



From the Editors

On Growing Up, Coming of Age, and Gaining Stature: Young Adult Literature in and out of Schools

(Melanie) have been in school as either teacher or student for thirty-seven of my forty-two years; I've been in school so long that I mark the passing of time in school years rather than calendar years. I do something similar when I mark the passing of time in young adult literature (YAL)—there's Before *The Outsiders*, After *The Outsiders*, Before Harry Potter, After Harry Potter . . . time is marked in beginnings and significant changes. School years and YAL years came together for me during my first year of teaching.

I graduated from college a *very* typical English major who intended to teach the classics—Shakespeare and Austin, Whitman and Dickinson—and *my* students were going to love them. I was going to find that magical approach that would reach all of my students. I loved books and kids—how could I not reach them? I took a job teaching seventh grade in a lovely town outside of a large metropolitan city. I intended to teach seventh grade only one year (surely, the administration would see that I was destined for greater things) and then move to high school, where my vision of an English classroom would be realized. Although I had no experience with seventh graders, I wasn't really worried. My student teaching experience had been with ninth graders (really, how much difference could two years make?), and there would be a textbook that I could use for content guidance.

I arrived at my new school to learn some very interesting facts: 1) It was textbook adoption year; 2) I was on a new team that had been created because the school had a sudden influx of students; and 3) The book room had been flooded during a particularly

rainy summer season and my textbooks were soaked and soggy, moldy and smelly. As it was a textbook adoption year, the school did not have money to replace textbooks that would only be used for one year. I would have to make do with the books with the least amount of damage. So there I was—no experience in middle school and no textbooks. That could have been a recipe for disaster; however, I had something really special at that school—a fantastic media specialist and an instructional lead teacher (ILT) who knew how to work with and mentor new teachers.

The media specialist helped me get reading group sets and class sets of young adult novels to use with my students, and my ILT helped me rethink my vision of students. That year, my students and I read *The Bridge to Terabithia* (Patterson), *A Wrinkle in Time* (L'Engle), *Dogsong* (Paulsen), *Number the Stars* (Lowry), and several other texts (all novels referenced in this introduction are listed in a bibliography at the end). It was a life-changing experience reading these texts with students. It is not so much the texts that I remember as life-changing, but rather the experience of reading those texts with students who were deeply engaged. My seventh graders came to class prepared to talk about what they had read; we had heated discussions about characterization, theme, and symbolism. Equally important as those conversations were the ones we had about how these stories connected with their lives. My students were willing to talk about the literary elements of a text, but they also wanted, *needed*, to talk about how they saw themselves in the texts. Karey, a student in sixth period, wrote,

I know how Annemarie felt when the Germans took her uncle's lunch and searched her basket. Last year on the way to school, two boys stopped me and my friend and took our lunches and went through our backpacks. They threw our stuff on the ground and kicked it. The whole time I kept hoping that they wouldn't find the money Mom gave me for the fieldtrip. The boys were mean like the Nazis and made us scared because they could. Annemarie's experience reminded me of my experience and I understood her being so scared and mad.

Karey connected her life experiences with the life experiences of a character in a novel set fifty years prior to her birth. Another student, Matt, connected with Russel, the main character in *Dogsong*. He wrote,

I been hunting for as long as I can remember. Russel keeps repeating that she would die, he would die, and the dogs would die. Saying it over and over again makes it more important. It makes me pay attention to the words. This one time I went hunting with my dad and uncle and we got separated. I kept saying the directions they'd told me over and over again so I wouldn't forget. They became the most important thing for me. Like Russel, I focused on that and [not] the stuff that didn't matter.

My experiences with that seventh-grade class and those texts reshaped what I thought about teaching, about literature, and about what counts as an important and rich text for adolescents. Before this experience, I would have argued that students needed to read the same texts that I had as a student in order to have something weighty to talk about; before this experience, I would have argued for the canon, the classics as texts for students in English classes. I began my growing up as a teacher that year; I recognized my students' deep need to see themselves in what they were reading, to connect their lives to characters, and to talk about their reading with other people.

It's been twenty years since my first teaching experience with young adult literature, and I have marked the passing of those years in novels. This past year, we marked ten years since the publication of *Speak* (Anderson); I get a lump in my throat each time I talk about this novel because of how it touched the life of one specific student. *Speak* was one of the books that disappeared from my classroom library eight years ago. I didn't think anything of it as I was preparing my list of books that needed to be replaced; it was just a book that was missing . . . until Marissa walked into my classroom. She said, "This book saved my life" and held out the missing copy of *Speak*. It was battered with writing and sticky notes on nearly

every page. Like Melinda, Marissa had been raped by someone who went to her, our, school.

Over the years, other books have helped students deal with issues in their lives—*Annie on My Mind* (Garden), *Crank* (Hopkins), *What Is Goodbye?* (Grimes), *Rats Saw God* (Thomas), *The House You Pass on the Way* (Woodson)—and I think about how my view of young adult literature has grown up and come of age. I don't look at young adult literature and see books that are best for struggling readers or for readers who need to see themselves in texts. I see young adult literature as Literature—texts that are rich, deep, and meaningful. I look at the books in my classroom library I have to replace each year—from *Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes* (Crutcher) to *ttyl* (Myracle) to *The Lightning Thief* (Riordan) to *Speak* (Anderson) to *Unwind* (Shusterman)—and still feel that sense of wonder that I felt when I realized as a first-year teacher that my students could and would engage deeply with texts.

