector, when his mother announces that she is shipping him to St. Petersburg, Florida, instead. The first line in the story proclaims that his grandmother has just passed away, so Jason must help his father bury her. Everything seems to be going all right until a mysterious phone call shakes Jason to the core. Suddenly, he is swept into a world of old, secret-coded postcards and hidden stories, family secrets, and late-night missions.</p> <p><i>The Postcard</i> is an enthralling story about unsolved family mysteries and secret orders. It is a story within a story containing vivid images of old-time and modern-day Florida. Postcards, journals, and magazines are pieced together to find the truth of what really happened to Jason's grandmother. It turns out that death is only the beginning.</p> <p>Courtney Burr Altamonte Springs, FL</p>

<p><u>Rehab</u> by Randi Reisfeld Simon Pulse, 2008, 225 pp., \$8.99</p> <p>Kenzie Cross is an up-and-coming starlet. She is the breakout star on the hit TV action drama <i>Spywitness Girls</i>. She falls in with the party crowd, develops a drug problem, and becomes the darling of the tabloids. Nonetheless, she is chosen for the lead role in the much-anticipated dramatic film <i>The Chrome Hearts Club</i>. But when her drug problem affects the press for the movie, the director gives her an ultimatum: go to rehab or you're out of the film. Kenzie chooses rehab.</p> <p><i>Rehab</i> follows Kenzie as she struggles to accept and overcome her drug addiction. Reisfeld parallels Kenzie's story to those of Hollywood starlets today. Reisfeld makes her characters relatable to readers of all ages. Her references to popular culture and flowing story line make <i>Rehab</i> a great read.</p> <p>Beth Brenner Tallahassee, FL</p>	<p><u>Seaborn</u> by Craig Moodie Roaring Brook Press, 2008, 208 pp., \$17.95</p> <p>Luke and his father get caught in the middle of a storm off of the coast of Nantucket, and Luke's father is thrown from the yacht with nothing but an inflatable lifeboat to save him. After the storm subsides, Luke is left alone in the yacht and his father is missing. At the end of the novel, Luke finds his father adrift in the ocean while simultaneously coming across a boat that is in the same area. They are eventually saved and Luke's father admits that he cheated on his mother, which is why she left.</p> <p>The author spends a lot of time explaining the events leading up to the climactic storm, but fails to expand on many details of the storm and its repercussions. The plot was resolved in such a predictable manner that it gave the book a lackluster finish.</p> <p>Alyssa Licitra Tallahassee, FL</p>
<p><u>The Secret Story of Sonia Rodriguez</u> by Alan Lawrence Sitomer Hyperion Books for Children/Disney Book Group, 2008, 312 pp., \$17.99</p> <p>Sonia Rodriguez lives each day caught between two worlds. As the only daughter in the family, she struggles to balance the demanding old-world expectations of her traditional Hispanic household with the expectations of her friends and teachers at her California high school, as well as her dream to become the first in her family to graduate. The trajectory of Sonia's life ultimately hinges upon two important events—her decision to focus on doing whatever it takes to graduate from high school coupled with a trip to Mexico to visit with her grandmother. She notes that the important story she has to tell involves “sex and violence and drugs But there is love too.” In telling her own secret story, Sonia follows through on this promise (directly and frankly, at times) and finds not only her voice, but also a way to reconcile the best of both of her worlds.</p> <p>Kevin Kienholz Emporia, KS</p>	<p><u>See No Evil</u> by Jamila Gavin Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2009, 208 pp., \$16.95</p> <p>Antonietta (Nettie) Roberts has led a life of luxury so far in her twelve years. She has her own nanny, her own butler, her own chauffeur, even her own suite of rooms to run through. She has also never attended a formal school. She was tutored for as long as she could remember by Miss Kovachev. Suddenly, Miss Kovachev deserts Nettie and all of her dreams without leaving so much as a note.</p> <p>Nettie's father, Vladimir, adores his little girl and will do most anything to make her happy. Unfortunately, this could mean that he would do illegal things. Nettie and her new friend, Bennie, learn all about seeing, hearing, and speaking evil in Regent Mansion in London, England. What kind of secrets does Nettie's home hold? The mystery does not unfold until the absolute end! Ages 12+.</p> <p>Mary E. Schmutz Junction City, KS</p>

<p><i>Sitting on the Edge</i> by C. Lee McKenzie Westside Books, 2009, 268 pp., \$16.95</p> <p>Family/Self-mutilation/Suicide ISBN: 978-1-934813-06-5</p> <p>“Something’s wrong.” So begins the story of Shawna Stone, the street-wise 16-year-old who has learned not to rely on anyone but herself. Abandoned by her mother with only a bus ticket and the name of the grandmother she’s never met, Shawna sets out for Kay’s horse ranch in California. McKenzie tells Kay and Shawna’s stories in alternating voices, an effective means of uncovering how deeply Shawna’s pain runs, how tightly both Kay and Shawna hold to their secrets, and how privately they each yearn for more. This is a novel for older students, as it includes details of Shawna’s cutting herself and multiple attempts at suicide.</p> <p>Catherine McTamane Nashville, TN</p>	<p><i>Step to This</i> by Nikki Carter Dañina/Kensington Press, 2009, 232 pp., \$9.95</p> <p>True to Life/Teen Christian Fiction ISBN: 978-0-7582-3439-1</p> <p>Gia Stokes is a fifteen-year-old who is grounded in her faith and in her self-esteem. Her mother keeps her in line through church functions and tough love because she does not want Gia to become a teen mother. Gia has her head on straight with AP classes, an SAT high-frequency-word vocabulary, and creative dancing ability. But her identity and faith are challenged when she decides to try out for the Hi-Steppers dance team at her high school.</p> <p>As she claims one of the top spots in the group, Gia’s popularity soars. Valerie, the leader of the Hi-Steppers, hooks Gia up with a makeover and a football player named Romeo. These changes cause Gia to lose touch with herself and her best friend, Ricky. She weaves a web of lies that puts her in a challenging position.</p> <p>Middle school and high school readers will enjoy this engaging page-turner!</p> <p>Anjeanette C. Alexander-Smith Tallahassee, FL</p>
<p><i>Stepping Up</i> by Mark Fink Westside Books, 2009, 216 pp., \$16.95</p> <p>Self-Discovery/Friendship/Basketball/Bullies ISBN: 978-1-934813-03-4</p> <p>Basketball. Making friends. Talking to . . . <i>girls</i>. All of these teenage pursuits come easily to his best friend, Mike, but not to Ernie Dolan. On the basketball court, Ernie can keep up, but he is a little too slow and a little too short to ever be “the man.” Ernie often finds himself on the outside looking in. On the first day of a competitive basketball camp, Ernie is nicknamed “Choke” by the camp bully. By the third day, Ernie and Mike are barely friends anymore. At the dance with the girls’ camp, Ernie humiliates himself by spilling soda on several girls. However, kind coaches, new friends, and a near-fatal tragedy help Ernie discover that by being himself, he really can find the confidence to “step up.”</p> <p>Blake Tenore Nashville, TN</p>	<p><i>Suite Scarlett</i> by Maureen Johnson Point, 2008, 368 pp., \$16.99</p> <p>Family ISBN: 978-0-439-89927-7</p> <p>Scarlett is the third of four children in the Martin family, who own, operate, and inhabit the historic Hopewell Hotel in NYC. The hotel once hosted some of the most glamorous movie stars in its 27 rooms; however, today the building is shabby and rundown. On her 15th birthday, Scarlett is put in charge of one of the hotel’s 27 rooms, the Empire Suite. Scarlett finds herself maintaining the room of Mrs. Amberson, a failed 1970s starlet who has returned to the city to write her memoirs.</p> <p>Throughout <i>Suite Scarlett</i>, the theme of family unity runs deep. Maureen Johnson does a great job of portraying an American family with financial problems and busy schedules. In addition, the members of the Martin family all begin to realize the things in their lives that are the most important and meaningful. Overall, Johnson’s characters are quirky, memorable, and overall believable people.</p> <p>Melissa Zamonis Tallahassee, FL</p>

<p><i>Thief</i> by Brian James PUSH (Scholastic), 2008, 247 pp., \$8.99</p> <p>Elizabeth, known as Kid, may be a thief, but she is also a victim. With an abusive father in jail, an emotionally fragile mother in medical care, and a foster parent, Sandra, who demands she steal to earn her stay, Kid's life is more complicated than it may appear.</p> <p>Wishing only to belong and be loved, Kid pours herself into relationships with Alexi and Dune, Sandra's band of thieves. Where her friendship with Alexi is ruled with fear, Dune's love is unconditional. Alexi's jealousy of newcomer Dune eventually leads to the ultimate betrayal, and Kid and Dune are on the run. After a short respite in suburban malls, Kid and Dune learn they aren't nearly as safe as they may feel.</p> <p>Kid narrates the story beautifully. Symbols of wings and wishes crop up throughout the piece, as Kid remains hopeful that she will find something that lasts forever.</p> <p>Faith H. Wallace Kennesaw, GA</p>	<p><i>The Twilight Zone: Walking Distance</i> Adapted by Mark Kneene, illustrated by Dove McHargue Walker, 2008, 72 pp., \$9.99</p> <p>ISBN: 978-0-8027-9715-5</p> <p>In this adaptation of a classic <i>The Twilight Zone</i> screenplay, high-strung Martin Sloan is struggling to deal with everyday pressures and longs for days gone by. In a strange turn of events, he does, in fact, return to his past, desperately trying to warn the younger version of himself of what lies ahead. Will anyone believe that Sloan has actually traveled in time? How will he return to his own life? Will there be consequences? Clues in the graphic novel format let the reader in on a few details in advance of Sloan, himself!</p> <p>In addition to <i>Walking Distance</i>, other classic <i>The Twilight Zone</i> screenplays have been adapted, including <i>The After Hours</i>, <i>The Odyssey of Flight 33</i>, and <i>The Monsters Are Due on Maple Street</i>. In this new adapted format, <i>The Twilight Zone</i> stories will find a new audience.</p> <p>Faith H. Wallace Kennesaw, GA</p>
<p><i>Three Cups of Tea</i> by Greg Mortenson & David Oliver Relin Adapted for Young Readers by Sarah Thomson Puffin Books, 2009, 209 pp., \$8.99</p> <p>ISBN: 978-0-14-241412-5</p> <p>"Greg Mortenson was lost. He didn't know it yet." So begins Greg Mortenson's inspirational story. He attempted to climb K2, the world's second tallest mountain, but he never made it to the top and ended up lost in Pakistan. The people of Korphe took him in and helped him. He was so moved by their generosity that he vowed to build a school for the children. He spent several years raising money to build over 60 schools. Over the course of his work in Pakistan, he has had to deal with soldiers, Taliban officials, village leaders, politicians, and the mujahideen. "With the first cup of tea, you are a stranger," a villager tells Greg. "With the second cup, you are an honored guest. With the third, you become family." The generosity of the Pakistani people with whom Greg becomes family contrasts sharply with the image that many Americans have.</p> <p>Melanie Hundley Nashville, TN</p>	<p><i>3 Willows: The Sisterhood Grows</i> by Ann Brashares Delacorte, 2009, 318 pp., \$18.99</p> <p>ISBN: 978-0-385-73676-3</p> <p>Realistic Fiction</p> <p>After four summers with the sisterhood of the traveling pants, Brashares introduces us to the next generation of best friends whose lives are linked not by pants, but by willow trees. Polly, Ama, and Jo have just finished eighth grade when they find themselves dealing with a new job, an unexpected adventure, and complicated family circumstances. Separated for most of the summer, the three become distant only to be pulled back together by tragedy. Younger readers who enjoyed Brashares's previous novels will enjoy this one as well.</p> <p>Their story is told from three different points of view, and Brashares includes observations about willow trees as a device for setting up each section. Although <i>3 Willows</i> seems to have been marketed as part of the original series (and the previous characters make cameos in the story), this novel can stand on its own and is undoubtedly destined to have a sequel.</p> <p>Jacqueline Bach Baton Rouge, LA</p>

<p><i>Well Defined: Vocabulary in Rhyme</i> by Michael Salinger</p> <p>Illustrated by Sam Henderson Wordsong-Boyd's Mill Press, 2009, 64 pp., \$16.95 ISBN: 978-1-59078-615-4</p> <p>A book based on defining words may seem an unlikely choice for a classroom library, but <i>Well Defined</i> is light and fun while still being informative. Salinger defines “two-dollar words” (p. 7),—like equivocal, recalcitrant, and transmute—in poetic form. Carefully crafted definitions (with their own two-dollar words) are told through story-like context with plenty of personification; students will have plenty of fun as they try to imitate the new words. Cartoon-like illustrations accompany many of the poems and provide visual cues for readers. Parts of speech of each word are included in the table of contents, and dictionary definitions are listed at the bottom of each poem.</p> <p>Faith H. Wallace Kennesaw, GA</p>	<p><i>What They Always Tell Us</i> by Martin Wilson</p> <p>Delacorte, 2008, 291 pp., \$15.99 ISBN: 978-0-385-90500-8</p> <p>Friendship</p> <p>Teen angst just got a much needed 21st-century perspective in this genuine story of two brothers and their struggle to come together throughout a turbulent school year. James was once close to his younger brother Alex, but things have changed. James, a senior, does not care to be associated with Alex, a loner trying to find his niche. James has his own issues to deal with: picking a college, going to parties, girls, and finding a way to stay sane in small-town Alabama. Alex must overcome his shaky past and the pressure to live up to his big brother's reputation. James and Alex discover the value of family and friendship in this powerful tale of self-acceptance and growing up.</p> <p>James and Alex's perspectives alternate through the chapters. Alex's chapters capture his loneliness and desire for social recognition while James's focus on his insecurities and concern for the future.</p> <p>Bryce Lewis Tallahassee, FL</p>
<p><i>Unwind</i> by Neal Shusterman</p> <p>Simon & Shuster Books for Young Readers, 2007, 352 pp., \$16.99 Science Fiction/Dystopia ISBN: 978-14169-1204-0</p> <p><i>Unwind</i> takes place after the Second Civil War, a long and violent war between the Pro-life and Pro-choice armies. According to the Bill of Life, a set of laws passed to end the war, life is sacred from the point of conception until the age of 13. Between 13 and 18, a child may be retroactively “aborted” as long as the child's life doesn't technically end. The process by which a child is both terminated and yet still alive is called “unwinding.”</p> <p>Connor's parents choose to “unwind” him because he gets in trouble at school. Risa, an orphan, is unwound by the state because there isn't enough money to take care of her. Lev's family is religious, and his “unwinding” has been planned since his birth. He is raised to see himself as a “tithe.” These three teens meet by accident and struggle to survive until they are 18.</p> <p>Melanie Hundley Nashville, TN</p>	<p><i>Publishers who wish to submit a book for possible review should send a copy of the book to:</i></p> <p><i>Melanie Hundley</i> <i>Dept. of Teaching and Learning</i> <i>Box 230</i> <i>230 Appleton Place</i> <i>GPC</i> <i>Nashville, TN 37203</i></p> <p><i>To submit a review for possible publication or to become a reviewer, contact Melanie Hundley at melanie.hundley@vanderbilt.edu.</i></p>

Carolina Dreams:

Kerry Madden and the Saga of the Weems Family of Maggie Valley

“Lord help this family that has been reared on false hopes and pipe dreams.”—Grandma Horace in *Louisiana’s Song* (p. 225)

In 2005, Kerry Madden published *Gentle’s Holler* to much critical acclaim. Two more novels in the Maggie Valley series—*Louisiana’s Song* and *Jessie’s Mountain*—have quickly followed. In *Gentle’s Holler*, we meet Olivia Weems. Livy Two, as she is called by her family and friends, is coming of age in the early 1960s in Maggie Valley on the North Carolina side of the Great Smoky Mountains. She is surrounded by nine siblings, music, the natural beauty of the Smokies, books, and poverty. A gifted storyteller, Livy Two describes the saga of her family as they struggle to overcome the constant hurdles life puts before them.

