

They Read and Write, but Do They Critique?

The Four Resources of Literacy Practice in Printz-Award-Winning Literature

. . . and I remembered those shoes
Cinderella wore. You know how in that story, everything
turns out okay when she comes out from her corner
and that glass slipper fits her? Sometimes I stay alive
by thinkin' of those stories

—*Keesha's House* (Frost, 2003, p. 52)

In *Keesha's House*, Carmen remembers childhood fairy tales, and they give her hope that transcends the bleakness of incarceration in a juvenile facility. Carmen also writes in detention. She gets two pieces of paper for writing letters, paper “like new shoes/ to take me where I want to go. I write things down to keep my/inside self alive” (p. 52).

The Michael L. Printz Award has honored many young adult novels in which characters like Carmen use reading and writing for a myriad of purposes. Virginia reads and writes emails in *The Earth, My Butt, and Other Big Round Things* (Mackler, 2003); Miles reads biographies and writes essays in *Looking for Alaska* (Green, 2005); Gio reads and writes zines in *Hard Love* (Wittlinger, 1999). In fact, all of the realistic fiction that has been honored by the Printz Award depicts characters who read and write. These depictions provide young adult readers with a broader understanding of the ways that reading and writing can be used to engage with the world; however, they represent an incomplete model of literacy practices. This essay uses the four resources model to examine the range of literacy practices in young adult (YA)

literature, a model that teachers may want to adopt themselves in order to ensure they are providing a more complete representation of literacy practices to the young adults with whom they work.

The Four Resources Model

The four resources model was developed by Luke and Freebody (1997, 1999) in order to describe the range of literacy practices enacted in classrooms. It has been used by others to critique the range of literacy practices embodied in state standards and assessments (e.g., Underwood, Yoo, & Pearson, 2007). Luke and Freebody suggest that literate individuals draw on four intertwining “families of practice” as they read and write, each of which highlights a different aspect of literacy practice. The four resources of literacy include (a) code breaking, with a focus on the relationship between sounds and symbols; (b) meaning making, with an emphasis on resources readers use to interpret texts and to compose messages; (c) text use, with a focus on the ways in which texts are used for a variety of functions in social contexts; and (d) text criticism,

resources that allow readers to evaluate and critique texts.

The four resources are neither hierarchical nor mutually exclusive. All four resources may be employed in any act of reading or writing; however, one or the other may be highlighted or most prominent during any given literacy event. A reader, for example, may use knowledge of phonics to decode a billboard for a restaurant on the side of the road (code breaking), interpret that billboard to mean that a restaurant is at the next exit (meaning making), and talk with her child in the back seat

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about the billboard's use of an athlete to promote unhealthy food (text criticism), and, most prominently, use the billboard's written directions to plan where to stop for lunch (text use). None of the four resources, by itself, is sufficient for literacy—a literate individual in the 21st century must be able to decode texts, make meaning, use texts for functional purposes, and understand and critique these texts.

The Common Core Standards for English Language Arts (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2010), for example, require students to engage in all four of these families of resources. The standards specify that in order to be ready for college and careers, students should be able to “know and apply grade-level phonics and word analysis skills in decoding words” (code breaking), “read and comprehend literature” (meaning making), “follow precisely a multistep procedure,” (text use) and “assess the extent to which the reasoning and evidence in a text support the author's claims” (text critique). Because being fully literate means being able to fluently engage in each of the four resources, it is important to provide young adults with models of each of these families of practice.

YA literature can provide readers with models for engaging with written text. Nodelman and Reimer (2004) explain the socializing potential of children's literature, saying, “Whatever else literary texts are,

and whatever pleasure they might afford us, they are also expressions of the values and assumptions of a culture and a significant way of embedding readers in those values and assumptions” (p. 69). Butts (2001), a former chair of the Printz Award Committee, described the power of YA lit to invite readers to “look beyond the surface, to look within, and to come to their own diverse conclusions as they move from childhood to adulthood” (p. 31). YA novels provide readers with a range of ways of being in the world, ways of acting and understanding that readers may assume as they make that transition into maturity. These ways of being can include ways of interacting with written texts, including ways of reading and writing that go beyond the range of literacy practices in which readers are already engaged.

