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From the Editors

> Before I loved *Ulysses* or *Hamlet* or *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, I loved books. I loved to read. I loved *The Outsiders*, Harry Potter, The Babysitters Club—all those books and characters were part of my reading life. Books were magical to me. Some were better than others but those were books I consumed, books I went to willingly. I want to teach books that kids come to willingly. And, some of those books are such quality works. How can I not choose them? What if I choose them *and* the students come to them willingly . . . and it changes everything about what I am teaching? Something to dream about. (Emma, 2008)

The theme for this issue focuses on preservice teachers, young adult literature, and the teaching of classical texts and/or YAL. Because I (Melanie) teach courses in young adult literature for future teachers, I often hear my students argue about whether or not YAL should be incorporated in middle and high school classrooms, whether YAL compares in quality to classic or canonical texts, and whether or not these books meet state and national standards. These same questions and arguments are the ones I heard in staff rooms as a middle school and high school teacher. The arguments seemed to settle into two camps—one arguing for "good" books and one arguing for books kids come to willingly. Their initial definitions of "good" books didn't often include YA novels. And the list of books that kids come to willingly rarely included classical texts. There was little effort to merge the camps.

The students in my YAL classes often begin the semester with the idea that the texts we will be reading are not *quality* literature—complex enough for deep discussions or challenging enough for good readers. Many of them remember loving particular novels as kids (they are always quick to specify as kids) before they moved on to "real books." If I push or challenge the notion of "real" books and ask them to explain what makes a book worth reading and worth teaching, they struggle. They start with the argument that the "real" books (anything by Shakespeare or Joyce, selected novels from Faulkner, Fitzgerald, Hardy, Austen, Cather, Hurston, etc.) are just "good for you to read" because "they are part of Quality Literature" and make you "part of the culture." When asked to define quality literature and identify how they know quality literature, their arguments break down. They regroup, refocus, and come to the next class ready to talk about complexity and the human condition. So, we start there.

The students define complex texts as those that allow for deep, rich engagement and discussions; they have multiple levels on which they can be read. They are texts in which a reader can dig deep and mine for more nuanced and layered understandings. Emmett explained, "There's something to talk about, something that surprises you, something that makes you go aha or oh."

With Emmett's class, our first YA novel was *Holes*. I asked them to apply their definition of complex text to *Holes* to see if it met their criteria, to see if there was something more to this particular text than what they thought initially. Anna bounced into class holding a copy of the novel decorated with multicolored sticky notes and a poster that explained her color-coded system. She had a color for gender roles

and whether or not the character met, challenged, or resisted their expected gender roles; a color for language play; a color for each of the three plotlines (and a chart that illustrated the shared elements of the plots); and a color for turning points in a character's life. Michael focused on the role of myth and legend in the novel, marking archetypal characters and uses of traditional symbols. Sarah and Liam both identified and explored elements of magical realism. Three other students focused on the role of fate and family. The discussion on this novel lasted for almost two hours and I said almost nothing.

When we debriefed, Liah said, "When I read [*Holes*] the first time, I didn't take the book seriously. It was a YA novel and easy to read." There were nods from the other 20 students in the classroom. "I read it," Anna said, "without a pencil or highlighter the first time." More nods. Liah picked up again, "I didn't expect anything from the book so I didn't find anything in the book. Emmet had talked about *aha* and *oh* moments. When I reread the book, I wanted to be the one who made those moments happen." There was a chorus of "me, too" from around the room. Nicole, a quiet student who rarely spoke up, said,

> As I was reading *Holes* for the second time, I realized that I was reading it like I did when I was first in my AP classes. Then, when I read a book, I knew there was something there, something I was supposed to get or find or discover or whatever. Early in my AP classes, I was shaky with the tools I was supposed to use. I looked for symbolism because we had covered that or I looked for whatever we had covered recently. I assumed that the teachers had assigned that book because there was something valuable in it, but I didn't assume that about *Holes*. I didn't use my tools with this text and it was a self-fulfilling prophecy thing. Because I didn't look, I didn't find. My expectation of the book shaped what I found. What I brought to the book shaped how I read it and what I missed. That's a scary thought for me because it means that I wasn't my own reader exactly in high school. I found something in all those books because I expected to, because a teacher told me it was there; now I have to look at all the books I read with that in mind. Nobody'll be there to tell me. I'll be the teacher.

The class was quiet, pondering what she said. Emmet asked, "Does this mean that we think all those books we named are good books because someone told us they were?" I let the question sit for a few minutes. Anna asked, "Or does it mean that there are good books that we haven't been told are good books, and we need to find them for ourselves and for our students?" Class discussions are interesting things. Good ones set the tone for the class, for the ways in which students can engage with each other around texts. A similar discussion played out this year; we read *Hunger Games,* and the students marveled at the complexity of the text and its elaboration of the human condition, at the challenges inherent in the way the author critiques society.

Frequently, we hear from preservice (and inservice) teachers that no matter how much they like YAL, they don't believe that they can teach it in their classrooms. "If I were somewhere else," they say, "it would be different." "If the current climate were different, then I could do more with these books." If. If. If. As teachers, *if* and *what if* are scary words. They help us imagine possibilities and potential failures. Changing something about the content taught in schools is risky. Adding new books to the curriculum requires attention to the larger context of the curriculum.