In *Gentle’s Holler*, Livy Two introduces us to the members of her family. Her father Tom sells encyclopedias and baby food to try to make ends meet, but his true love is his music. He spends his time writing country songs and picking his banjo while he dreams of Nashville. Her mother Jessie’s dream has already come true. As an only child, Jessie had longed for a large family. While we admire her ability to juggle the responsibilities of raising this family, we also recognize the toll the ten children



and the perpetual poverty has taken on her. The size of the family affects the other characters as well. Tired of his father’s lackadaisical attitude toward supporting the family, Emmett, the oldest brother, has a heated argument with his dad and eventually runs off with an erstwhile uncle to work at Ghost Town in the Sky, a newly opened amusement park. As she grows older, Livy Two assumes more responsibilities around the house, including caring for her blind younger sister Gentle. The transition from child to teen is difficult for anyone, but Livy Two greatly struggles with her identity. At one point in the novel, she repeatedly sings, “Who am I? Who am I?” (27). To make matters worse for everyone, Grandma Horace—whom Livy Two calls the Wicked Witch of Enka—moves in to help with the children. Life for the family becomes even more tragic when Tom Weems is in a car accident and suffers a severe head injury. He lapses into a coma, and the

family falls deeper into poverty. The novel ends with Livy Two and her family standing around the hospital bed, hoping one day that Daddy can return to Maggie Valley.

Tom Weems does return home in the first chapter of *Louisiana’s Song*, but he is not the same man. His brain has been injured, and he struggles to find words and memories. Ever the pragmatist, Jessie knits sweaters and baby blankets to sell, but she still has more

About Author Kerry Madden

Kerry Madden has written plays, screenplays, features (for publications like the *Los Angeles Times*, *Salon*, and *Sierra Club Magazine*), and six books, including *Offsides*, a New York Library Pick for the Teen Age in 1997, and *Writing Smarts* (American Girl). In 2005, she turned her hand to children's literature with *Gentle's Holler*, the first installment in what became the award-winning Maggie Valley Trilogy. It earned starred reviews in both Kirkus and Publisher's Weekly and was the featured children's book of North Carolina at the National Book Festival. The next book in the trilogy, *Louisiana's Song* (2007), was equally well received, being named a Bank Street College Book of the Year and a finalist for several other awards. The third installment, *Jessie's Mountain*, was published in 2008 to strong reviews. Most recently, Madden has published a biography of *To Kill a Mockingbird* author Harper Lee in Viking's Up Close Series (March 2009). She has taught creative writing at the University of Tennessee, Ningbo University in China, UCLA, and elsewhere, and has visited schools across the country as a guest author. Her website is www.kerrymadden.com.

bills than money in the family's "Everything Box." Although Becksie—the oldest girl—and Livy Two both find part-time jobs, there is never enough money to go around. Emmett had promised to send money from Ghost Town, but he seldom does. Grandma Horace threatens to move the entire family to her house in the mill town of Enka.

Then there is school. Since Livy Two and her younger sister Louise were born in the same year, they are in the same seventh-grade class together. At school and on the bus, they find themselves the target of constant bullying because of their poverty. Louise is so traumatized by her experiences that she refuses to attend school, preferring instead to remain home to paint and help with Daddy and the little ones. Only after her teacher threatens to send the truant officer does the shy and anxious Louise return to school. In the novel's climactic scene, Livy Two hikes the children and Daddy into the mountains; he wanders

off in the mist and becomes lost. Louise remains calm enough to find him. As readers, we have already seen Livy Two start to come of age in *Gentle's Holler*. In *Louisiana's Song*, we watch as Louise grows from an anxious and withdrawn child into a stronger, more confident teen.

At the beginning of the third book, things have gone from bad to worse for the family. They have hit rock bottom financially. They are way behind on the rent and face eviction. The electricity has been cut off, and Grandma Horace is more determined than ever to move the family away from Maggie Valley. She hopes that Jessie can find work either at the textile mill or the paper plant in Canton. In an effort to save the family from financial ruin, Livy Two hatches a plan to run away to Nashville to sell her songs and secure a recording contract. She has saved enough money from her bookmobile job to buy a roundtrip bus ticket. She wakes up early one morning and sneaks off without telling anyone. However, she is followed by her little sister Jitters. The two sisters argue, and finally Livy Two agrees to let Jitters come along. Naturally, they find nothing but misfortune in Nashville. Livy Two returns home dejected, having betrayed the trust of her family and friends by pulling this stunt. However, all is not without hope for the Weems family. Jessie does find a secretarial job in Canton, so money is not as scarce. Grandma Horace returns to Enka alone. Daddy has even started playing his banjo again. While riding through Maggie Valley, Livy Two spies an old building and dreams another dream. What if the family opened a music hall? A place where the tourists could hear real mountain music? With the help of her teacher and some local musicians, the Weems family opens Jessie's Smoky Mountain Music Notes. At the end of the book, Livy Two shows her maturity with these words, "It'll get lean again come winter, but if we can watch our money and be careful, we can eke out a living. . ." (p. 303).

I first met Kerry Madden at the 2006 Children's Festival of Reading in Knoxville. I later heard her speak at a roundtable discussion at the Southern Festival of Books in Nashville in October of 2007. After a couple of emails back and forth, we decided to work on an interview about Livy Two's family and the books Kerry has written about them. The following interview took place via a series of emails from November 2007 until January 2008.

TAR: Your Maggie Valley novels are such a departure from *Offsides*, your first book. *Offsides* details a teenaged girl's coming of age as the daughter of a college football coach. You are the daughter of a college football coach, so the autobiographical connection is obvious. These stories are set in the Smokies in the 1960s. Livy Two's experiences with life and family are no doubt quite different from yours. How did you come to write *Gentle's Holler*?

KM: I began writing *Gentle's Holler* when I was missing the Smoky Mountains. I had lived in Tennessee throughout high school and college from 1977–1986, and it was home. Seasons are subtle here in California, and I was longing to write something that I loved and cared about. It also came out of a dark period. *Offsides* came out in 1996. I had had three more books rejected—two novels and a collection of short stories. I was writing pieces like “How to stay healthy if you sell insurance,” stroke victim stories, and aging parent stories. I was writing shadow soaps,¹ ghostwriting, too, and struggling to figure out how to begin again. I grew up drawing pictures of mountains and big families, and when I met my husband, Kiffen Lunsford, one of thirteen children, with roots deep in North Carolina and Tennessee, I knew I had found the love of my life. In 2002, I finally returned to my love of big families and mountains, and I began something called “Smoky Mountain Girl,” which became *Gentle's Holler*.

TAR: In *Gentle's Holler*, you include a statement from your agent, Marianne Merola. After an early draft, she wrote, “The kid's blind, the dad's in trouble, and they're broke. How about a little hope?” When I heard you speak in Nashville, you discussed some of the difficulties you had with the early drafts. Could you describe some of the revisions you made in the story?

KM: When I first began *Gentle's Holler*, I had the great misconception that because I was writing

¹ A “shadow soap” is where the producers give a writer a highly detailed breakdown/outline of the show's plot-line a month in advance, and ask the writer to write a particular episode from that outline to see how well they can adapt to the format of writing the dialogue and characters.

for a younger audience, I could write it fast and get it done and get it published—all the *wrong* reasons. I did write a fast, furious, and treacly first draft that was rejected by everybody. I sent it out too early, and the rejections stacked up. My son, Flannery, 13 at the time, told me, “Nothing happened too exciting in the book, and kids want excitement and adventure in books.” We argued as

I drove him to a friend's house. Finally, he said, “Fine, Mama. Don't change a word. Leave it just the way it is.” I knew then how wrong I was, and I had to go back and really spend the time and write the draft that scared me to write and take all the time I needed and not rush it. I had intended originally to write a book from every Weems kid's point of view, but fortunately, my editors saw the folly of that idea and suggested I keep Livy Two as the storyteller because I'd established her voice as the family's eyes and ears. I am still so grateful for that advice.

TAR: Why did you choose Maggie Valley as the setting for your novels?

KM: In 1994, my three-year-old daughter Lucy had a meltdown on Thomas Wolfe's front porch when we were visiting his home in Asheville. She screamed, “Dis is so boring!” Kiffen tried to console her, but it was no use, so we left, and I looked at a map and said, “Let's take the back roads to Knoxville through the mountains. On Highway 19, there's a town called Maggie Valley.” At the time, we'd been traveling cross-country, and we were on our way back to California. I was visiting old football towns to write *Offsides*. The name “Maggie Valley” sounded like some kind of old-fashioned oasis. We drove the kids there and spent the day playing, exploring creeks, and climbing trees. We went to the

When I first began *Gentle's Holler*, I had the great misconception that because I was writing for a younger audience, I could write it fast and get it done and get it published—all the *wrong* reasons.

Livy Two is kinder to her younger siblings than I was, but storytelling was a huge part of growing up.

Pancake House and saw Ghost Town in the Sky. We had a wonderful time, so in 2001, when I began writing about the Weems family, I decided I'd plant them in Maggie Valley and hope for the best.

TAR: In *Gentle's Holler*, Livy Two tells us the origin of her name. Her older sister Olivia died at birth, and her parents "didn't see no use in wasting the name, so as I was the next girl born, I became Olivia Hyatt Weems too. Livy Two for short" (3). Where did the idea for Livy Two's name come from?

KM: My husband had a brother, Alfred Kiffen, who died at birth. When my husband was born years later, they named him Alfred Kiffen. They never called him "Kiffen Two," but it always struck me. Who would Kiffen have been if the baby had lived? Then I found out that Salvador Dali had a brother who died at birth named Salvador, and one of my children's babysitters, Rose, had three older sisters named Rose, all of whom died at birth. That's how I got the idea.

TAR: With her Uncle Hazard stories, Livy Two proves she is a natural storyteller. I read on your website how you often told stories to your younger siblings. How much of your storytelling is in Livy Two's character and in her stories?

KM: Because I was the oldest of four children, I was the designated family babysitter. I made up characters and stories, but it was all geared toward performance. When I read Laura Ingalls Wilder, I had my brothers and sister dress up like prairie children. I made gruel for them to taste and dressed them up as *Oliver Twist* orphans. Sometimes, I blended stories—an orphanage might have shifted into a boarding school with a cruel Miss Minchin twin at the helm. I played evil train conductors, dying mothers who made miraculous recoveries I grew up in football stadiums in football towns, and I longed for other stories besides ball games. My sister is a born actress, so she played every role with great passion, but my brothers

rebelled, especially when sports were on TV. Livy Two is kinder to her younger siblings than I was, but storytelling was a huge part of growing up.

TAR: Part of the appeal of the series is Livy Two's narration. Many of the conflicts—Gentle's blindness, Daddy's accident, Louise's shyness and truancy, the problems with Emmett and Uncle Buddy, the constant lack of money—are not hers to resolve. Yet she describes these conflicts with near pitch-perfect voice. What are some of the characteristics in Livy Two that make her an ideal narrator?

KM: I always begin with voice . . . so I worked on her voice, wrote pages and pages in her voice, trying to get to know her . . . I think if I had to choose one thing, I would say it was her curiosity. She has a great curiosity and a need to make things right by doing, at times, the most wrong, stubborn thing. I think, for instance, spicing up Louise's shyness with exotic diseases was irresistible to her. She was so much fun to write, because she is a combination of impetuosity and worry and yet absolute belief that she is doing the right thing. With Livy Two, I had the freedom to listen to her and figure out what she wanted to do and add plenty of drama Sometimes, the plot came to a grinding halt, but when I gave her trouble—Grandma Horace, Uncle Buddy, Jitters—then she had something to fight against. Charles Baxter says, "Get your characters up a tree and throw rocks at them." When I wasn't throwing rocks at Livy Two, things went along fine, but the story was dull-dull-dull.

TAR: While she might be the perfect narrator, she is far from the perfect child. Many of her decisions are highly questionable and often have negative consequences. Part of coming of age is making mistakes and learning from them. How do Livy Two's mistakes change her as a character?

KM: I think she realizes it when she pushes it too far, but never until it's too late. What's done is done. But I could feel her growing up in *Jessie's Mountain* and changing into a more compassionate person. In *Gentle's Holler*, Jitters was mainly an irritant to her, but when she was forced to deal with her in *Jessie's Mountain*, she began to respect her sister more.

Livy Two's heart is filled with good intentions, but some of those good intentions backfire, and when they do, she can hear the suffering in the voices of those she's hurt. That's part of growing up—it was also hard for me to let these Weems kids grow up, but they were doing it whether I liked it or not—like my own children.

TAR: *Louisiana's Song* tackles many issues—Daddy's return and his recovery from his accident, Grandma Horace's influence over the family, Becksie winning Maggie Queen. However, Louise truly drives the plot in this story. Louise is a talented painter; she is also very shy and anxious. She experiences many awkward moments as she matures toward adolescence. She stays home from school and avoids the bullies on the bus. As the story progresses, so does her confidence. Describe how you came to develop her character.

KM: I wrote forty pages in Louise's voice, and this helped me discover her as a character. I was terribly shy as a girl. I wasn't shy at home, but I was horribly shy in public, and I had to ride a bus not that different from Louise's experience. The mean boys dominated the buses in Pittsburgh and Knoxville, and I could not eat breakfast, knowing I had to face them. I carried a book at all times. I was also huge—so I took that shyness and towering height (I was 5'7" by 5th grade and then stopped growing) and gave that to Louise. I think Louise finds her passion in painting, and with her passion comes confidence. She slowly discovers the thing she loves best, and this gives her hope.

TAR: The series is written in Appalachian dialect. As a child, you moved around quite a bit. Although you spent many years in Knoxville, you now live in Los Angeles. How difficult was it for you to write the novels in dialect?

KM: North Carolina is the first place where I have real memories, and Tennessee is the place I stayed and stopped moving with my family to the next football town. Being shy, I always listened hard to mimic the dialect. My father has always spoken with a southern accent, and one of my brothers does, but not the other. One of my most favorite

films is *Coal Miner's Daughter*, and I've watched it through the years and listened to the language of that film. I was an exchange student in England at Manchester University for my junior year, and I did not want to return to Knoxville to graduate. I traveled throughout England, Ireland, and Scotland, and I loved every bit. However, I knew I had to go back, so I decided to treat Knoxville as another exchange year. I paid very close attention to how people talked and discovered southern writers. The following year, I started my MFA at Tennessee and taught Voice and Diction, and I loved the different accents of my students.