This article applies the four resources model to examine the literacy practices of characters in Printz-Award-winning and honor books from 2000 to 2010. The Printz-Award-winning novels provide a means for introducing and explaining the four resources model, using the characters' interactions with reading and writing to instantiate each of the four families of practice. Teachers who possess an understanding of the four resources model can employ it to examine the literacy practices represented in the texts they share with YA readers and the families of literacy practices that they incorporate into their own literacy instruction.

While the novels provide a context for understanding the four resources model, a secondary purpose of this article is to analyze the ways in which reading and writing are portrayed in Printz-Award-winning novels themselves. The Printz Award has been given by the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) of the American Library Association since 2000 and is awarded on the basis of the literary merit of the text (see www.ala.org/yalsa/printz). Books eligible for the award must be designated by their publisher as intended for an audience between the ages of 12 and 18 years old. Because Printz Award winners represent the best of YA literature, they provide a context for looking at the models of literacy use provided to YA readers. While the Printz Award has been given to 48 books, including nonfiction, poetry, fantasy, and historical fiction, this article analyzes the literacy practices depicted in the subset of 24 novels that can be classified as contemporary realistic fiction.

(Table 1 lists these titles by date of award; a list by author can be found in the references.) This subset is chosen because the literacy practices found in realistic fiction reflect those available to young adults in the 21st century.

Method

To analyze the range of literacy practices depicted in Printz-Award-winning novels, each instance of literacy use in all 24 novels was excerpted. Each excerpt was categorized according to the family of resources portrayed and placed accordingly into a table (see an excerpt in Table 2). Because the four resources intertwine, that aspect of literacy use that was most prominent in the excerpt was used as the basis for placing the instance in the data table. For example, every representation of characters reading involved characters using decoding skills, but only those instances in which characters explicitly referred to or struggled with decoding were coded as examples of the code-

breaking family of resources. Once the table was constructed, each column of the table was analyzed for frequency (e.g., there were very few examples of characters explicitly working to decode). Because there were many instances of characters engaged in reading and writing for specific purposes (engaging in the third resource of text use), that category was again analyzed, with each instance of literacy use sorted into sub-categories based on the purpose for text use (e.g., using text to entertain oneself or to build relationships). Examples of each of the four resources and of the six most common literacy uses are discussed below.

Code Breakers: Employing Knowledge of the Sound-Symbol Relationship

The first of the four families of literacy practice described in the four resources model is that of code breaker. This dimension of literacy emphasizes the practices that individuals use when they employ knowledge of the sound-symbol system of the English

language, that is, when they use knowledge of letters and sounds and spelling patterns to decode text, and when they encode their own thoughts and ideas into alphabetic symbols.

The code-breaking family of resources is illustrated most clearly when Shawn, the main character in *Stuck in Neutral* (Trueman, 2000), describes learning to read. Shawn has no muscle control. He cannot talk or even focus his eyes in any particular direction. However, Shawn says that he learned to read when his sister played school with him. He says, “Reading is easy once you catch on that every letter just stands for a sound Sounds into letters, letters to words, words to sentences—reading” (p. 9).

Shawn is an exception. As young adults who are already fluent readers and writers, the characters in Printz-Award-winning novels encode and decode with fluency and ease. Code breaking is only made explicit in one other text. In *The Body of Christopher Creed* (Plum-Ucci, 2000), characters

Table 1: Contemporary realistic fiction honored by the Michael L. Printz Award: 2000–2010

2010	<i>Punkzilla</i> , Adam Rapp
2009	<i>Jellicoe Road</i> , Melina Marchetta <i>The Disreputable History of Frankie Landau-Banks</i> , E. Lockhart
2008	<i>The White Darkness</i> , Geraldine McCaughrean <i>One Whole and Perfect Day</i> , Judith Clarke
2007	<i>An Abundance of Katherines</i> , John Green
2006	<i>Looking for Alaska</i> , John Green <i>I Am the Messenger</i> , Markus Zusak
2005	<i>Chanda's Secrets</i> , Allan Stratton
2004	<i>The First Part Last</i> , Angela Johnson <i>Keesha's House</i> , Helen Frost <i>Fat Kid Rules the World</i> , K. L. Going <i>The Earth, My Butt, and Other Big Round Things</i> , Carolyn Mackler
2003	<i>My Heartbeat</i> , Garret Freymann-Weyr
2002	<i>A Step from Heaven</i> , An Na <i>Freewill</i> , Chris Lynch <i>True Believer</i> , Virginia Euwer Wolff
2001	<i>Many Stones</i> , Carolyn Coman <i>The Body of Christopher Creed</i> , Carol Plum-Ucci <i>Angus, Thongs, and Full-Frontal Snogging</i> , Louise Rennison <i>Stuck in Neutral</i> , Terry Trueman
2000	<i>Monster</i> , Walter Dean Myers <i>Speak</i> , Laurie Halse Anderson <i>Hard Love</i> , Ellen Wittlinger