The ways in which my students interact with texts has changed in the past twenty years. While they still want to read and talk about texts, students often have an expectation that the book will be part of a larger media experience. Keith, a high school student, said, "I don't want just a book. I want more. I want to read it and then play it and then see it. I like it when books have movies and games and websites." Many young adult authors realize this expectation and are responding with multimedia experiences for young adults. Like Keith, Sarah sees books as part of a larger social environment; she expects to be able to read a book and then have more "stuff" to do with it. She said, "I like when there are lots of books in a series so I can really get into like the whole world. I like the books that have a website that I can go to and get more stuff from. Games and chats and forums and stuff." Young adult literature is coming of age along with its readers.

The articles for this issue all address the theme of "Young Adult Literature Gaining Stature at the High School Level." We begin with an article by a first-year teacher, Kate Featherston. Her account traces her successful incorporation of YAL into her English Language Learners (ELL) classroom full of reluctant and struggling readers. Next, Candence Robillard examines the popularity of *Twilight* by analyzing student responses to the novel as she explores what

these responses reveal about gender roles and readers' expectations within the larger genre of vampire novels. Anete Vásquez explains how ninth-grade "at-risk" students can produce a close literary examination of Alex Flinn's novel, *Breathing Underwater*. Crag Hill's article explains a collaborative teaching unit between an English teacher and a health teacher. Using Angela Johnson's *The First Part Last*, the teachers combine efforts in the sex education unit of a high school Health class.

Through a close reading of *American Born Chinese*, Rosemary Hathaway describes how not only traditional texts provide intertextuality, but how other cultural texts, videos, toys, and children's chants can also support and enhance deep intertextual readings. Nicole Westenskow provides an introduction to the young adult literature of New Zealand. In a global world, we can be more responsible teachers if we have more books to offer our students that can connect them to the rest of the world.

In our last article, "An Almost Young Adult Literature Study," Lisa Hazlett, Angela Beumer Johnson, and Judith Hayn tackle the difficulties and frustration of explaining a failed research study. They describe current problems around the research in our field and then point to possible next steps for establishing a stronger research base for the continued efforts of legitimizing the field.

In our section Something about the Author, we have two interviews. Catherine Ross-Stroud conducted Janet McDonald's last interview before her death to cancer in 2007. McDonald's works have been an important voice for the experiences of African American teens, and Ross-Stroud provides a brief survey of her work along with the interview. Jacqueline Bach offers an interview with Rick Riordan. Riordan's Percy Jackson series has been exciting readers for the last several years with the adventures of a group of modern-day demi-gods. Who says that the study of mythology can't be exciting?

This issue's Connections section has two columns and introduces a new feature that we hope offers an opportunity to hear more of your voices. Peter Gutiérrez's column, Integrating Graphica into Your Curriculum: Recommended Titles for Grades 6–12, provides a thoughtful introduction to strong graphic novels "that contain significant literary merit and can accomplish multiple curricular goals." In "Beyond

Relevance to Literary Merit: Young Adult Literature as 'Literature,'" Anna Soter and Sean Connors argue that young adult literature has come of age for young people in terms of its relevance and its literary value. Our new feature, which we are calling Stories from the Field, highlights your experiences with young adult literature. We hope teachers, librarians, critics, students, and readers might offer interesting insights into how they have used this literature in a variety of settings. In this issue, Matt Skillen shows how young adult literature influences a student's behavior at home, and Kathleen Richard reports on reading *Twilight* through her students' reading response journals.

We hope you enjoy these pieces as much as we have. We look forward to your comments, whatever they may be.

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Call for Manuscripts

Submitting a Manuscript:

Manuscript submission guidelines are available on p. 2 of this issue and on our website at <http://www.alan-ya.org/the-alan-review/>. **Note:** *The ALAN Review* is adjusting its submission deadlines to allow more time for editing and production. *The January 2010 deadline below represents a change from previous versions of this call.* Beginning with the Fall 2010 issue, deadlines will be announced as follows: Fall issue, March 1; Winter issue, July 1; Summer issue, November 1.

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. Submission deadline: **October 15, 2009**

2010 Summer Theme: Interplay: Influence of Film, New Media, Digital Technology, and Image on YA Literature

The lines between various forms of media are frequently blurred for young adult readers; young adult novels increasingly have some combination of websites, blogs, fanfiction, and video games to accompany them. The theme of this issue asks us to consider the influences of film, new media, digital technology, and image on young adult novels. What does the interplay between digital media and young adult literature look like? How is young adult literature being influenced by digital media? What roles do film and image play in young adult literature? What are the reading experiences of young adults who “read” books in multiple media? Which novels and novel media help readers to question or critique society and the world? 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. Submission deadline: **January 5, 2010**

2010 Fall Theme: Can I teach this? What does YA literature look like in the classroom?

One of the most frequent comments we hear from our preservice teachers is how much they like young adult literature, but how unprepared they feel to “teach” it in their future classrooms. They are worried not only about possible censorship issues, but also about whether or not the quality of YA literature is comparable to the “classics.” For this issue, we are seeking a broad range of articles that explore the ways teachers incorporate YA literature in the classroom. What are your experiences teaching YAL at any level? How do you prepare new teachers? How does teaching YAL compare with teaching the classics? How does it meet or trouble the standards in your environment? What are some quality texts that have been rewarding in the hands of students? 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. Submission deadline: **March 1, 2010**

New Section

Got a story about young adult literature you’d like to share? We are starting a new section featuring brief vignettes (no more than 300 words) from practicing teachers and librarians who would like to share their interactions with students, parents, colleagues, and administrators around YA literature.