TAR: Along those same lines, you do a wonderful job with the pacing of the novels. *Life in Southern Appalachia* moves at a different speed, a different cadence. How were you able to capture that element of the story?

KM: I was homesick for seasons and the mountains. I thought about the books that filled my heart as a child and found myself wanting to write about characters that I loved and cared for deeply as a child and then a teenager. I also wanted to create a world for children. Los Angeles is where we've made our home and raised our own children,



but it will never truly be home for me. I love our friends here, but I miss the mountains, and when I lived in Tennessee, I began to bring friends to the mountains. I was proud of them . . . I also

I've also worked with teen moms and seen the poverty firsthand, and I wanted to show that even without money, books and stories can be sustaining when there is little else.

grew up where life moved slowly at times, long hot summer days in Leavenworth, Kansas, visits to grandparents that stretched into weeks and weeks. . . I also remember when I first started dating my husband, we visited his mother for the weekend, and we said good-bye to her at noon on Sunday, but we had to make the rounds saying good-bye to so many folks around the town of Lynchburg that we didn't end up leaving until hours later, because each good-bye meant long, looping discussions of weather and crops and music and college and standing outside the car, just talking. . . . That's the South for me You begin to gradually let go of time, because something else is discovered in the hours of not getting on the road, of not making "good time." We finally left for Knoxville around 9:30 p.m.; I felt like I had lived a whole lifetime in that day.

TAR: Like many families in Appalachia in the 1960s, the Weems family lives in extreme poverty. The family was poor before Tom's accident. After the car wreck, their financial situation becomes even more desperate. They are behind in their rent. The electricity is cut off when they can't pay the bill. The girls carry potatoes from their garden to school to barter for their lunches. Yet they persevere. Could you speak to the theme of poverty and the role it plays in this series?

KM: I guess I thought of Kiffen's family. . . . His father really did sell encyclopedias and baby food door-to-door while working as a musician. The family always struggled financially, but when I asked one of my seven sisters-in-law, Eppie, about the happiest time in her life, she said, "When I was nine living

on the farm with everybody." They were poor and struggling, but it was then when she was the happiest. Then her father died suddenly, and she had to go live with the well-to-do older sister in Memphis and leave her siblings. She has a rich and fascinating life today living in Istanbul with her family, but her most favorite time of life was being a kid, growing up with all those siblings playing together, climbing trees, making birthday cakes, exploring the woods. I've also worked with teen moms and seen the poverty firsthand, and I wanted to show that even without money, books and stories can be sustaining when there is little else. Books are Livy Two's lifeline to the world, as is Miss Attickson and her bookmobile.

TAR: One character that really stands out for me is Grandma Horace. There is no doubt that Grandma Horace loves her family and makes sacrifices for them, but she certainly has a strange way of showing that love. How did her character develop?

KM: After Uncle Hazard, the family dog, finds and rescues Gentle in *Gentle's Holler*, I was stumped. The dog could now stay, Gentle had lived . . . now what? Then Grandma Horace came calling, and she stayed. My grandmother, Elizabeth Baker, was very outspoken, mostly about cleanliness and respect and religion. So I think she's a bit of Grandma Horace. Kiffen's grandmother was also tough, though I never met her; I only heard stories. I also came from a family where being practical was everything. So I think Grandma Horace came from bits and pieces of all the strong women in my life who had advice and plenty of it, but they also had tremendous capacity for love. I do remember my grandmother Elizabeth listening to a country music demo of my brother's. I played it for her, and I was so proud of him. She listened and said, "Is that the only song he knows?" That sort of sums up Grandma Horace—it's all very well to dream, but who's going to put food on the table?

TAR: The oldest generation—that of Grandma Horace and Uncle Buddy—can be seen as antagonistic. Uncle Buddy suffers from wanderlust, gambles his money and Emmett's as well, and runs moonshine.

He is certainly a negative influence on Emmett. He and Grandma Horace are almost polar opposites. Could you explain how you derived his character?

KM: Uncle Buddy is a character I've written for years, but he really sprang to life in the Weems family. Emmylou Harris's song "Greenville" reminds me of Uncle Buddy. Her lyrics are: "*You drink hard liquor, you come on strong, you lose your temper someone looks at you wrong . . . oh, looks at you wrong*" and "*Empty bottles and broken glass, busted down doors and borrowed cash . . . oh, borrowed cash.*" I have had relatives with short fuses and long lists of grievances. At times, this behavior was excused or smoothed over as "he's sensitive," and I never liked this excuse. There would be blow ups, and then the air would clear and all was supposed to be forgiven. I think scraps of my childhood and watching certain boys and men rage all came together in Uncle Buddy. To me, Emmett is Uncle Buddy before the bitterness and meanness sets in . . . when there is still hope for this beautiful and loving boy.

TAR: There is another conflict that I find particularly intriguing. Grandma Horace wants the family in church on Sunday mornings. She refers to them as heathens. Tom Weems thinks the family is better served "admiring God's work in mountains." Discuss for a moment the religious conflict between Grandma Horace and the family.

KM: I think it's a universal conflict that so many families endure. Tom is spiritual and finds his "religion" in the mountains whereas Grandma Horace is adamant about regular church attendance. They both are good people who want the best for their family, but they go about it in different ways. Naturally, Tom thinks his way is right, and Grandma Horace is certain she is right, so it was a natural conflict to explore when two characters are absolutely positive of one thing—being right!

TAR: There is a particularly heart-wrenching moment in *Jessie's Mountain*. Mama has just started a secretarial job at the paper mill in Canton, and Grandma Horace has moved back to Enka. Emmett is no longer working at Ghost Town in the Sky. Mama

demands that he go back to school and that Becksie as the oldest girl stay home to take care of Daddy and the children. That is a powerful scene. Could you elaborate on this incident?

KM: At first, I wrote to where Becksie and Emmett shared the responsibilities; this was not working at all, and I knew it wasn't accurate or believable. My editor, Catherine Frank, noted this, too. I also thought about how Francie Nolan in *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* had to leave school and go to work while her brother was encouraged to stay in school. I realized that it was surely like that everywhere. But I felt such pain for Becksie having to be the one to stay home when she'd worked so hard to become the Maggie Queen, but I knew it was the right thing to do . . . Mama's become desperate, and she's forced into making such hard choices, even sacrificing a child's education for a while.

TAR: A turning point in Livy Two's life comes when Grandma Horace gives her Mama's diary. We could see that as a malicious act by Grandma Horace, but the diary truly helps the children understand their mother. Please comment on the role the journal plays in *Jessie's Mountain*.

KM: At first the journal was just for me to get to know Mama better, and then I began to realize that it was part of the novel. It was a bridge between Grandma Horace and her grandchildren, and I think she knew that when she gave it to Livy Two. Grandma Horace, as difficult as she is, has her own hopes and dreams for this family, but it's grounded in practicality. I also discovered Jessie's love of birds in the journal, and my own daughter Lucy sketched the birds that appear in the book. It was wonderful to collaborate with her on the book.

TAR: Other writers have written young adult novels set in Appalachia. Cynthia Rylant, Ruth White, and Bill and Vera Cleaver are just a few. Did any other

Mama's become desperate, and she's forced into making such hard choices, even sacrificing a child's education for a while.

I do hope to write more of these novels.

authors (adult, children, or YA) impact your Maggie Valley books?

KM: I love those authors, and I really discovered

even more of their books after I'd given a talk at Hollins College in Virginia when Tina Hanlon (Ferrum College) and Amanda Cockrell sang their praises. Dr. Hanlon also introduced me to the Jack Tales. Rylant's *When the Relatives Came* is so funny and wonderful. I have read much of Cynthia Rylant, Shutta Crum, Delia Ray, May Justus, James Still, and Ruth White aloud to my youngest daughter, Norah. I grew up on Betty Smith, but it was Lee Smith who gave me hope as a young mother with two babies in Los Angeles. I read *Oral History* and *Fair and Tender Ladies*, and they filled me with such joy. I also loved Fannie Flagg's *Fried Green Tomatoes at the Whistle Stop Café* and Jill Ker Conway's *The Road from Coorain*. As a teenager, I deeply revered *Christy* by Catherine Marshall . . . so these books and so many others influenced me.

TAR: Gentle, Louise, and Jessie have all had books named after them. Can we expect more novels about the Weems family?

KM: I do hope to write more of these novels. Jitters came to life in *Jessie's Mountain*, and I certainly could see her having her own story. I'd also like to know what happens to Gentle. I want to write more of Emmett, too. I don't want the books to be "manufactured mountain" tales by writing them too fast. I was so thrilled to be able to write a biography of Harper Lee for young adults, but now I am missing the mountains again, and I would love to go back to the Weems family.

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Call for Nominees for the 2010 CEL Exemplary Leader Award

The CEL Award for Exemplary Leadership is given annually to an NCTE member who is an outstanding English language arts educator and leader. Please nominate an exceptional leader who has had an impact on the profession through one or more of the following: (1) work that has focused on exceptional teaching and/or leadership practices (e.g., building an effective department, grade level, or building team; developing curricula or processes for practicing English language arts educators; or mentoring); (2) contributions to the profession through involvement at both the local and national levels; (3) publications that have had a major impact. Your award nominee submission must include a nomination letter, the nominee's curriculum vitae, and additional letters of support (no more than three) from various colleagues. Deadline for submission is **February 1, 2010**; submit to: Patrick Monahan, 4685 Lakeview Dr., Interlochen, MI 49643; pjmonahan1@gmail.com (subject: CEL Exemplary Leader).

Young Adult Novels with Multiple Narrative Perspectives:

The Changing Nature of YA Literature

Many of today's adolescents are on the cutting edge of technology. They are becoming more competent with and reliant upon aspects of technology in all areas of their lives. The reality is that our teenagers are living in a technology-filled world, and many of them engage with technology every day. By using these new media, today's students learn about the world and communicate with each other in new and different ways (Bruce, 2004). They are experiencing the multifaceted nature of information and knowledge alluded to in position statements on adolescent literacy published by organizations such as the International Reading Association (Moore, Bean, Birdyshaw, & Rycik, 1999), and the Carnegie Corporation (Biancarosa & Snow, 2004). The IRA and Carnegie documents conceptualize how adolescent literacy practices have grown to encompass a wider range of texts, including magazines, books, websites, and digital communication tools (e.g., email, text messaging, instant messaging [IM], and blogs). Adolescents have cell phones, iPods, cable TV, MySpace®, and YouTube® that keep them "connected." Our students employ the Internet, cable television, text messages, and other communications from friends to provide them with information, and they have become accustomed to dynamic information that changes with each new entry on Wikipedia. In short, their lives revolve more around multiple and ever-changing perspectives than previous generations.

These new literacies and digital communication technologies often impact adolescents' reading and

writing practices. However, such practices do not always translate into what is valued in school settings—the reading and writing of print text (Boerman-Cornell, 2006; Lewis & Fabbos, 2005). It behooves secondary teachers, then, to become aware of and familiar with all of the varieties of text available to and read by teens. This would assist them in focusing instruction on developing students' competencies in comprehending and reading these diverse texts.

Traditional print novels, such as the classics and other commonly accepted literary genres, remain important in today's classroom and are not disappearing from society; however, they are being joined by newer genres and text types, as well as new forms of literature found on the Internet. Adolescent literature, which continues to be a typical and valued print text in today's classroom, increasingly reflects the changes taking place in society, adolescence, and adolescent literacy. One area of print text published specifically for teens has grown and evolved in recent years— young adult literature.

In the last decade, young adult literature has grown extensively, with significant numbers of books being published for the teen audience, ages 12–18 (Bean & Moni, 2003; Horning, Lingren, Rudiger, & Schlicsman, 2006; Owen, 2003). Given this growth spurt, it seemed important to examine changes taking place within this expanding body of literature. Are authors taking risks and experimenting with their writing, pushing the boundaries of the traditionally accepted format of young adult literature, and play-

ing with new forms of voice and structure? A content analysis of current YA novels (Koss, 2006) identified a trend away from the typical first person point of view,

These books challenge the traditional linear, chronological, and single-voiced nature of narrative fiction, which (a) is typically told from the first-person point of view of the main character, or (b) focuses on a main character but is written in third person.

usually embodied by a teenage narrator. Today's multiple narrative perspective novels are characterized by multiple voices, narrators, points of view, structures, and perspectives (Aronson, 2001; Koss, 2006; Koss, 2008).

These books challenge the traditional linear, chronological, and single-voiced nature of narrative fiction, which (a) is typically told from the first-person point of view of the main character, or (b) focuses on a main character but is written in third person. Issues of

form, voice, and structure are breaking new ground, and publishing trends are emerging.

Current young adult novels appear to be changing in form and structure, and mirror both the different ways information is accessed and the forms of new literacies appearing in contemporary society. "There is no doubt that the rapid pace of technological change in the way information is presented and received will continue to have a significant influence on the YA novel of the future" (Owen, 2003, para. 38). This suggests that something is occurring in today's social and cultural environment that is changing how YA narratives are being told and accommodating experimentation in how they are being written.

The Study: Rationale and Context

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to explore systematically the growing body of young adult novels using multiple narrative perspectives within the context of evolving contemporary changes to society, technology, adolescents, adolescent literacy, literary genres, and young adult literature. Young adult novels mirror the changing nature of society; in turn, changes in

society alter aspects of the way young adult novels are written. A study of one type of novel that is becoming more prevalent in contemporary society can illuminate the interconnectedness of literary and societal change, as well as provide insights into the nature of adolescents and adolescent literacy today and suggest directions for future research into teenagers and their reading.

With support from the ALAN Foundation Research Grant, this study (1) explicated a growing corpus of novels written with multiple narrative perspectives in order to usefully define and categorize them; and (2) explored the sociocultural phenomenon related to the growing numbers of texts that are written and published from the perspectives of different populations and people. Guiding questions for the study were: 1) How can books that use multiple narrative perspectives usefully be described and defined? 2) What do teens and adults who work with young adult literature think as to why so many of these novels are being published today? 3) Why do editors and marketing directors of major publishing houses think more of these novels are being published, what features do they look for, and what challenges are involved in working with these novels?

Literary Analysis

In order to describe systematically the different forms these novels take, a textual analysis of YA novels written with multiple narrative perspectives was undertaken. A list of 205 novels was compiled between 1999 through the end of 2007 (including 2008 advanced reading copies (ARCs) in order to find the most current examples of this trend. The time frame of 1999 to the present day was selected in order to represent books written and recognized in the early part of the 21st century. The novels were read in order to create an overall umbrella definition of novels written using multiple narrative perspectives. Five features emerged that define this type of novel and identify the different writing conventions commonly found in them (see Table 1). These features are not exclusive to books written with multiple narrative perspectives; they are features that can be found in all types of literature. However, they are included in this analysis because they are employed by authors in unique ways in books with multiple narrative perspectives, and thus add to the distinctive nature of this type of novel. In

addition, five distinct categories emerged inductively over the reading process (see Table 2). The novels mentioned in the tables were found to be exemplars of each category and feature; that is to say, they clearly and concisely represent all of the elements included in the category's definition. Also, novels were selected for discussion based on how well they exemplified their category rather than their literary quality.