Table 2: Excerpt from data analysis table

Code Breaking: Sound-Symbol Relationship	Meaning Making: Figuring Out What Texts Mean and How to Use Text to Convey Meaning	Text Use: Using Texts for Functional Purposes	Text Critique: Evaluating Purposes, Critical Literacy
<p><i>Body of Christopher Creed</i>, page 154; trying to read last name in Creed’s journal, “Wait, let’s back up and read a little bit. Maybe it’ll just back into our heads after we’ve looked at his handwriting long enough.”</p>	<p><i>I Am the Messenger</i>, pp. 208–209; Ed learns to use the electronic card catalog to look up the names of authors on a playing card, hoping to learn what the list means. “. . . when I punch the name in and hit return, all the titles of Graham Greene come up on-screen.”</p> <p><i>Abundance of Katherines</i>, p. 208; Colin gets his first kiss when he tells a good story, “. . . you Smarty-pants, just told an <i>amazing</i> story, proving that given enough time, and enough coaching, and enough hearing stories from current and former associates of Gutshot Textiles, anyone—anyone—can learn to tell a damned good story.”</p>	<p><i>My Heartbeat</i>, pp. 51–52; Ellen reads books at a gay bookstore to answer questions: “I learn lots of things.” (use: to learn)</p> <p><i>My Heartbeat</i>, p. 30; Ellen would rather still be reading <i>Jane Eyre</i>, “Eating lunch with Adena and Laurel feels like a complete waste of time. I could be reading.” (use: entertainment and distraction)</p> <p><i>My Heartbeat</i>, pp. 10–11; Ellen gets bumper stickers from James (he has to explain the jokes) and books from her father: “Dad’s present is a hardcover copy of <i>The Age of Innocence</i>.” (use: build relationships)</p>	<p><i>Freewill</i>, p. 103; Gran’s response to the newspaper article: “It’s every bit of it nothing but sick lies anyway.”</p>

work to decipher the scrawling cursive in their classmate’s diary by reading and rereading. In all the other texts, code breaking is invisible as characters engage in reading and writing for meaningful purposes. Even characters that might at first seem unlikely to have access to literacy are depicted as able to decode and encode texts with ease. For example, *Chanda’s Secret* (Stratton, 2004) is set in AIDS-affected Africa, where literacy rates are incredibly low (United Nations Development Programme, 2009). Chanda grapples with both poverty and her parents’ death, but she has access to schooling, books, and writing materials, and she already knows how to read.

Meaning Makers: Figuring Out What Texts Say

Meaning making refers to the family of practices individuals engage in when they construct meaning—when they draw on their knowledge of text structures, genre, and social contexts to interpret and encode meaningful texts. Several characters in Printz novels

employ the resources of meaning making, and as they do so, they reveal a great deal about the social nature of interpreting texts. For example, in *One Whole and Perfect Day* (Clarke, 2006), Lonnie is not sure at first how to interpret the letter C written at the top of his English essay. Lonnie had felt proud of the essay, but the C “was—he knew it—borderline” (p. 51). Or so he thought, until Clara provides more information. “I mean you mightn’t know Dr. Finch does it to *everyone*,” she tells him, “Especially if they’re good” (p. 53). Clara helps Lonnie realize that the grade of C is actually meant as praise. Lonnie needs more information about the text, its author, and his intentions in order to understand its meaning. Talking with Clara provides that context.

Characters are also depicted using additional print resources to make meaning from the text they are reading. In the novel *I Am the Messenger* (Zusak, 2005), for example, Ed receives messages written on the faces of playing cards, and he engages in a great

deal of research to figure out what those messages mean. One message leads him to the library to look up books written by specified authors, another sends him to a movie theater to consult a list of movie titles. The original texts make no sense without this added reading. Likewise, in *Jellicoe Road* (Marchetta, 2008), Taylor draws repeatedly on a variety of sources in order to understand her own past. These resources include newspaper articles, the memoir her guardian is writing, and the novel *To Kill a Mockingbird*. In these and other novels, a single text cannot be interpreted on its own. Characters involve the meaning-making family of resources as they use the context of other texts in order to interpret the texts they read.

