



From the Editors

Since I (Melanie) am trapped at home with a broken leg, I have been bemoaning the state of daytime television. Lots of reality shows, lots of CSI repeats, and lots of infomercials. While flipping through the channels last week, I stumbled on the movie *Juno*. I came in at the scene where Juno just told her family that she is pregnant. Her father looks at her and says, “I thought you were the kind of girl who knew when to say when.” She responds by saying, “I don’t know what kind of girl I am.” In that response, I heard the echo of so many of the adolescents I have taught over the years—I don’t know who I am. I don’t know who I want to be. I wanna change and be different but I don’t know how. I don’t like who I am when I hang with them. I just want someone to like me for me, for who I am.

Campbell (2000) argues that one of the distinguishing themes of YAL is “becoming an adult, finding the answer to the question ‘Who am I and what am I going to do about it?’ No matter what events are going on in the book, accomplishing that task is really what the book is about, and in the climactic moment the resolution of the of the external conflict is linked to a realization for the protagonist that helps shape an adult identity” (pp. 485–486). The questions “Who am I and what am I going to do about it?” are more complex than they appear at first glance. Juno realizes that she is in the process of becoming who she is as she makes very challenging, very adult decisions. Her actions, her choices shape who she is. Adolescents and the characters that they choose to read about, identify with, or learn from are as complicated as the

question. Good YAL explores the world and, implicitly or explicitly, identity in complex ways.

This issue of *The ALAN Review* focuses on questions of identity. As a teacher, one of the reasons I wanted to use YAL in my classes was so my students could see themselves, or at least people their own age, dealing with issues that they may also be dealing with—getting along with siblings or people at school, finding a date, saying “no” to drugs or sex, dealing with an unwanted experience, etc. While YAL does more than provide an opportunity for students to see themselves, it is a place where issues of identity and self can play out in nuanced and complex ways. The range of YAL—comedy and humor to science fiction to romance to realistic fiction and beyond—provides a space where adolescents can read and explore the issues of their lives and of the world.

In “Humanizing the ‘So-called Enemy,’” Bloem and her university students read the work of Naomi Shihab Nye, which serves as a way for them to discuss the representations of those from the Middle East in popular media. Bloem points out the transformative aspects of Nye’s poetry when paired with thoughtful classroom discussions and activities.

In “Landscapes of City and Self,” Thomas illustrates the variety of ways in which adolescents are represented in urban settings and helps us see that an urban landscape might mean a larger variety of experiences than readers from other setting might initially imagine. Then, in “A Family from a Continent of I Don’t Know What,” Katherine Bell asks us to consider if the grand narrative of the *bildungsroman* or coming-

of-age novel, as it is described in classic terms, still serves as a sufficient trope for adolescents as they question their own formation and identity. Perhaps new narratives make more sense in an increasingly globalized society.

Connie Zitlow and Lois Stover ask us to consider the many ways in which the young adult is represented as an artist. In their essay “Portrait of the Artist as a Young Adult,” they provide examples of how some adolescents define themselves as artists. They illustrate that many adolescent protagonists find themselves as they explore their identities through artistic expression. Angela Insenga explores in “Goth Girl Reading” how graphic novels and comic books provide insight into the exploration of adolescent identity. In this essay, she explores how Kyra Sellers, the protagonist of Lyga’s *Goth Girl Rising* (2009), creates an identity through her reading of graphic novels.

Jennifer Dail and Jordan Leonard ask if LGBTQ teens might find some solace in reading texts that are more representative of their experiences. In *Creating Realms of Possibilities*, they explore the issues surrounding the inclusion of such novels, including the possible discomfort some classroom teachers might feel when attempting to add these titles to a classroom library or reading list.

The three columns in this issue provide useful information for everyone. Jerry Weiss reminds us that when students read different books around a common genre or theme, they can still have a shared experience through discussion. He provides a few sample categories and suggests some recent titles for our con-

sideration. Jeffery Kaplan provides a retrospective of books published about young adult literature through the last decade. His list is a valuable consolidation of resources. Judith Hayn and Lisa Hazlett provide a more specific retrospective in “Hear Us Out!” They explore the changes in how young adult literature representing LGBTQ teens has changed since the late 1990s. Collectively, these columns can help provide timely facts or a relevant reading list when addressing specific issues of young adult literature.

Both of the authors interviewed in this issue write books that deal with important issues young adults experience. In her interview with Allison Whittenberg, KaaVonia Hinton asks her about her identity as a writer who focuses on young African American women’s issues. Rebecca Hill discusses with Ellen Hopkins her decision to write about tough issues that teenagers face and her upcoming novels that continue the stories of some of her familiar characters. Both of these novelists create characters who are seeking the answer to Campbell’s (2000) question.

Finally, our Stories from the Field feature episodes in which families become part of our students’ reading experiences. Family members—represented in young adult literature from the absent and overbearing to the loving and supportive—remain integral to young adults’ identity formation.

References

- Campbell, P. (2000, July/August). The sand in the oyster: Middle muddle. *The Horn Book Magazine*, 483-487.
- Lyga, B. (2009). *Goth Girl rising*. New York: Houghton Mifflin.

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**.