Exploration of Sociocultural Phenomenon

Once an understanding of multiple perspective young adult novels emerged from the literary analysis, the reasons why more of these novels are being published in recent years was explored. This phenomenon was examined from the perspectives of three different populations—teens; professionals who work in the field of

young adult literature (including professors, librarians, teachers, consultants, and booksellers); and professionals who work in the field of young adult publishing (including editors and marketing directors). The perspectives of three different populations that engage with young adult literature on a regular basis were obtained in order to develop a more complete picture of why more of these books are being published. Data were obtained through questionnaires completed by and discussed with teen book club participants, questionnaires completed by academics and practitioners in the field of YA literature, and interviews held with editors and publishers who work with YA novels at major publishing houses. A combination of information gathered from all three groups identified three overarching themes that may explain why so

Table 1: Features Found in Multiple Narrative Perspective Novels

Category	Definition	Number (Percentage of Novels) Overall	Exemplar Novels
Sequence	The nature of the events as they take place in alternating sections or chapters. May be linear, non-linear, or simultaneous.	112 titles (55%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Breakout</i> (Fleischman, 2003) • <i>What Happened to Cass McBride?</i> (Giles, 2006) • <i>Rainbow Party</i> (Ruditis, 2005)
Structure/ Organization	Markers that delineate the voice or time period being represented through the use of font changes, characters' names, or the listing of times, dates, and places.	181 titles (88%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Sweetgrass Basket</i> (Carvell, 2005) • <i>Heart on My Sleeve</i> (Wittlinger, 2004) • <i>Shooter</i> (Myers, 2004)
Point of View	The alternating either between narrators and/ or between first and third person.	41 titles (use a combination) (21%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The Amulet of Samarkand</i> (Stroud, 2003) • <i>The Missing Girl</i> (Mazer, 2008) • <i>Mistik Lake</i> (Brooks, 2007)
Tense	The switching between past and present tenses.	76 titles (use a combination) (37%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>How to Build a House</i> (Reinhardt, 2008) • <i>Where I Want to Be</i> (Griffin, 2005) • <i>The Book Thief</i> (Zusak, 2006)
Text Type	The use of different types of text as a writing style, including epistolary novels, graphic novels, and novels in verse.	97 titles (47%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Impulse</i> by Ellen Hopkins (2007) • <i>The Brimstone Journals</i> (Koertge, 2001) • <i>The Realm of Possibility</i> (Levithan, 2004)

Table 2: Categories of Multiple Narrative Perspective Novels

Category	Definition	Number (Percentage of Novels) Overall	Exemplar Novels
One Event, Multiple Perspectives	Novels that tell a story that focuses on one major event, which is told from the point of view of a number of different participants involved with the event.	25 titles (12%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Real Time</i> (Kass, 2004) • <i>Holdup</i> (Fields, 2007) • <i>Poison Ivy</i> (Koss, 2006)
One Story, Multiple Perspectives	Novels that tell one story, but the tale is told via alternating narrators or perspectives.	59 titles (29%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>A Fast and Brutal Wing</i> (Johnson, 2004) • <i>The Year of Secret Assignments</i> (Moriarty, 2004) • <i>Not the End of the World</i> (McCaughrean, 2004)
Multiple Stories, Multiple Perspectives, Intertwined	Novels that tell multiple stories told by multiple characters, whose lives become somehow intertwined.	50 titles (24%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Bronx Masquerade</i> (Grimes, 2002) • <i>American Born Chinese</i> (Yang, 2006) • <i>The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants</i> (Brashares, 2001)
Then and Now	Novels in which the main character or a number of characters tell their individual stories at different points in time through the use of flashbacks and flash forwards.	42 titles (21%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The First Part Last</i> (Johnson, 2003) • <i>Day of Tears</i> (Lester, 2005) • <i>Turnabout</i> (Haddix, 2000)
Parallel Stories	Novels in which two parallel stories are told, each of which typically takes place in a different time period, often through the use of a journal or as an older character telling a younger character stories of his or her youth.	29 titles (14%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The Diary of Pelly D.</i> (Adlington, 2005) • <i>Endymion Spring</i> (Skelton, 2006) • <i>Tamar</i> (Peet, 2007)

many books written with multiple narrative perspectives are being published in contemporary society: a) textual changes; b) teen changes; and c) technological changes. The fact that the themes were consistent across the populations is interesting and significant, as each population interacts with and relates to young adult literature in different ways.

Textual Changes

All three populations—teens, professionals who work with young adult literature, and professionals who work in YA literature publishing—felt that changes in literature overall are impacting the publishing of more books with multiple narrative perspectives. In contemporary society, the way young adult novels are being written is changing, and one reflection of this change is the increase in novels with multiple voices

and points of view. Several factors were identified as influencing this change, but all groups seemed to focus on how this literature reflects the changing nature of literature in general and the changing nature of society, which is becoming more accepting of diverse populations and multiple perspectives on single events. It was also pointed out that publication of all types of YA novels is on the rise, so multiple narrative perspective novels are following that pattern, giving them a stronger chance of being published and reaching teen audiences. Other reasons given were that multiple narrators are traditional and that these books represent a high quality of writing.

Teen Changes

The second major theme that emerged across all three populations was that teens in society today are

different than the teens of previous generations. The issues they deal with on a day-to-day basis tend to be harsher, which can cause adolescents to develop and grow up faster. Owing to issues such as sexual advancement, teen pregnancy, and drug and alcohol abuse, among others, teens are growing in awareness and sophistication at an earlier age. Books with multiple narrative perspectives may be written as a form of bibliotherapy, or to provide teens with a picture of other teens who may be going through similar life events. These books also present different perspectives on and reactions to such events. Teens interact with others in a variety of ways, and are expected to act in certain ways in certain situations. Novels written in different voices and with different perspectives can provide teens with ideas of how to act in different circumstances, as well as allow them to experiment with different ideas of identity.

Technological Changes

The increase in and changing nature of technology in contemporary society is a third reason the teens and adults who interact with young adult literature felt novels are being written with multiple narrative perspectives. Access to constantly evolving technology impacts how teens read and write. They are now much more accustomed to writing and reading on the Internet and using other forms of digital communication technologies. They gather information from a myriad of sources and synthesize it to make sense of a concept or event. The media are also changing, now using sound bites and fragmented television shows and movies to present their stories. Linear, chronological sitcoms and movies no longer dominate. All three populations queried thought these technological changes were impacting the ways young adult books are being written. Since teens are used to getting fragmented snippets of information in their daily lives, books are being written to reflect this phenomenon.

Implications

This research also identified three primary reasons an abundance of these books is being published in the beginning of the 21st century. These results revealed that changes in narrative and literature, changes in teen development and teen experiences, and changes in technologies have all impacted the way young

adult books are currently being written. The changing nature of these books also reflects the changes taking place in society. By examining one specific body of literature, connections were made to the greater changes taking place in technology, adolescents, adolescent literacy, literature, and young adult literature itself.

The results of this study provided a system and a language for talking about the issues surrounding books with multiple narrative perspectives. As this study has shown, these evolving texts are being published with increasing frequency, adolescents

interact with them, and, according to the teen respondents in this study, they are intriguing, interesting, and a welcome change from the traditional, linear text format. They are also complex, pushing readers to follow several different strands, sometimes out of chronological/linear order; readers must also adjust to different voices and/or narrators, sometimes through the switching of tenses, and occasionally juggle conflicting information from unreliable narrators. Readers need to be able to sort through, analyze, and organize what they read in order to construct a coherent whole. By their nature, the reading of these types of texts is a complex process and creates challenges for teen readers (Capan, 1992; Klinker, 1999), challenges that must be identified and explored.

The nature of these books, specifically their metafictional characteristics—such as intertextuality, multiple narratives, and non-linearity—require readers to think critically in order to achieve comprehension. They also need to think critically about which sources or voices in the novels are credible and reliable. As Lesesne (2007) says:

Because these characters, and indeed all characters who have a part in telling the story, do so from their unique perspectives, these books can provide an opportunity for students to distinguish—or at least attempt to distinguish—between what is true or accurate and what is untrue or distorted. (70)

Owing to issues such as sexual advancement, teen pregnancy, and drug and alcohol abuse, among others, teens are growing in awareness and sophistication at an earlier age.

Although critical thinking is a purposeful activity, the presence of these literary devices often requires alternative ways of navigating text, and there is a lack of understanding about how readers approach and understand these types of texts. Teachers must be aware of these changing characteristics in order to

help their students navigate these texts.

As YA books become more common in high school English classes (Bushman & Haas, 2006; Donelson & Nilsen, 2005) and in outside literacy practices, this knowledge of how the texts are changing in light of trends, teens,

and technology has implications that trickle down into the classroom. Looking at the types and features of texts being written at the beginning of the 21st century, as well as the sociocultural phenomena that are impacting the ways these texts are written, informed our exploration of how these texts can impact both teen readers and adolescent literacy practices.

The findings of this study may have implications for educators by helping them to recognize the diverse types of texts published for adolescents, and suggesting ways they can effectively use these books in the study of literature in middle school and high school English classrooms. The literary analysis was structured so that a variety of practical applications and methods could be used in a classroom setting. An assortment of thematic units and lessons on literary elements and critical analysis could also be developed using these books, relying on social constructivist and sociocultural learning theories that emphasize the value of students working together to form meaning, on reader response, and on engaging students with alternative perspectives portrayed in literature.

Two examples of thematic unit ideas are provided here—"Character Development and Perspective Taking" and "Synthesizing Information"—each with a discussion of why the topic is important and which books can be used with it most effectively. In addition to the books and themes suggested here, books with multiple narrative perspectives can be used equally effectively in classrooms for other units of study,

including point of view, narrative structure, sequence, pacing, text type, and elements of time.

Character Development and Perspective Taking

One thematic unit that relates to this research is the study of different characters within a book. Character development includes analyzing characters' actions and formulating reasons or motives for each of their story events. In books with multiple narrative perspectives, especially books in which there is more than one narrator, each character will have a different set of beliefs, traits, and goals that impact his or her decisions over the course of the story.

When we examine alternative perspectives, we explore the viewpoints of different characters in a story. These characters perceive or react to events differently from other characters. In studying character development, students can select a novel and identify the different characters whose stories are told within it. They can look at each character and determine backgrounds, including gender, sexual preference, race, etc. Once they have an understanding of who the characters are, they can examine their different story events or perspectives. Students can identify what beliefs or motives each character may have had in taking specific actions and/or the ways those beliefs influenced how the story was presented to the reader. Books from these categories are good choices for the unit: One Event, Multiple Perspectives; One Story, Multiple Perspectives; Multiple Stories, Multiple Perspectives, Intertwined.

Some questions for students to consider include:

- What are the characters' different perspectives?
- Are the narrators reliable and telling the truth about the events?
- Do they report the story events in the same way, or are there discrepancies in their tellings? What might have caused those discrepancies?
- Do students think one character is right over another character?
- Why do they think the characters acted as they did?
- How do the characters' actions and beliefs compare with how students see the world?

Possible novels for use in studying character development and perspective taking include: *Inexcusable*

When we examine alternative perspectives, we explore the viewpoints of different characters in a story.

(Lynch); *Fade to Black* (Flinn); *The Night My Sister Went Missing* (Plum-Ucci); *A Fast and Brutal Wing* (Johnson); *Not the End of the World* (McCaughrean); *The Pull of the Ocean* (Mourlevat); *Breathing Underwater* (Flinn).

Synthesizing Information

Texts with multiple narrative perspectives often present information from a variety of narrators and perspectives. As with analyzing the perspectives of characters in novels, students need to learn how to synthesize all of the information presented in a novel and put it together into one overall story. They must collect and organize information presented from a variety of perspectives and sources, identify what is accurate and what is biased, and come up with a coherent whole. This process of comprehension is similar to techniques and strategies that students must use when reading and writing using digital communication technologies and the Internet. A useful thematic unit is for students to apply the strategies they have learned when interacting with an electronic text to synthesizing and discussing information from a traditional paper print text, such as a multiple narrative perspective novel.

As the use of digital communication technologies and the Internet increases, it is important for students to become familiar with the unique characteristics of electronic texts in order to navigate them effectively and efficiently. Novels that incorporate multiple voices, perspectives, and time sequences can help teach students about how they synthesize information online. Students can identify titles that either incorporate multiple perspectives that cause them to synthesize the story into one coherent whole, or choose texts that incorporate digital technology. After analyzing their chosen text, they can compare it to electronic or digital texts. Books from any of the five categories would work for this unit.

Some questions for students to consider include:

- What characteristics were found in the novels analyzed?
- How do these characteristics compare to digital texts?
- How does reading text on the Internet differ from reading a traditional print novel?

Possible novels for synthesizing information

include: *Names Will Never Hurt Me* (Adoff); *Real Time* (Kass); *Give a Boy a Gun* (Strasser); *Confessions of a Boyfriend Stealer: A Blog* (Clairday); *The Year of Secret Assignments* (Moriarty); *ttyl* (Myracle); *Harmless* (Reinhardt).

Concluding Thoughts

Literacy in the 21st century means thinking critically, making sense of a bombardment of media and information sources, and making choices about what to read and how to read it. Books with multiple narrative perspectives have great educational potential to nurture growth in these areas. As these texts grow in number and popularity, it is critical that educators examine the ways in which adolescents comprehend and make sense of these texts. The results of this study may help teachers work toward understanding the ways in which students approach and make sense of books written with multiple narrative perspectives so that they may, in turn, provide students with the tools and skills necessary to adequately comprehend and make sense of these complex texts.

This study has opened the door to further research on young adult novels with multiple narrative perspectives. It has provided a language that scholars can use to begin talking about and exploring these novels and their implications for adolescent literacy and the changing nature of young adult literature.

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Rac(e)ing into the Future:

Looking at Race in Recent Science Fiction and Fantasy Novels for Young Adults by Black Authors

My elementary school librarian introduced me to science fiction and fantasy when I was in third grade by showing us a filmstrip of Madeleine L'Engle's *A Wrinkle in Time*, a classic tale about good versus evil and how love can conquer much of what ails the world. I was so amazed by this filmstrip because it created an environment that was pleasing to me—traveling through the sky, visiting other dimensions of space and time; it offered power to the powerless—three children were the only ones capable of saving their father from being forever lost in another world and, ultimately, saving that world from a loveless, lifeless fate. But I was also drawn to L'Engle's books because I identified with her characters. Like me, they were smart, often misunderstood, and in the case of the character Calvin O'Keefe, poor. And, then, there was also the mother, Dr. Murry, who had a Ph.D. in physics, spent quality time with her children, and did significant work that mattered to the world. After the filmstrip was over, I checked the book out and read the whole time travel series. I decided, in third grade, that I wanted to have a life like that of Meg Murry and her mother, a life of the mind—an opportunity to think, to dream, to do.