Another aspect of meaning making is learning about how texts work in order to comprehend them in sophisticated ways. Good readers are able to interpret the conventions authors employ to convey meaning (e.g., literary devices or the conventions of particular genres), and they are able to use these resources to encode texts. Characters in Printz novels occasionally engage in these meaning-making activities in explicit ways. For example, in *Speak* (Anderson, 1999), Melinda's English class learns about symbolism. She describes her deepening understanding of *The Scarlet Letter* and how she realizes that symbolism is important because "it would be a boring book and no one would buy it" if Hawthorne "came right out and named everyone's feelings" (p. 101). This explicit discussion of symbolism calls attention to the symbolism in *Speak* itself, such as Melinda's efforts to draw trees that move from immature line drawings to layered and full of life as she herself recovers. In this way, it both models the meaning-making set of resources and teaches readers to use these skills to interpret texts as they read.

Another example is found in *Monster* (Myers, 1999), which exposes some of the tools that movie makers use to convince audiences of a particular point of view. Steve narrates his own murder trial by writing a screenplay and keeps a journal about prison life. He reflects on his screenwriting class, where he learned explicitly how movies work to create impressions in the audience's mind. He remembers his film teacher warning that viewers "serve as a kind of jury for your film. If you make your film predictable, they'll make up their minds about it long before it's over" (p. 19). Throughout the novel, Steve grapples

with the prosecutor's characterization of him as a "monster" while his own attorney works to represent him as a "good kid." As Steve writes his movie script and reflects on that process, readers are shown both the ways that representation can create the truth and the tools that authors use to construct meaning.

Text Users: The Many Purposes for Reading and Writing

The text use family of practices highlights the ways that individuals "use texts functionally" (Luke & Freebody, 1999, para. 25) for a variety of reasons. Text users select the right genre, form, tone, and structure of text to accomplish particular purposes. When text use is most prominent in a particular literate act, the role and function of that literate practice is highlighted.

There are hundreds of examples of text use in the 24 Printz novels in this study. Characters look things up in the phone book, they use emails to set appointments, they write homework because it is required. Within this wide range of literacy practice, six particular text uses appear most frequently. In the Printz novels, characters frequently use reading and writing (a) for personal expression, (b) for entertainment and distraction, (c) to learn, (d) to remember, (e) to build social relationships, and (f) to gain access to power.

Reading and writing for personal expression. The first common text use in Printz-Award-winning novels is that of engaging in literacy for personal expression. In the novel *Hard Love* (Wittlinger, 1999), for example, characters write poems in order to communicate their feelings to one another in an indirect way. They write friendly letters because "I'm better in letters. I can say what I really mean" (p. 218). In *The Earth, My Butt, and Other Big Round Things* (Mackler, 2003), Virginia creates a webzine where she and her classmates "can bitch, rant, and rave about whatever is on their minds" (p. 228). These are just a few examples of the ways characters use writing to express their emotions and understanding to others.

Reading and writing for entertainment and distraction. Many characters in Printz-Award-winning

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novels use literacy practices to entertain themselves. Jessaline, in *One Whole and Perfect Day* (Clarke, 2006), is “enraptured” as she reads about making “Bavarian Crème Perfect Love,” including beating eggs till they are the color of lemons (p. 80). In *Angus, Thongs, and Full-Frontal Snogging* (Rennison, 2000),

Georgia reads whenever she is not out with her friends. On the phone with a friend she says, “I could see my book sort of beckoning to me, saying ‘Come and read me, come and read me, you know you want to’” (p. 44). She quickly hangs up because reading is more entertaining. These and other characters provide a model of reading for enjoyment,

for the pure pleasure that texts provide.

Characters also engage in reading and writing to distract themselves from boring or difficult situations. In *Speak* (Anderson, 1999), Melinda uses reading as a refuge. Alone on Halloween, Melinda says, “I refuse to spend the night moping in my room or listening to my parents argue. I checked out a book from the library, *Dracula*, by Bram Stoker” (p. 41). In *A Step from Heaven* (Na, 2001), Young Ju recites the alphabet as a way of distracting herself when her parents fight. In *Monster* (Myers, 1999), writing the screenplay provides Steve with a way to escape the realities of prison. Steve says, “I can hardly think about the movie, I hate this place so much, but if I didn’t think of the movie I would go crazy” (p. 45). These and other novels provide models for the ways that literacy can transport an individual away from the challenges of everyday life.