Sonia, a student teacher, requested to teach *Hunger Games* for her middle school placement; her cooperating teacher told her that *Lord of the Flies* is the 8th-grade YA novel and that changing it would involve a lot of paperwork, permission from the department chair, the principal, and the parents. Sonia eventually received permission to teach *Hunger Games* as a companion text to *Lord of the Flies.* She said, "While I am glad that I got to teach *Hunger Games*, it was a lot of work. If I have to do that every time I want to teach a different book, then I imagine I will choose to teach what is in the bookroom." Another student teacher wanted to use an LGBT text as an option for students in literature circles. She was told that she couldn't use that book as one of the options. The difficulties in changing or adding to the curriculum, especially when there may be censorship issues, make it challenging for teachers to imagine other options for their classrooms. The articles in this issue focus on the *what if* questions that the authors asked as they made a change in their classrooms or in their practices.

In the first article, "From Preservice Teacher to Trusted Adult: Sexual Orientation and Gender Variance in an Online YAL Book Club," Katherine Mason uses lesbian, gay, bisexual, and gender-variant YA literature with preservice teachers. She explores how an online book club introduced her students to the importance of being aware of this literature, the ways

in which they might use these texts with their future students, and the role these texts play in meeting the national call for attention to these issues.

Joni Richards Bodart reminds us that in a world that seems to increasingly accentuate the divide between adolescents and adults, young people still need adult guidance. That guidance seems to appear not only through the books that YA authors produce, but through their communications with their readers. B. Joyce Stallworth explains how students in a YA literature course used the common assignment of a book talk to help them create a summer reading list—one that, for some, expanded their opportunities to explore YA literature beyond the parameters of the class.

Denise Davila explores the emerging phenomenon of online book trailers. Students in her YA literature class respond and react to these specific "texts" as they consider the value and effectiveness of this publishers' experiment to reach a broader reading audience. It seems clear that digital communication continues to influence adolescents and their reading. Melanie D. Koss and Eli Tucker-Raymond offer a textual analysis of a significant representation of YA realistic fiction in an attempt to discover how authors represent digital communication among their protagonists and other characters. Do they blog, text, email, or play online games? Indeed, do the teens in fiction seem to mirror what we see in homes, the mall, or in schools, not just in e-communication, but in terms of ethnic or socioeconomic representation?

In "Island Hopping: From *The Cay* to *Treasure Island* to *Lord of the Flies* to *The Tempest* . . . and Back Again," Kevin B. Kienholz chronicles his journey into and through young adult literature, offering us glimpses into the ways particular books shape our reading lives. Joni Richards Bodart provides a brief history and an introduction to booktalking in the Library Connection column, "Booktalking: That Was Then and This Is Now," providing a contextual overview and resources for classroom teachers and media specialists. Linda Oatman High weaves a literary analysis of *Wintergirls*, *Speak*, and *Chains*, through an interview with Laurie Halse Anderson in which they explore the use of symbols in these three texts. She shows us the layers that Melanie's students seek to find in their texts, demonstrating that these works qualify as important components to any classroom.

This issue's Stories from the Field demonstrate what happens when three teachers find their own answers to the "If," as they share their success with incorporating young adult literature into their own very different settings—a multicultural education course, an Advanced Placement course, and a remedial reading course.

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

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.

Summer 2011 Theme: What Does YA Literature Look Like in Spaces Other than the Classroom?

Young adult literature continues to permeate spaces other than the classroom: in libraries, bookstores, movie theaters, and the Internet. Consider the popularity of texts such as the Twilight series, the Harry Potter series, and *The Diary of a Wimpy Kid* (examples of books that have gone viral with young adults), and think about how these books and others like them develop communities of readers outside of the classroom. The theme of this issue asks us to explore the ways in which young adult literature functions outside of the classroom. In what spaces, other than the classroom, do you use young adult literature? What have you learned from book groups, especially those involving adults, that read young adult literature? How has cyberspace influenced the way you discuss young adult literature? In what way or ways does young adult literature become part of a young adult's life outside of school? 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: **November 1, 2010.**

Fall 2011 Theme: Converging Paths: YA Lit, The ALAN Review, and NCTE

This issue coincides with the 100th anniversary of NCTE, so it seems appropriate to consider the role of young adult literature, in particular *The ALAN Review*, and its relationship with NCTE. Which young adult authors or sessions have you seen at NCTE that inspired you or helped you reconsider how to incorporate YA Lit into your curriculum? What themes (social justice, issues of diversity, coming of age, to list a few) in YA Lit continue to speak to you or your students as they find books in your classroom or in your library? What direction should NCTE take in regards to our field? How do the NCTE conference and the ALAN workshop influence the place of YA Lit in the larger world of English education? How does your participation in these events influence how you teach young adult literature at the college level? This theme is meant to be open to interpretation and support a broad range of subtopics. General submissions are also welcome. Submission deadline: **March 1, 2011.**

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.