I continued to read science fiction and fantasy throughout my childhood, young adult, and adult life. But, eventually, I caught on to the fact that although I could identify in many ways with the

characters in science fiction and fantasy novels, in one important way *I* was missing. Where were the Black authors and characters who blazed across the galaxy, spilled into dimensions of space, and warped through time? Where were Black girls who fed dragons, petted unicorns, or slept in castles? Aside from the earliest offerings—Virginia Hamilton's Justice Trilogy (1978, 1980, 1981), Walter Dean Myer's *The Legend of Tarik* (1981), and Joyce Carol Thomas's novels, *Water Girl* (1986) and *Journey* (1988)—it has been nearly impossible to find science fiction and fantasy with protagonists or secondary characters of color written for young adults by Black authors. And, most recently, comprehensive studies of African American children's and young adult literature (Bishop 2007, Brooks and McNair 2008, Smith 1994) can only reference the dearth rather than analyze the novels of Black authors who write in these genres.

In their 2003 study of middle school genre fiction, Agosto, Hughes-Hassell, and Gilmore-Clough found that of 976 reviews of youth fantasy novels, only 6 percent featured protagonists or secondary characters

of color, and that of the 387 reviews of youth science fiction, only 5 percent featured protagonists or secondary characters of color. Not surprising, considering that publishing industry overviews provided by the Cooperative Children's Book Center suggest that, each year, the publication of multicultural books

Where were Black girls who fed dragons, petted unicorns, or slept in castles?

falls far behind the growing multicultural population in the United States. Yet, as the publishing industry opens its doors more widely to adult science fiction/fantasy writers like L.A. Banks, Stephen Barnes, Tananarive Due, and Nalo Hopkinson, we are seeing the door inch forward so that more Black writers are given the opportunity to fill this void in youth literature as well.

Filling this void is important for several reasons.

While race and ethnicity are not ignored in these books, the race or ethnicity of a character does not drive the plot.

Studies have shown that, in the general population, science fiction and fantasy literature has an impact on the teaching of values and critical literacy to young adults (Bucher and Manning, 2001; Cox, 1990; Porthero, 1990). According to Bucher and Manning, the appeal is in the imagination that “comes into play as science fiction challenges readers to first imagine and then to realize the future of not only the novel they are reading but, also its juxtaposition the world in which they live” (42). For Walter Mosley, noted African American author of adult science fiction and detective novels, filling this void is necessary because it is a literature that speaks to children and young adults. He claims that science fiction, in particular, has the power to “tear down the walls and windows, the artifice and laws by changing the logic, empowering the disenfranchised or simply by asking, What if?” (“Black to the Future” 32). This literature also gives students of all races and ethnicities an opportunity to explore what their world might be like in the future *while* portraying a future that is an accurate representation of the array of brown people within the global community.

For author Maiya Williams, writing in these genres is as much about destroying subtle messages as it is about having fun. She recalls reading “fun” genres like mysteries, fantasy, and science fiction and noticing that the protagonists were always White:

If the protagonist was black you could be sure the story was going to be about racism. Either that, or it was a folk tale. After a while I began to find this irritating. The subtle message I was getting was that white kids are allowed to have wonderful, fantastic adventures, while the only thing Black kids can do is suffer and battle oppression. . . . So

I ended up avoiding the books that were deemed “black literature.” . . . So my goal [is] to show characters of all hues and cultures engaged in exciting adventures, without racism being the driving point of the story. (<http://www.maiyawilliams.com/faq.html>)

Since 2004, several Black authors, Maiya Williams included, have published books of science fiction and fantasy featuring Black youth as protagonists. An analysis of these books reveals plots that are fun and adventurous; black protagonists who are gifted, insightful youth surrounded by functional, supportive family units; and themes common to the sci-fi-fantasy genre, like courage, integrity, and good versus evil. But an analysis also reveals that the books written by these authors approach “blackness” as a normative experience. While race and ethnicity are not ignored in these books, the race or ethnicity of a character does not drive the plot.

Maiya Williams’s book *The Golden Hour* (2004), the first in a time travel trilogy that also includes *The Hour of the Cobra* (2006) and *The Hour of the Outlaw* (2007), places at the center a White brother and sister, Rowan and Nina Popplewell, who befriend the Black twins Xavier and Xanthe Alexander during a brief family visit in Maine. The foursome is drawn to each other and spends time together, only to discover that the small town that they are visiting provides a portal to travel back in time. *The Golden Hour* introduces Xanthe Alexander’s race in this manner:

A girl handed him a towel. She looked about his age, with brown skin and hair plaited into hundreds of beaded braids, all the same length, that hung down to her chin. Her brown eyes were almond shaped. To Rowan, she looked like an ancient Egyptian princess, except for the cutoff overalls. (31)

Alexander is introduced as having brownish red hair and being two inches taller than Xavier. In further discussion between the teenagers, it is revealed that the twins are so smart that rather than have them skip grades in public school, their parents chose to homeschool them. When the Popplewells meet the twins’ grandmother, we discover through her accent and ethnically prepared dinner that she is of Jamaican descent.

The plot then focuses on the Popplewells and their grief over the untimely death of their mother. Race is not mentioned again until the Popplewells and the Alexanders discuss when in time they would travel if they are allowed to use the time travel

machines. Xavier comments, “We just have to make sure that we choose a time and place that was good to brown skinned people. . . . I don’t want to be stuck picking cotton” (73). Rowan, Xanthe, and Alexander aren’t given an opportunity to choose, however; they must travel back in time to France during the French Revolution in order to retrieve Nina, who they believe has traveled there to meet Mozart. Here, the teenagers realize that they will have to take on racialized and gendered personas that befit the time period. Xanthe is told that she will act as an artist because it was a good occupation for a woman, and she is told, “Your skin color will make you seem exotic and exciting” (89). Xavier, on the other hand, protests that he will have to act as a freed slave in the service of Rowan, who will act as a noble. The teens are provided with the following explanation by the town librarian: “Well, there weren’t that many black people in Revolutionary France,” Miss O’Neill explained. “Some of the French had slaves, but unlike Americans, they didn’t keep them in their own country. Slave labor was limited to the Carribean colonies, where they needed the manpower for their crops” (89).

Although, Xavier does not like the idea, he complies because they can only remain in Revolutionary France for a maximum of seven days. Yet, while in France, there is no indication that Xavier’s race or status as a slave are deterrents to searching for Nina. As a matter of fact, his status as a slave allows him entry into the servant quarters, where he is able to bond with the other servants over the plight of the servant class and gather gossip that is useful in their search for Nina.

So although race is acknowledged throughout Williams’s trilogy, it is not presented as a burden to the characters and, in many cases, works to their advantage during their time travels. Williams provides exciting adventures for her readers, as well as characters who don’t deny race or the historical implications of race, but rather are allowed within the context of their lives and their time travels to be unhindered by the racism that may be present.

Twelve-year-old Charlemagne Althea Mack tackles both the issues of racism and classism at the beginning of Stephen Jones’s novel *Charlemagne Mack: Rise of the Queen* (2007), the first of a planned trilogy. Jones establishes Charlemagne’s race and intelligence within the first few pages of the book:

Alana was a lot like me except instead of being African-American with a short dreadlock hair style, Alana was Mexican-American. . . . We both were Honors students and had a lot of the same classes. The classes for the smart kids—the “colored eggs.” That’s what some of the other students, and even some of the teachers, called us. We were mostly black and Mexican kids. The “colored” part came from what they used to call black people way back in the day. The “egg” part came from what they used to call really smart people like Albert Einstein and Oprah Winfrey: eggheads. (6)

It is clear that a class system exists within Charlemagne’s school. There are those students who are intelligent, take Honors classes, and are given some hope of leaving their inner city neighborhood. And there are those students that the “colored eggs” tend to stay away from—the kids who are passing time until they eventually go to jail—because it is the safest thing to do.

Charlemagne’s gifts go beyond the academic. She is also a talented gymnast, with a scholarship to a gymnastics club on the more affluent side of town. Charlemagne is convinced that her talent will be rewarded with the position of team leader. Yet, when she and her uncle arrive at the club for the competition, it is quite clear that wealth, and not talent, divides Charlemagne from her nearest competitor, Anna. Although Anna has a personal trainer, her routine does not outshine Charlemagne’s, and yet, Anna is awarded the position of team leader. The club manager makes it very clear that it is Anna’s money that has won her the position: “Anna’s family brings a lot to this club . . . including money and influence that Charlemagne here clearly benefits from through a full scholarship, which includes her uniforms” (11). Although these scenes open the book, the race and class issues are made less burdensome by the immense emotional support and guidance that Charlemagne receives from her uncle and aunt. Charlemagne is clearly unhappy with her circumstances and must come to terms with the fact that a meritocracy often exists in theory only, but her family gives her words of encouragement and model living a life of dignity while overcoming the daily obstacles that African Americans face.

It is clear that a class system exists within Charlemagne’s school.

Not only does this harsh truth seem to usher Charlemagne into adulthood, but on the night that she loses to Anna, Charlemagne narrowly escapes an attack from the Hunters, creatures of darkness who want to capture Charlemagne in order to gain control and power over the universe. Once whisked away to safety, Charlemagne's family reveals to her that she is the Queen of the Sky Conjuring People and has been in open hiding for twelve years. Reeling from the attack and the loss at the gymnastics club, Charlemagne responds, "Can't no black girl ever be queen of nothin'" (18). Charlemagne is again shored up by family support, with dignity. Her aunt reminds Charlemagne to use correct grammar before stating, "It is your history, it is your birthright, and it is your destiny! So do not *dare* to sit there and tell me little black girls can't be queens because you, dear girl, were *born* a queen!" (18).

Early in the novel, Jones provides a race and class foundation for Charlemagne that surely inner city readers can identify with. Charlemagne occasionally feels trapped by circumstances of poverty and race, but Jones makes it clear that Charlemagne has, within herself, the necessary tools to acquire another kind of existence, despite life's obstacles. Once Charlemagne is able to grapple with her earthbound battle of race and class, she goes on to successfully battle evil throughout the galaxy.

The Marvelous Effect (2007) is the first in Troy CLE's planned Marvelous World Series. In this offering, thirteen-year-old Louis Proof awakens from a summer-long coma only to realize that he, with some help from his best friend Brandon and his young cousin Lacey, has the power to drive extraterrestrial beings back to their planet, Midlandia, before they completely restructure Earth and the way that people think about evil and committing evil acts. Louis Proof is a popular kid with a close-knit, supportive family; like any other typical American kid, he loves video games, fast food, and amusement parks. The emphasis of CLE's novel is placed on the action, familial support, friendship, and loyalty. For the most part, he makes no direct comments on race as a category or concept in this action-packed sci-fi novel. In chapter

Although race is not a significant factor in the first book of CLE's series, we know that CLE wrote the book with race at the forefront of his mind.

three, where the décor of Louis's room is described, the reader realizes that Louis is a NASCAR fan:

The blue walls were covered with everything from hip-hop stars to comic book characters such as Spawn, SpiderMan, and Wolverine. Most of his friends considered it odd that he had posters of Dale Earnhardt Sr. and Jr. on his wall. They didn't understand why he cared about NASCAR. Louis believed that NASCAR was one of the fastest and most dangerous sports. (39)

Here, the reader might infer that Louis's friends don't understand his love for NASCAR because car racing is a sport that has been historically dominated by White men. The assumption, of course, is that NASCAR could not possibly have a place for him or people like him. Yet Louis, an avid radio-control car builder and racer, does not let the race of NASCAR drivers deter him from appreciating the sport or aspiring to it. The only other inference that the reader might make is to Louis's other best friend, Angela, who has traveled to Hollywood to star in a movie as Denzel Washington's daughter.

Although race is not a significant factor in the first book of CLE's series, we know that CLE wrote the book with race at the forefront of his mind. He has repeated in numerous interviews that the inspiration for his book was the movie *The Goonies*. He admits to wanting to be a Goonie as a child, but only being one in his heart. He states, "I was like, you know what? I'm going to write a book that is where I could be the kid going on the adventure. . . . I was a part of them [referring to sci-fi fantasy books and movies], but we really didn't see ourselves" (Interview 2007). In *The Marvelous Effect*, CLE has created a novel that allows Black readers to see themselves as adventuresome, talented young people about the business of saving the world. Again, race is not a factor that should be considered burdensome; race just simply is—it is normative and, therefore, not a liability.

In Nnedi Okorafor-Mbachu's *Zahrah the Wind-seeker* (2005), difference, not race or ethnicity, drives the plot. Difference is a major factor in this story about thirteen-year-old Zahrah, who is born *dada* (with dreadlocks). Everyone in Zahrah's community knows that she is special, but most are not sure how

she is special. Will her gifts bring harm or good to her community? This novel is a blend of both science fiction and fantasy, presenting a futuristic planet, Ginen, and the Ooni Kingdom, which resembles what could be thought of as a lush, parallel universe-type Nigeria. Most of the kids with their perfectly coifed afros tease Zahrah about her locs that are intertwined with vines growing out of her head and tell her that bad luck comes to those who come near her. But Zahrah is constantly encouraged to see herself as special by her best friend, Dari, and many of the adults in the community.

In the prologue, Zaharah remarks on the regions of the Ooni Kingdom. Those in the north, where she lives, are obsessively concerned with their looks and have an array of mirrors, some even sewn onto their clothing. Those who live in the northwest cook all day and most of the night and are “gloriously fat” (x). Those who live in the southwest are obsessed with beads and wear them in their hair, on their bodies, and on their clothes. The people of the southeast are metalworkers with soot on their faces; those of the northeast are architects and scientists, driven by technology. These regional differences are accepted as just that, differences. But it is Zahrah’s hair, a rare occurrence throughout the Ooni Kingdom, that puzzles and frightens people. Zahrah finds all of the differences simply interesting rather than wrong.

As the novel unfolds, Zahrah’s gifts, including her ability to fly, are unveiled. She is forced to surrender her self-doubts and personal fears when Dari is bitten by a war snake and falls into a deep coma. The antidote can only be found in the Forbidden Greeny Jungle, a place where unspeakable things grow, live, and happen. Few who enter the Forbidden Greeny Jungle return, and those who do return are insane. Here, Zahrah must go on a quest not only for the antidote, but for the person that she is—dada and Windseeker.

There are a few other options for sci-fi and fantasy fans out there. *Shadow Speaker*, also by Nnedi Okorafor-Mbachu, is a science fiction and fantasy novel about a young girl in the Ooni Kingdom who uses her powers to hear the shadows and embarks on a quest to thwart a war. Also check out *47*, by Walter Mosley, a science fiction novel about slavery set on a plantation before the Civil War.

Young adults who are Black can relate to the experiences in science fiction and fantasy novels. Indeed, they crave these experiences and read these

genres just as voraciously as young adults of other races. But the lack of self-images in this literature can have a negative effect on the psyche of young readers. We derive our perceptions of self by what we hear, see, and read.

Scholar Karen Patricia Smith believes that literature has the potential to alter negative perceptions and calls for more literature written by Blacks that depict positive intergenerational images and issues; gifted and talented African Americans; Blacks who live outside of the United States; middle class protagonists; unified Black families; and science fiction and fantasy worlds.