Reading and writing to learn. Characters in Printz-Award-winning realistic fiction use reading and writing to learn things they need to know. For example, Sym’s reading about Antarctica and the lives of polar explorers in *The White Darkness* (McCaughrean, 2007) prepares her to survive when she is lost on the polar ice shelf. In *My Heartbeat*, (Freyman-Weyr, 2002), Ellen begins to wonder if her older brother is gay. Because her family avoids talking about this issue, she goes to a bookstore. Ellen says, “I spend a couple

of weeks ignoring my homework in an attempt to increase what I know about gay people . . . I keep reading because I’ll never be able to ask” (pp. 51–52). In a similar vein, Virginia in *The Earth, My Butt, and Other Big Round Things* (Mackler, 2003) reads books about strong women provided by her teacher as she works on her own self-esteem issues and grapples with an eating disorder. These characters consult print texts to learn more about the events in their lives, though there are also a few instances where learning from reading is not foolproof, as in *The First Part Last* (Johnson, 2003) when teen father Bobby asks, “What the hell about those pamphlets Mary put beside my bed and STDs and teenage pregnancy?” (p. 13).

Characters also use writing to learn. As they write, characters reflect on their experiences and gain deeper understanding of their lives. In *Looking for Alaska* (Green, 2005), for example, Miles uses writing to reinterpret tragedy and to recover from crisis. After Miles’s friend commits suicide, their class is asked to write about the religions they have been studying to answer an existential question: “How will you—you personally—ever get out of this labyrinth of suffering?” (p. 215). Their teacher requires them to write in order to “fit the fact of suffering into understanding of the world, and how you hope to navigate through life in spite of it” (p. 215). Miles realizes “. . . he had to forgive to survive” (p. 218) and then he writes his paper, or as he says, “I wrote my way out of the labyrinth” (p. 219). Another example of writing to learn is seen in *An Abundance of Katherines* (Green, 2006). Colin constantly writes in a journal, taking notes in order to develop an equation he calls the “Theorem of Underlying Katherine Predictability,” which he hopes will help him understand his 19 failed relationships with girls named Katherine and the nature of romantic relationships in general.

Reading and writing to remember. Characters in several novels use literacy to remember, sometimes for very ordinary reasons, such as writing shopping lists and recording addresses and phone numbers. Characters also write in order to remember for much more profound reasons. In *True Believer* (Wolff, 2001), LaVaughan carries a note from her crush Jodi around with her for days so she can remember how he makes her feel. In *An Abundance of Katherines* (Green, 2006), the teen protagonists are employed to record the oral histories of local residents of Gutshot,

Tennessee, so that they can preserve the stories of the mill workers “for future generations” (p. 73). In *Many Stones* (Coman, 2000), Berry’s family erects a stone monument with a plaque as a memorial to her murdered sister. The writing on the plaque is meant to remind people about her sister’s good work in South Africa. Literacy practices also allow the life of a missing child to be remembered in *The Body of Christopher Creed* (Plum-Ucci, 2000). After Christopher disappears, his classmates track down and read his diary in an effort to piece together his life. The diary is the only real record of Christopher’s circumstances. All of these characters use writing to hold on to things they do not want to forget, sometimes in mundane ways, and sometimes for very profound reasons.

Reading and writing to build social relationships. The most common function of literacy practices in the Printz-Award-winning novels is that of using literacy to forge and maintain relationships with others. Reading and writing are pivotal in building friendships and maintaining family in almost all of the novels. For example, in *True Believer* (Wolff, 2001), LaVaughan reaches out to friends by writing invitations to her birthday party. Many other characters use notes as means of communicating to maintain social relationships. In *Freewill* (Lynch, 2001), Will communicates with his grandparents through notes on the refrigerator, “Will. Went to bocce ball. Beautiful day. Come on down. Love, Gran & Pops” (p. 6). In *Angus, Thongs, and Full Frontal Snogging* (Rennison, 2000), Georgia and her best friend make up after a fight because of a note. It reads: “If there is anything I can do to be your friend again, I will do it” (p. 170).