I believe that the few science fiction and fantasy books that are now being published by Black authors are filling this bill. Writers like Maiya Williams and Troy CLE have chosen science fiction and fantasy as their genre because they remember the desire they had as young people to see themselves mirrored there. All of the authors discussed in this article embrace the fantastic while also embracing intact family units, intergenerational support and relationships, and gifted and talented protagonists who can take on the world without carrying it on their shoulders. Race in literature for Black young adults can be important without being a burden.

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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 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 galsvner@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.

From the FPS to the RPG:

Using Video Games to Encourage Reading YAL

The sound of rapid gunfire assaults my ears as I watch Jason deftly evade the mutants that are chasing him. He maneuvers around the edge of the building and picks up an assault rifle. He explains, “The weapon that I currently have does not have the range to reach the sniper in the tower. These guys are trying to invade us and take over Earth. I gotta make sure that this does not happen.” Jason is immersed in a first-person shooter game, also known as an FPS. In these games, players assume the role of a character, and they experience the game through that character’s eyes while utilizing ranged and melee weaponry.

Across town, Davis is deeply entrenched in a fantasy world. His avatar (a personally designed character for which the player can dictate the traits and characteristics) has the head of a lizard and the body of a man. He is roaming a fantastical land looking for a portal to another world so that he can gather more clues to complete the main quest. He is continually confronted with demons, dwarves, and various creatures that attempt to help him or thwart him in his mission. If he is successful in finding this portal, he will be that much closer to solving the main quest in the game. The game that Davis is immersed in belongs to the role-playing game genre, otherwise known as an RPG. This game in particular is a massively multiplay-

er online role-playing game (MMORPG), which means that multiple people are online at any given time and can work to help, or frustrate, a player in his or her missions.

Both of the adolescents described above are good friends who spend a large portion of their time out of school invested in playing, researching, and discussing video games. The amount of time invested in their reading, writing, listening, viewing, speaking, and presenting of video games through blogging, online chat, researching games through guides, and YouTube videos far outweighs the amount of time they spend each night on traditional schoolwork. In fact, in the classroom, they can often be found discussing the latest game and attributes of game play, often to the

dismay of the classroom teacher and more often than not leading to reprimands to quiet down and focus on their schoolwork. However, the attention that they give to this pastime does not conflict with the traditional literary views discussed in many of today’s English classrooms; in fact, these games can often help and enhance what is being discussed.

Video games, a form of literacy that captures the attention of many of the youth in schools today, are not as detrimental to students’ growth and reading habits as some pundits might have you think (Gee

Video games, a form of literacy that captures the attention of many of the youth in schools today, are not as detrimental to students’ growth and reading habits as some pundits might have you think

7). In fact, video games can actually encourage students to read and write prolifically, with many gamers utilizing their knowledge of game environments to read multiple novels and even delve into writing of their own, including blogs, novels, and fan fiction (Gerber 119). In fact, the modern video game contains multiple story elements and becomes an interactive form of narrative, or rather an interactive experience (Gee 84), which is what we want literature to become for our students. Interestingly enough, video games can be used as a platform to engage students in today's classroom to develop a richer appreciation for another literary form: the young adult novel. Video games are a complete form of literacy as well, since many of the modern video games incorporate the multiple strands of literacy; reading, writing, listening, speaking, viewing, and presenting are all engaged in when a student enters into many of today's game worlds (Gerber 123).

Just like there are multiple genres in writing, there are multiple genres of video games. Genre simply means categorization; however, categorization is different for video games than literature. In video games, genres are determined by the type of game play that is utilized by the players in the game. This is also known as interactivity; interactivity in a game is what is used to determine the game's genre (Wolf 194). Often a game will belong to a sub-genre of a larger genre, which is similar to the way that genres and sub-genres are determined within literature. Many gamers play multiple games, but have a preference for a particular genre or style of game, and just like each genre of novel draws a diverse crowd and diverse population of readers, so do video games. Gamers, like readers, are varied in their interests and reasons for investing time in a particular pastime.

Educators would be remiss to ignore the popularity and relevance that games hold in many students' lives. The game industry is a 65 billion dollar-a-year industry, which far surpasses any other form of entertainment; in fact, the majority of students in any given classroom play video games on a regular basis; according to the latest surveys, 97% of youth play video

The hook comes in helping students recognize how literature can be paired with their interests and affinities toward particular game genres and game experiences.

games (Lenhart i). But video games are not necessarily bad or detrimental to students and their reading habits. In fact, video games can be used to encourage students to explore new worlds through literature and to engage in a print-literate environment as well as their familiar and ubiquitous digital environment. The hook comes in helping students recognize how literature can be paired with their interests and affinities toward particular game genres and game experiences.

By conducting multiple case studies of gamers, speaking with active gamers, and being an avid gamer myself, I have compiled a list of video game genres and related young adult books that will interest even the most reluctant reader in your classroom. This article does not provide an in-depth discussion of each gaming genre; however, it will provide you with a basic understanding of gaming genres and some examples of games that fit into those genres. It is important to understand how video game genres and young adult books can fit together in order to foster reading habits in today's students. Just like the genres of books and films can overlap and enrich each other, so too can video games and the books that I have paired them with.

While I have classified the games into genres according to the interactivity required to play them, I have thematically paired the novels to the games based more on iconography, utilizing information on settings, characters, and plot in order to pair texts with similar games. Additionally, I have focused on the genres of games that have been found to be most popular with adolescents today: the RPG, the action-adventure, and the FPS. Other genres, such as simulation and strategy, are not included in the scope of this article. The lists provided are not exhaustive, but they should offer you a place to begin when helping your students to identify texts that they will enjoy.

The RPG

The RPG is similar to literature in many aspects. RPG simply means Role Playing Game; it is considered to be an interactive form of storytelling. There is a plot

with a compelling conflict that must be solved. In order to solve the conflict, the player must complete multiple quests. Narratives and cut scenes (mini movie-like scenes that occur during game play) help to support the plot and to create a fully immersive adventure.

When we think of students becoming invested in a piece of literature, we want to think of them as understanding and emphasizing the role of a character through their own eyes. In the RPG, the player assumes the role of a character and, through an avatar, completes quests, puzzles, and missions. Often in an RPG, the player is prompted to create his or her character's appearance, traits, strengths, and weaknesses. The character's identity and abilities are then merged with the player's identity and morals to form what Gee terms the "projective identity" (55). The projective identity becomes the identity that conducts quests and succeeds or fails based upon choices and actions. However, in an RPG, game the character is constantly evolving due to decisions and experiences. A player in an RPG game collects experience points and utilizes these points to modify or change the character during game play.

RPGs can be played in first- or third-person vantage points; this means that the player can play through the eyes of the character, or they can play through the eyes of an omniscient narrator. This choice slightly changes what they see on the screen during game play. RPGs can be played solo or online with others; this is called an MMORPG (Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Game); the popular game *World of Warcraft* is a MMORPG. In these massively multiplayer games, social interaction and collaboration become important to success. However, in standard RPGs, collaboration with other players is generally nonexistent unless the player is in a co-op mode (co-operative mode where two players work together to complete a quest or mission).

The setting of most RPGs is fantastical, or set in a fantasy world. Dragons, elves, mages, and magic are common characters. Many are medieval and based on folklore. This genre pairs well with the young adult genre of fantasy. Some popular video game titles are the *Fable* series and the increasingly popular *World of Warcraft*. Table 1 pairs popular RPG titles with popular young adult fiction.

The Action-Adventure

Action-adventure games can be mistaken for RPGs by the novice due to similarity in game play; however, they are different than RPGs. Action-adventure means exactly what the title suggests: the elements of action games combined with the elements of adventure. It is a very diverse and broad genre, which is in part what might lead to initial confusion.

Again, like with the RPG, there is a plot with a compelling conflict that must be solved, but generally in an action-adventure game, the player does not have the ability to modify the character, although sometimes points are awarded and the player can make slight modifications or purchase needed items. The player must move through multiple locations, worlds, and places and solve several challenging puzzles in order to get through the game. Additionally, those puzzles are generally very logic oriented and require completing many steps in order to achieve the objective.

Action-adventure games take place in multiple settings and occur across many different time periods in history; however, some of the more popular ones today take place in the present as the protagonist, or the game player's character/avatar, attempts to escape from an unpleasant situation, such as running from a gang of thieves, finding treasure, or eradicating an evil group. Novels that provide a similar feel of action-adventure fall in the category of mystery or science fiction. Table 2 provides a list of popular action-adventure video games and pairs them with popular young adult literature titles.

The FPS

Also known as the first-person shooter, this genre of video game is exactly what it sounds like, players assume the role of first person and go on missions

Table 1. RPG titles paired with YA literature

RPG Title	YAL Title
<i>Fable 1 & 2</i>	<i>The Hunter's Moon</i> by O. R. Melling
<i>World of Warcraft</i>	<i>The Eye of the World</i> by Robert Jordan
<i>Elder-Scrolls Oblivion</i>	<i>Elf Realm</i> by Daniel Kirk
<i>Final Fantasy</i> series	<i>Manga</i> (various authors)

Table 2. Action-Adventure titles paired with YA literature

Action-Adventure Title	YAL Title
<i>Kingdom Hearts 1 & 2</i>	<i>Manga</i> (various authors)
<i>Baldur's Gate</i>	<i>The Lightning Thief</i> by Rick Riordan
<i>Lara Croft</i> series	<i>Steel Trap: The Challenge</i>
<i>Assassin's Creed</i>	<i>The Way of Shadows</i> by Brent Weeks

involving a ranged or melee weapon; the world in the game is seen from the perspective of their avatar, which makes it first-person. Many times, FPSs are played with multiple players via a broadband connection or on linked systems via a LAN (local area network), but they can also be played solo against the AI (artificial intelligence of the computer).

The tactics in FPSs are slightly different than in the other two mentioned genres. Players often must rely on stealth tactics in order to beat the game. (Stealth tactics means sneaking up on other characters in order to catch them off guard.) However, these games are still very action-oriented like the above genres. The FPS is deemed one of the more violent games due to the weaponry and war themes, and as a result, substantial negative press on FPSs influences how mainstream society views the gamer culture (Gee 10).

Again, like the RPG and the action-adventure, there is generally a plot with a protagonist or main character (the player's avatar) who must complete missions, quests, and puzzles in order to complete the game. Many popular shooters are centered around war and/or saving the world from organized crime. Novels that provide a similar feel deal with war and crime, science fiction, or an anti-utopian future (see Table 3).

Table 3. FPS titles paired with YA literature

FPS Titles	YAL Title
<i>Halo</i> series	<i>Feed</i> by M. T. Anderson
<i>Bioshock</i>	<i>Gone</i> by Michael Grant
<i>Resistance Fall of Man</i> series	<i>Everlost</i> by Neal Shusterman
<i>Call of Duty</i> series	<i>Fallen Angels</i> by Walter Dean Myers

So What Now?

Given the prevalence of gamer culture and students who identify as avid gamers, it is of utmost importance to understand and utilize these students' interests in order to encourage and enhance their literary lives through literature. The answer is not cut and dried; one cannot simply assign books to students because they enjoy a particular gaming genre. However, it is a place to start and may provide a way to introduce your students to an author or particular literary work so that they might begin to understand how to select their own literature. It could even serve as a starting point for having students critically analyze and understand topics that are discussed in class: characterization, plot, conflict, etc.

Try having your students complete a beginning-of-the-year interest survey. This interest survey, however, will focus on aspects of game play rather than on reading and writing skills. Simple questions that ask students what genre of video games they enjoy, how often they play these games, and some of the titles that they play would offer terrific insight into their preferences. Figure 1 provides an example of

Check each genre of video game that you play and indicate how many hours you play that genre each week.

<u>Genre</u>	<u>Hours played per week</u>
___ RPG	_____
___ FPS	_____
___ Action-Adventure	_____
___ Simulation	_____
___ Strategy	_____
___ Action	_____
___ Music	_____

List titles recently played:

Figure 1. Video Game Survey

such a survey. By getting students to understand that the games they play are indeed valid forms of literacy, and by helping them to understand connections among the various forms of literacy, we help our students become immersed in a lifelong habit of reading and enjoying a variety of literature and literary habits.

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Call for Proposals: NCTE Theory and Research into Practice (TRIP) Book Series

The NCTE Books Program invites proposals for its TRIP series (Theory and Research into Practice). These books are single-authored and focus on a single topic, targeting a specified educational level (elementary, middle, or secondary). Each book will offer the following: solid theoretical foundation in a given subject area within English language arts; exposure to the pertinent research in that area; practice-oriented models designed to stimulate theory-based application in the reader's own classroom. The series has an extremely wide range of subject matter; past titles include *Creative Approaches to Sentence Combining*, *Unlocking Shakespeare's Language*, and *Enhancing Aesthetic Reading and Response*. For detailed submission guidelines, please visit the NCTE website at <http://www.ncte.org/write/books/>. Proposals to be considered for the TRIP series should include a short review of the theory and research, as well as examples of classroom practices that can be adapted to the teaching level specified. Send proposals to Acquisitions Editor, NCTE, 1111 W. Kenyon Road, Urbana, IL 61801-1096.

“Would you want to read that?”:

Using Book Passes to Open Up Secondary Classrooms to LGBTQ Young Adult Literature

It is Monday afternoon and my methods class is in the middle of our first official book pass. Seated in pairs in a large circle that spans the width of the classroom, each student holds a single sheet of paper that has been divided into four columns: Author, Title, Topic, and Rating (see Fig. 1). On this piece of paper, they are quickly collecting information about the book I have just placed on their desks. In the two or three minutes they are allotted to assess the book, they look at its front cover and then flip the book over to read the synopsis or excerpt or quotes provided on the back. They quickly skim the inside cover of the book jacket and begin reading the first couple of pages.

I circulate around the room and listen to their conversations. “This could be fun,” Celeste says to her partner, Tom, as she skims through Jenny Han’s *Shug*. Tom looks pained. “There’s no way I would read that book,” he mutters under his breath and marks a big zero in his rating column.

To my left, Andrea and Mike are staring at the

cover of the book they’ve just received, David Levithan’s *Boy Meets Boy*. They take in the blue color and its simple design, the three candy hearts that comprise the title. “I don’t get it,” says Andrea. Mike opens the book and starts to read. “I think it’s about a gay guy.” Andrea leans over to look at the book more carefully. “Really?” She pauses. “Would you want to read that?”

I tell the students to wrap up their discussions and pass the books to the pair of students to their left. Andrea and Mike close *Boy Meets Boy*, write down their ratings, and hand the book to Jennifer and Melissa. Melissa and Jennifer dutifully note the author and title in the appropriate columns. The conversations begin again.