In several novels, characters’ lives are profoundly changed by the relationships they build as they engage in reading and writing. One example is *One Whole and Perfect Day* (Clarke, 2006). In this novel, Stan’s wife leaves their estranged grandson’s address on the refrigerator for so long that Stan memorizes it, and then finds himself arriving there, beginning to rebuild the relationship with his grandson he has missed for so long. Clara bumps into the boy of her dreams when she is mailing a letter, and he asks her on her first date. A homeless, deaf, pregnant teenager carries a sign explaining her situation, and reading it, Lonnie gives her the family’s address on a slip of paper. Later, she is shown on the train with the crumpled message, “. . . she’d clutched it tightly, all those long, long

hours until at last she’d made up her mind. Her name was Lucy. And as the train sped westward through the dark, she had the unaccustomed feeling that she was going home” (p. 248). Indeed, arriving at the address on the paper, Lucy finds a family.

Literacy also allows Jamie to establish a relationship that gets him off the street in the novel *Punkzilla* (Rapp, 2009). Jamie is a runaway who has been taking meth when he sends his brother Peter a letter. In response, Peter sends his love, the news that he is dying of cancer, and money for a bus ticket. These two letters begin Jamie’s journey from Portland to Memphis, from alone and on drugs to a home and a future.

Another example is found in the novel *An Abundance of Katherines* (Green, 2006), in which Colin learns to use narrative to maintain social relationships. He is an awkward former child prodigy who has few friends before Lindsey explicitly teaches him how to tell a story. She says, “. . . you need a beginning, a middle, and an end. Your stories have no plots” (p. 94). Later, Colin realizes the importance of narrative, saying “. . . it changes other people just the slightest little bit . . . I will get forgotten, but the stories will last. And so we all matter—maybe less than a lot, but always more than none” (p. 213). In these and many other novels, literacy use allows characters to initiate, rebuild, or strengthen relationships.

Though most instances of maintaining social relationships with literacy practices are positive, this is not always the case. Notes in the kitchen allow Melinda’s parents to continue to ignore and neglect her in *Speak* (Anderson, 1999). Melinda says, “I write when I need school supplies or a ride to the mall. They write what time they’ll be home from work and if I should thaw anything. What else is there to say?” (p. 14). Literacy is also used to intimidate, as in *Keesha’s House* (Frost, 2003), in which Harris gets “Another note in my locker today: *Die, faggot.*” Literacy use complicates relationships in *True Believer* (Wolff, 2001). In this novel, Ronnel describes how her relationships with others have changed since she began the Gram-

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mar Build-Up program. She says, “I walked in here last fall saying ‘ain’t.’ By October I was telling my boyfriend ‘Don’t be so inert.’ He broke up with me. It’s a price I pay” (p. 176).

Reading and writing to gain access to power.

Several of the Printz novels are explicit about literacy use and access to power.

Some make this relationship clear by deliberately demonstrating the relationship between the ability to read and write, financial stability, and civic participation. For example, knowing how to read and write provides orphaned

There are almost no examples of characters engaging in the literacy practices of the text critic.

Chanda in *Chanda’s Secrets* (Stratton, 2004) enough money to continue supporting her younger siblings, and the promise of a brighter future. This is most evident in Wolff’s *True Believer* (2001). The teacher of their grammar program emphasizes that she is teaching literacy skills that allow them to be lucid and to “sustain a thought,” emphasizing that this knowledge will allow them not just to get into college, but to stay there and succeed. She equates their learning with hope for their community when she says, “Only when we are lucid can we be constructive. Only when we are constructive can we live with good conscience in the world. Only when we live with good conscience in the world will the rage of the people calm” (p. 171).

The novel *The Disreputable History of Frankie Landau-Banks* (Lockhart, 2008) demonstrates the relationship between power and literacy in another way. Frankie attends a prestigious boarding school and dates the most popular boy on campus, but she is excluded from the school’s all-male secret society. Frankie uses an anonymous email account to direct the society through a series of pranks. She explains, “I wanted to—prove myself. I wanted to make things happen, wanted to show that I’m as smart as any of you, or smarter even, when all you ever think is that I’m adorable” (p. 315). The novel tells us that Frankie is “. . . one of those people who break the rules . . . who take some larger action that disrupts the social order” (p. 337). Because Frankie schemes, reads, and writes, the text tells us, “she will grow up to change the world” (p. 337). As these characters read and write, they reveal the power of literacy.