Establishing a Context for YA LGBTQ Literature

Despite increased public attention to and discourse about gay issues—gay marriage and the passing of

Title	Author	Topic	Rating

Figure 1. Book Pass Chart

Proposition 8 in California, the critical acclaim of such films as *Brokeback Mountain* and *Milk*, and the growing presence and visibility of Gay-Straight Alliances in many public high schools—the majority of middle and high schools in the United States continue to be unsafe spaces for today’s LGBTQ youth. According to the 2007 National School Climate Survey, produced by the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN), 9 out of 10 LGBTQ students continue to hear homophobic remarks in classrooms and hallways, and the majority of LGBTQ students have experienced some kind of school-based verbal (86.2%) or physical (44.1%) harassment as a result of their sexual orientation. This harassment often leads to increased absenteeism, lowered educational aspirations, and ultimately decreased academic success.

While many secondary teachers may want to help—by intervening or advocating for their LGBTQ students—the majority of LGBTQ students surveyed by GLSEN (60.8%) stated that they chose not to report being harassed because they believed nothing would be done. And, according to the report, “nearly a third (33.1%) of the students who did report an incident said that school staff did nothing in response.” Clearly something has to change.

According to the survey, supportive school staff who intervene when they encounter homophobic behaviors can make a significant difference in the experiences of LGBTQ youth and positively affect school climate, as can administrative efforts to systematically address anti-LGBTQ bullying and harassment. Safe school policies, training for faculty and staff, and increased access to LGBTQ resources can also pave the way toward safer schools.

Unfortunately, LGBTQ resources, specifically LGBTQ young adult literature, is still either absent or invisible in most middle or high school classrooms and libraries. LGBTQ-themed texts are rarely mentioned, discussed, or taught. As a result, ongoing classroom conversations about sexual orientation that could support LGBTQ students, build understanding and empathy, and proactively challenge a hostile school climate do not happen. Teachers are reduced to intervening when violence erupts and these interventions, when they do occur, continue to play out on an individual,

LGBTQ-themed texts are rarely mentioned, discussed, or taught.

rather than institutional, basis. For institutional transformation to take place and for schools to become safe for LGBTQ students, change has to occur at the curricular level. All students must have access to LGBTQ literature.

To aid in this process, this article will provide specific titles as well as a methodological recommendation for middle and high school teachers interested in familiarizing themselves with available LGBTQ young adult texts and integrating them into their curriculum. In particular, I will examine how the book pass as an instructional technique is particularly well suited for this purpose.

The Literature Itself: Excitement and Apprehensions

Since the publication of John Donovan’s *I’ll Get There, It Better Be Worth the Trip* in 1969, a significant amount of young adult literature featuring LGBTQ youth has become available to teen readers (Day; Cart). Nevertheless, while some of the preservice teachers who enroll in my methods classes have read books with LGBTQ protagonists, most have not. They know these books exist, perhaps they have even heard of a title or two, but very few have purchased one or checked one out of a school or public library. Similarly, very few of my students have considered including LGBTQ literature in their curricula or recommending it to their future students. Therefore, when they encounter young adult LGBTQ books during the book passes, their reactions are often mixed. Some respond as Andrea did, with surprise and curiosity. They really don’t know if they would be interested in reading a book with LGBTQ characters and themes. Other students seem indifferent. If the book isn’t about a topic (or written in a genre) of interest to them, the genius of the plot won’t make any difference. Occasionally, students will reject LGBTQ texts outright, proclaiming to their partner that they would “never read a book like that.” Still other students respond enthusiastically—“Really? Awesome!” one of my students declared upon seeing Ellen Wittlinger’s *Parrotfish*; their enthusiasm often conveys both appreciation and relief.

In the case of *Boy Meets Boy*, many of the students in my classes rate it highly because the book is

genuinely romantic, and they respond positively to Levithan's breezy style and the depth of the two main characters, Paul and Noah. Other LGBTQ books my students consistently rate highly include *Pedro and Me*, Judd Winick's powerful graphic novel about his friendship with AIDS activist and *Real World* housemate, Pedro Zamora; *Hero*, Perry Moore's novel about a gay teenage superhero; *Luna*, Julie Anne Peters's groundbreaking depiction of a transgendered teen; *Hard Love*, Ellen Wittlinger's multigenre (and Printz Award-winning) narrative about unrequited love between two friends—one straight, the other gay; and *The Misfits*, James Howe's hilarious and poignant tale of four friends who decide to tackle their middle school's name-calling problem (see Fig. 2 for additional recommended LGBTQ Young Adult titles).

When I surveyed this particular class to see how many students would actually read *Boy Meets Boy*, about half of them raised their hands. When I asked them to talk about why, their responses varied. Some

students admitted to a general interest in romance, others liked the cover. One student said she heard a classmate mention that there was a character who was a drag queen, and several others commented that the book seemed like a "feel-good" book and they were looking for something "happy" to read. A couple of remaining students indicated that they had an interest in LGBTQ issues and were drawn to "that sort of thing." When I asked the class whether or not they thought high school students would be interested in reading *Boy Meets Boy*, the majority of my students posited that it might have "serious popularity potential." Yet, when I inquired as to how many of them encountered texts with LGBTQ characters or themes in their middle or high school English classes, only one or two indicated that they had.

As we begin, then, to consider why this is, why LGBTQ literature continues to remain absent from most middle and high school classrooms, we focus our attention on two things. First, curriculum—specifically, the way in which the texts we privilege in class, either by explicitly teaching them or by giving them face time in an activity such as the book pass, become meaningful. We examine how it is that our curricular and methodological choices determine what educational theorist Michael Apple calls "the official knowledge" of our classrooms. In the case of secondary English classrooms, this is the knowledge that sanctions

- whose voices will be included;
- which stories will be told;
- how these stories will be used;
- what questions we will ask of them and of ourselves as we read;
- whether or not these stories reflect those of the students in our classrooms;
- and finally, how we will respond to these stories—can our engagement with them build empathy and help us understand each other and our world in a more substantive and critical way?

I ask my class: What are the effects (on students, on school climate) when we accept a school's noninclusive or nondiverse curricula at face value? Why factors determine what books we teach in middle and high school classrooms? Would other books be better?

As they contemplate these questions, they consider the fact that they are legally responsible for en-

Bauer, Marion Dane (ed.), *Am I Blue?: Coming Out from the Silence*
 Block, Francesca Lia, *Dangerous Angels: The Weetzie Bat Books*
 Freymann-Weyr, Garret, *My Heartbeat*
 Garden, Nancy, *Annie on My Mind*
 Hartinger, Brent, *The Geography Club*
 Heron, Ann (ed.), *Two Teenages in 20: Writings by Gay and Lesbian Youth*
 Holmes, A. M., *Jack*
 *Howe, James, *The Misfits*
 *Howe, James, *Totally Joe*
 Kerr, M.E., *Deliver Us from Evie*
 Levithan, David, *Boy Meets Boy*
 Levithan, David & Merrell, Billy (eds.), *The Full Spectrum: A New Generation of Writing about Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, Questioning, and Other Identities*
 Moore, Perry, *Hero*
 Peters, Julie Anne, *Far from Xanadu*
 Peters, Julie Anne, *Luna*
 Ryan, Sara, *Empress of the World*
 Sanchez, Alex, *The Rainbow Boys*
 Summer, Jane (ed.), *Not the Only One: Lesbian and Gay Fiction for Teens*
 Winick, Judd, *Pedro and Me*
 Wittlinger, Ellen, *Hard Love*
 Wittlinger, Ellen, *Parrotfish*
 *Woodson, Jacqueline, *From the Notebooks of Melanin Sun*
 *Woodson, Jacqueline, *The House You Pass on the Way*

*Books appropriate for middle school as well as high school students.

Figure 2. Recommended LGBTQ young adult literature to include in book passes

suring the emotional and physical well-being of their students, and that unsafe classrooms undermine and jeopardize student learning. They are also asked to consider the damaging effects of curricular exclusion and silence, particularly the lack of acknowledgement and empathy, the increased probability of misunderstanding and miscommunication, and the emotional, intellectual, and physical violence that can result from it. In doing so, they begin to acknowledge the importance of cultivating a classroom environment in which all of their students feel welcome, respected, valued, and safe. Yet, even though they “know” all of this, my students readily admit that using LGBTQ literature in their future classrooms makes them feel unsafe as well. Therefore, the second topic we discuss is their fear—their many apprehensions about opening up their classrooms to LGBTQ-themed texts.

Immediately, my student teachers raise concerns about student maturity and classroom management (“Yes, middle and high school students might want to read these books, but will they be able to handle them?”). And they feel uncertain about their own ability to talk sensitively or even knowledgeable about LGBTQ topics (“I’m not even sure what I would say.”). They are also terrified of the conflicts they imagine will ensue with parents and administrators over the appropriateness of LGBTQ-themed texts and topics. Incorporating LGBTQ literature into the curricula, they believe, puts them at risk for greater personal and professional scrutiny; ironically, it “outs” them by making them “political,” even when they’re not always certain what their politics really are (Meixner).

While I can’t assuage all of their fears—or the fears of middle and high school teachers who may share their apprehensions—we try to brainstorm solutions to many of these concerns. We also examine resources they can consult in order to make informed decisions about the texts they decide to introduce or teach, especially intellectual freedom information about First Amendment issues and censorship available through the American Library Association, the Cooperative Children’s Book Center at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, and the National Council of Teachers of English. I additionally remind my students that in many states, they have at least some legal protection for their actions. In New Jersey, for example, the state in which most of my students will eventu-

ally be employed, they have recourse to a state nondiscrimination law and a safe school law that include a nondiscrimination civil rights statute and an anti-harrassment education statute, both of which include sexual orientation as a category, and both of which legally require them to ensure that their classrooms are safe spaces for LGBTQ students. (Similar information about other states is available in GLSEN’s 2004 State of the States Report).

The Book Pass

About the Methodology

As an instructional method, I use the book pass described in the introduction in virtually all of my English methods and Young Adult Literature courses. As Janet Allen explains in *Yellow Brick Roads: Shared and Guided Paths to Independent Reading 4–12*, book passes are a quick and easy way to get a variety of books into secondary students’ hands and introduce them to authors, titles, and topics that they may not be inclined to seek out on their own. For students who don’t know what they like, what they are looking for, or where to find it, book passes provide a concrete and much-needed place to start. For students who have already developed more specific reading tastes, book passes expand their options and challenge them to try something new. In general, my college students love them. They love it when I arrive to class with an enormous bag of books that I display dramatically on the table at the front of the room. They love that I have done most of the work selecting “good” books for them. They love being able to handle the books themselves and talk about them with each other. And they especially love that they can accept or reject my suggestions without consequence. I have found these sentiments to be mirrored in middle and high school classrooms.

For middle and high school students who are uncertain of their own reading preferences, book passes also provide an opportunity for teachers to model how it is that good readers make decisions about which

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a book's content by examining the front and back cover or assesses a text's readability by skimming the first couple of pages and looking at text size and white space. Teachers can also show students that they draw upon their prior knowledge of an author's other works or that they use their own experiences to evaluate whether or not a book will sustain their interest (Beers; Tovani). The students are able to practice these skills over and over again as the books circulate around the room.

While both of these aspects of the book pass underscore its pedagogical value, what I appreciate most about this activity is that it is especially well suited for introducing high-interest texts with potentially contentious content. I will never traditionally "teach" the majority of books I include in my book passes; that is, these books will not be required reading for the entire class. Many are certainly teachable or teach-worthy, and some may be adopted by students for literature circles or research projects or other class assignments, but my main objective with each pass is not common knowledge. Instead, it is access and, of course, exposure—to texts, authors, genres, topics, ideas, world-views, values, questions, etc.—that expand the scope of a school's required or sanctioned curricula and open up classrooms to conversations about issues like sexual orientation and school safety that frequently don't occur without them. Book pass books are books that provide students with personal choices: to read or not to read, to investigate or to ignore, to question or to confirm. As such, they are "unofficial" books whose content, through presence and discussion, becomes an official part of the curriculum.

I'll be honest: part of my reason for using predominantly YA literature in the book passes reflects my belief that YA literature should be featured more prominently in middle and high school curricula.

books they will and will not read, skills it is often assumed secondary (and college) students already possess. Therefore, as a teacher explains how the book pass works, s/he can simultaneously demonstrate a variety of reading strategies; she can, for example, predict

I want my student teachers to be familiar with a variety of young adult titles and authors. Even if they ultimately disagree with me, I want them to know enough about the genre to make an informed decision. More important to me than genre familiarity, however, is the visible presence of LGBTQ youth in the texts that my students encounter, youth whose voices and stories are still too-often ignored, excluded, or forgotten in secondary schools. Through the texts I include, I can take a public stand about which stories—about whose stories—will be welcome in my classroom. As a result, the books I include in each book pass signify to my students who and what I value as a teacher and the kind of diverse, inclusive space I intend my classroom to be.

Learning to Meta-Process

Once the pass has been completed and the students have ranked each of the books, I ask them to spend an additional ten minutes discussing their rankings and reflecting on their preferences. This processing time is perhaps even more significant than the students' during-pass conversations as the books are circulating around the room. Freed from the possible pressure of conforming to their partner's assessment of a text, the pass debriefing allows them to revisit the books independently and on their own terms. Specifically, it provides them with an opportunity to review books they have already read, ask additional questions about books they rated highly, clarify book topics when they felt they did not have enough time to properly assess the book during the pass, identify why they were drawn to certain texts and not to others, and listen to their classmates' responses and recommendations.

For example, when I asked Andrea why she had doubts about reading *Boy Meets Boy*, she responded that she just couldn't get past the cover and the title. Its "prettiness," specifically the three candy hearts, were just a little too "cutesy" for her. Melissa immediately disagreed. "It's funny," she said. "That's *exactly* why I thought the book looked fun. The cover made me want to read more."

This exchange prompted another student, Megan, to raise her hand and ask her own question: "How would you feel if someone saw you reading this book?" After finishing the first few pages, she was interested, but she'd never read a book with gay characters before, and she wasn't sure what she would say

if someone saw her reading it and asked about it. “I’d just tell them it was a love story and let them jump to their own conclusions,” Jessica responded. Next to her, Julie shook her head. “Who cares? If they’re offended or not interested, they don’t have to read it.” “But,” she paused, “maybe it would be a good thing. Maybe someone else would want to read it.”

Conversations such as these force students to attend to their own values as well as their own thinking as they select or dismiss each book. For students already comfortable making independent selections, listening to each other’s comments and questions pushes them to consider texts they might have originally dismissed. For struggling readers, hearing how other students make choices—what they look for, what turns them on and off, what questions they have about the book once the pass is completed, how they know a book might be too easy or too difficult—teaches them how to make better choices on their own. Participating in the book passes provides the entire class with ongoing opportunities to examine and discuss literature they might never encounter otherwise. Finally, for teachers, book pass discussions are an incredibly useful tool for assessing and addressing students’ (personal and reading) needs as well as for engaging students in evaluative conversations about the literature itself: Why aren’t these books “taught” in school? Should they be? Is the content (or language or perspective or topic) appropriate? Why or why not?

Evaluating the Method

To conclude the book pass, I require my methods students to spend a final ten minutes assessing the activity as an instructional method. As mentioned previously, they typically enjoy it as students. As future teachers, they also find it valuable because, having experienced it first-hand, they are able to imagine how they might use it:

- to teach pre-reading strategies such as predicting or inferring
- to preview upcoming required texts
- to generate interest-based literature circle groupings
- to make independent reading recommendations
- to highlight the work of a particular author
- to introduce students to a particular genre
- to incorporate more nonfiction into the curriculum
- to provide students with additional information and reading options following a themed or topical unit

- and to differentiate instruction by introducing books that vary according to their students’ unique interests and reading levels

In terms of the book pass as a viable site for the inclusion of LGBTQ young adult literature in their future classrooms, even though many of my student teachers remain uncertain about the reception they and the books would receive, they recognize its merits. Incorporating LGBTQ books in the pass sets a tone of open-mindedness, acceptance, and inclusivity. It puts LGBTQ texts in the hands of students who need them, and because these books are not necessarily required reading, it allows other students to either pursue or dismiss them based on personal preference.

Including LGBTQ texts in book passes acknowledges what we, as teachers, must also acknowledge: that the voices of LGBTQ youth are not only present in our classrooms, but also contribute to the learning that occurs there.

Incorporating LGBTQ books in the pass sets a tone of open-mindedness, acceptance, and inclusivity.

Final Thoughts

It has been my experience as a teacher in both high school and college classrooms that while students often enjoy and appreciate particular activities or methods, they rarely take the time to say so. Book passes are different. Students stop me after class to tell me how much fun they are, they comment positively on them in my course evaluations, and they occasionally email me to tell me that they read a book on their list or gave the entire list to a loved one “just in case they didn’t know what kind of a present to get me.” I also have alumni (former students, now teachers) who contact me to tell me that they used these passes with their students or recommended particular books they first encountered in my class. Last year, after using several book passes in my Literature for Younger Readers course, many of which incorporated LGBTQ YA texts, a student who had no interest in teaching and who came out to me in his course evaluation, sent me the following note during winter break:

Hey, Dr. Meixner,
I just wanted to say a quick thank you for the books you

shared with us in class. They were important to me and I thought you should know that.

For this student and the many other LGBTQ students like him who are looking for support from their teachers and to see themselves in the curricula they encounter in school, my answer to the question Andrea posed as she sorted through her feelings about *Boy Meets Boy* is always, “Yes. They would want to read that.”

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The Long Journey

As a founding member of ALAN, I have witnessed the growth of the organization, as well as the output of many outstanding books for young adults. NCTE's annual convention has changed also. When I first started attending the convention, usually one or two authors spoke. One of my favorite memories is that of listening to Richard Armour, who delighted many with his humor, even making fun of teachers. (Some at my table were "offended.")

Now, through the generosity of publishers, many authors—children's, young adult, adult—appear and share their ideas and writing techniques with convention-goers. The post-convention ALAN Workshop is increasingly successful. Many authors talk briefly about the sources for their writings, and outstanding educators who know and use young adult literature share ways for using such books in the classroom. It is exciting to be a part of all this.

But there is a new cloud in the skies. The troubled economy has hit publishing in a big way. Many good friends have lost their jobs, as a number of good people are being

let go from publishing houses. Publishers are facing a decline in sales, and schools and libraries have less money to spend on new books. The *New York Times* (January 29, 2009) reported that "The *Washington Post* has decided to shutter the print version of Book World, its Sunday stand-alone book review section, and shift reviews to space inside two other sections of the paper" (C1). In addition, the *Los Angeles Times* lost its stand-alone book review section in 2007. *Publishers Weekly* fired a number of people, including its editor-in-chief, Sara Nelson, and Elizabeth Devereaux, children's reviews editor. (The size of *PW* has shrunk tremendously.) New people have been assigned to take over these tasks. Some publishers are urging employees to take voluntary retirement. Voltaire states: "All is for the best in the best of all possible worlds."

Since I was a youngster, how times have changed. I was an avid reader of comic books. I also was addicted to the Hardy Boys and Nancy Drew. (I still read the Aladdin editions published today.) When I went to the library in the good old days, I was informed

that professional organizations recommended against purchase by libraries of such "series books" and comic books. Too trivial. Now look at the lists of series books and graphic novels in libraries. Who would have thought that hundreds of thousands of young people would attend midnight parties for the latest in the Harry Potter and Twilight releases? Hooray!

Dear publishers, you have helped many of us to grow and appreciate your efforts. As a result, we have chosen to spread the word about the abundance of poignant, funny, heartbreaking, heartwarming, and mind-broadening books you have offered us. These good young adult books have touched not only our lives, but those of students, teachers, librarians, and parents. So, in hopes of attracting even more readers to even more books, here are some of my favorites from among more current titles.

Professional

Mortenson, Greg, and David Oliver Relin. *Three Cups of Tea*. Penguin, 2007.

Pennac, Daniel, translated by Sarah Adams. *The Rights of the Reader*. Candlewick, 2008.

Biography/Memoir/Non-Fiction

- Aronson, Marc. *Race*. Atheneum, 2008.
- Brimmer, Larry Dane. *We Are One: The Story of Bayard Rustin*. Calkins Creek, 2008.
- Busby, Cylin, and John Busby. *The Year All Disappeared*. Bloomsbury, 2008.
- Crowe, Chris. *Up Close: Thurgood Marshall*. Viking, 2008.
- Farr, Richard. *Emperors of the Ice: A True Story of Disaster & Survival in the Antarctic, 1910–1913*. Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2008.
- Heiligman, Deborah. *Charles and Emma: The Darwins' Leap of Faith*. Holt, 2009.
- Kaufman, Michael T. *1968*. New York Times/Roaring Brook, 2009.
- Kuklin, Susan. *No Choirboy: Murder, Violence, and Teenagers on Death Row*. Holt, 2008.
- Lang, Lang, with Michael French. *Lang Lang: Playing with Flying Keys*. Delacorte, 2008.
- McCafferty, Carla Killough. *In Defiance of Hitler: The Secret Mission of Varian Fry*. Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2008.

Cultural Diversity

- Burg, Shana. *A Thousand Never Evers*. Delacorte, 2008.
- Chen, Da. *Sword*. HarperCollins, 2008.
- Compestine, Ying Chang. *Revolution Is Not a Dinner Party*. Holt, 2007.
- Craig, Colleen. *Afrika*. Tundra, 2008.
- de la Pena, Matt. *Mexican Whiteboy*. Delacorte, 2008.
- Erdrich, Louise. *The Porcupine Year*. HarperCollins, 2008.
- Hijuelos, Oscar. *Dark Dude*. Atheneum, 2008.

- Sitomer, Alan Lawrence. *The Secret Story of Sonia Rodriguez*. Hyperion, 2008.

Family Relationships

- Blundell, Judy. *What I Saw and How I Lied*. Scholastic, 2008.
- Carter, Alden R. *Walkaway*. Holiday House, 2008.
- Levitin, Sonia. *Strange Relations*. Knopf, 2008.
- Moodie, Craig. *Seaborn*. Roaring Brook, 2008.
- Moses, Sheila P. *Joseph*. McElderry, 2008.
- Parry, Rosanne. *Heart of a Shepherd*. Random House, 2009.
- Schumacher, Julie. *Black Box*. Delacorte, 2008.
- Staples, Suzanne Fisher. *The House of Djinn*. Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2008.
- Vincent, Zu. *The Lucky Place*. Front Street, 2008.

Historical Fiction

- Anderson, M. T. *The Astonishing Life of Octavian Nothing—Volume II: The Kingdom of the Waves*. Candlewick, 2008.
- Barker, M. P. *A Difficult Boy*. Holiday House, 2008.
- Bryant, Jen. *Ringside, 1925: Views from the Scopes Trial*. Knopf, 2008.
- Gardner, Sally. *The Red Necklace*. Dial, 2008.
- Haddix, Margaret Peterson. *Uprising*. Simon & Schuster, 2008.
- Hesse, Karen. *Brooklyn Bridge*. Feiwel, 2008.
- Heuston, Kimberly. *The Shakeress*. Calkins Creek, 2008.
- Hostetter, Joyce Moyer. *Healing Water: A Hawaiian Story*. Candlewick, 2008.
- Klages, Ellen. *White Sands, Red Menace*. Viking, 2009.

- Meyer, Carolyn. *In Mozart's Shadow*. Harcourt, 2008.
- Rees, Celia. *Sovay*. Bloomsbury, 2008.
- Rinaldi, Ann. *The Redheaded Princess*. HarperCollins, 2008.
- Waldorf, Mary. *The Gold Rush Kid*. Clarion, 2008.
- Wiseman, Eva. *Puppet*. Tundra, 2008.

Mystery and Suspense

- Abrahams, Peter. *Into the Dark*. Harper Collins, 2008.
- Bauer, Joan. *Peeled*. Putnam, 2008.
- Davidson, Jenny. *The Explosionist*. Harper Collins, 2008.
- Ferguson, Alane. *The Circle of Blood*. Sleuth, 2009.
- Gaiman, Neil. *The Graveyard Book*. HarperCollins, 2008.
- Green, John. *Paper Towns*. Dutton, 2008.
- Haven, Paul. *The Seven Keys of Balabad*. Random House, 2009.
- Hiasen, Carl. *Scat*. Knopf, 2009.
- Parkinson, Curtis. *Death in Kingsport*. Tundra, 2007.
- Sanders, Scott. *The Hanging Woods*. Houghton Mifflin, 2008.
- Staub, Wendy Corsi. *Lily Dale: Believing*. Walker, 2008.
- Velde, Vivian Vande. *Stolen*. Cavelandish, 2008.

Sports

- Coy, John. *Box Out*. Scholastic, 2008.
- Eulo, Elena Yates. *The Great Receiver*. Holiday House, 2008.
- Flynn, Pat. *Out of His League*. Walker, 2008.
- Gratz, Alan. *Brooklyn Nine*. Dial, 2009.
- Jones, V. M. *Out of Control*. Cavelandish, 2008.
- Konigsburg, Bill. *Out of the Pocket*. Dutton, 2008.

Mercado, Nancy, ed. *Baseball Crazy: Ten Stories That Cover All the Bases*. Puffin, 2009.

Preller, James, *Six Innings*. Feiwel, 2008.

Ritter, John H. *The Desperado Who Stole Baseball*, Philomel, 2009.

Teens: Good Times/Bad Times

Anderson, Laurie Halse. *Wintergirls*. Viking, 2009.

Barkley, Brad, & Heather Hepler. *Jars of Glass*. Dutton, 2008.

Beck, Nina. *This Isn't Fat, It's Fabulous*. Scholastic, 2008.

Booth, Coe. *Kendra*. Scholastic, 2008.

Freitas, Donna. *The Possibilities of Sainthood*. Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2008.

Grab, Daphne. *Alive and Well in*

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Kwasney, Michelle D. *Itch*. Holt, 2008.

Mass, Wendy. *Every Soul a Star*. Little, Brown, 2008.

Pixley, Marcella. *Freaks*. Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2007.

Summers, Courtney. *Cracked Up to Be*. St. Martin's Griffin, 2009.

Wilson, Martin. *What They Always Tell Us*. Delacorte, 2008.

A Touch of the Poet and Artist

Franco, Betsy, ed. *Falling Hard: 100 Love Poems by Teenagers*.

Candlewick, 2008.

Frost, Helen. *Diamond Willow*. Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2008.

Greenberg, Jan, ed. *Side by Side: New Poems Inspired by Art from around the World*. Abrams, 2008.

Reich, Susanna. *Painting the Wild Frontier: The Art and Adventures of George Catlin*. Clarion, 2008.

Sones, Sonya. *What My Girlfriend Doesn't Know*. Simon Pulse, 2008.

Weatherford, Carole Boston. *Becoming Billie Holliday*. Wordsong, 2008.

Wolf, Virginia Euwer. *This Full House*. HarperCollins, 2009.

Yeomans, Ellen. *Rubber Houses*. Little, Brown, 2007.



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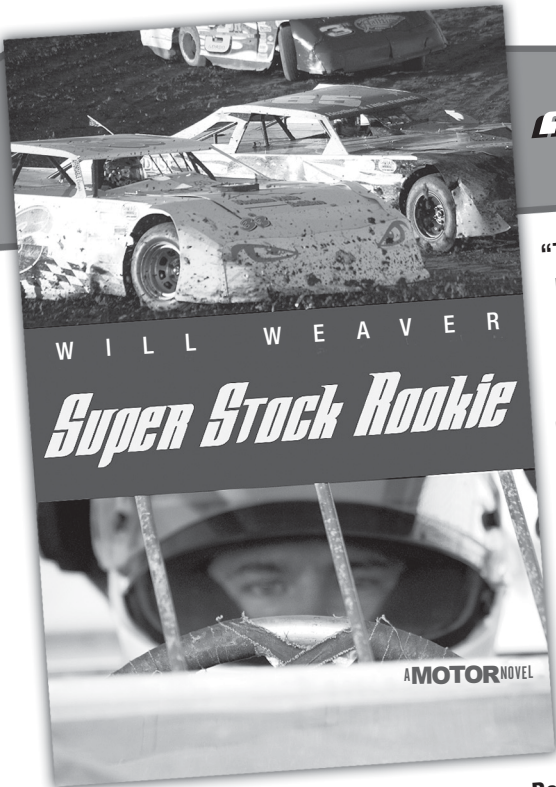
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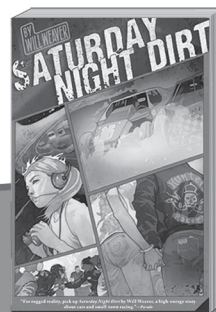
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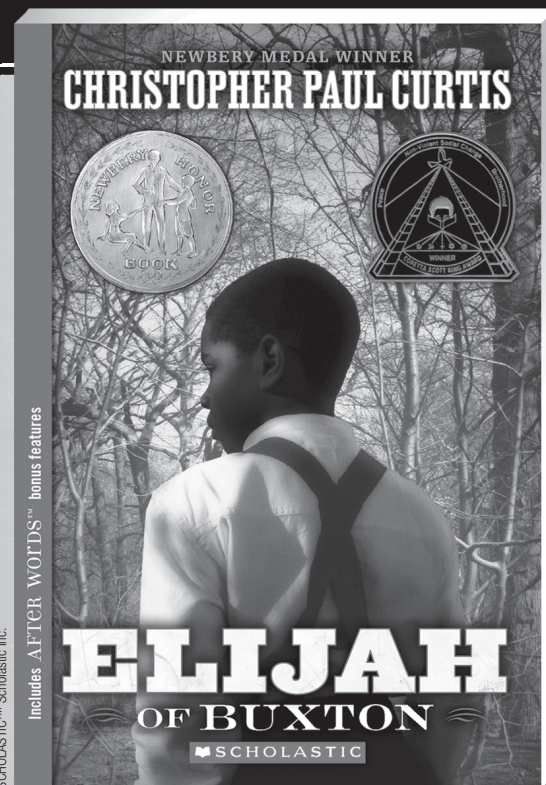
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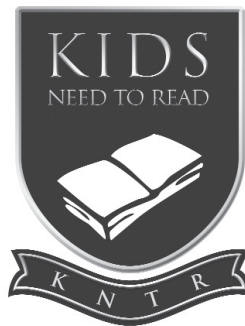
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