Text Critics: Evaluating Texts’ Purposes and Positions

In the 24 Printz-Award-winning novels of realistic fiction in this study, characters break the code, make meaning, and use texts for a wide variety of functions. What they rarely do is engage the textual practices of the text critic, the fourth set of resources outlined by Luke and Freebody’s four resources model. Because texts are not ideologically neutral—they are written by someone for a particular purpose at a particular point of time and put forward a particular point of view—readers must be able to critique the texts they read. This family of practices, referred to as critical literacy, highlights the political and social nature of texts and allows readers to examine texts and textual practices for the ways they reify, expose, or challenge social and economic inequality (Lankshear & McLaren, 1993; Morgan, 1997; Tasmanian Department of Education, 2009). The practices of the text critic are engaged when readers ask why a text is written, evaluate the believability of a text, consider whose voices are represented and whose are silenced, or evaluate the relationship between texts and power.

There are almost no examples of characters engaging in the literacy practices of the text critic in any of the Printz-Award-winning novels. *One Whole and Perfect Day* (Clarke, 2006) provides an oblique critique of teen magazines when Lily frets about always being the “sensible one.” Lily “. . . wished she could, just once, enjoy filling in a quiz from *Bestie* without thinking it was [garbage]” (p. 12). She sees through its demeaning characterization of girls. The novel *Freewill* (Lynch, 2001) provides a bit more sustained example of text critique. A sculpture Will created is found at the scene of a suicide. A reporter comes to interview Will about the sculpture, and Will realizes the reporter aims to sensationalize the story. Will thinks, “He is not your friend. Listen. . . . He is not your friend” (p. 95). Though Will tells him nothing, the reporter runs the story, and Gran critiques it, saying, “It’s every bit of nothing but sick lies anyway” (p. 103). *Freewill* and *One Whole and Perfect Day* are the only examples of novels in which characters explicitly engage the family of resources of the text critic. Taken as a whole, these novels do not provide readers with a model for questioning assumptions or critiquing the texts they read.

Implications

The four resources model was originally developed as a tool for examining the range of literacy practices found in classrooms. It is important that students are given opportunities to engage in and master all four of the families of practice delineated in the model, because the entire range of literacy practices is required for full participation in society. If the texts they encounter help to socialize YA readers into particular ways of being, as Butts (2001) and Nodelman and Reimer (2004) state, then it is important for literature to present examples of characters who engage in all four families of practices in the four resources model.

The novels of realistic fiction that have been honored as the best literary works in YA literature provide models of three of the four resources and, in particular, they engage in text use, modeling a wide range of reasons for reading and writing that we hope teens will aspire to acquire. Characters use literacy to express themselves, to entertain themselves and to escape reality, to remember, to learn, to build relationships, and to gain access to power, among many other functions. As they use reading and writing for these and other purposes, characters engage in code breaking and meaning making, using the conventions of written text and an understanding of social contexts to decode and interpret what they read and to compose meaningful texts of their own. However, these characters almost never employ the resources of the text critic. They are rarely depicted questioning the texts they read or critiquing the ways that authors structure texts to promote a particular point of view.

This article is not meant as a critique of the Printz Award--winners or the selection process, nor do I mean to imply that authors of YA literature should necessarily change the ways in which characters engage in literacy. Characters that read and write in Printz novels, and indeed, all quality literature written for young adults, engage in literacy practices as functions of their lives, both as constructed in the literature and in ways that support the narrative. Rather, this article is meant to use the Printz-Award-winning novels to introduce the four resources model as a way of thinking about the range of literacy practices that are provided for young adults in and out of school. Teachers can use the four resources model to examine the literacy practices represented by the texts they

share with young adults and to consciously select the ways they model reading and writing practices as they read and write with students.

Printz-Award- novels, like many novels written for YA readers, provide a range of ways of using reading and writing for functional purposes. They may encourage young adults to read and write for affective, personal, and pragmatic reasons. However, these texts may be less helpful for teachers who want their students to become text critics as well as text users. Learning to be critical readers of texts is important, particularly for young adults who must digest a barrage of print and electronic information daily. Because websites with inaccurate information proliferate, social media can take ideas viral in hours, and advertisements and songs with questionable messages abound, young adults must become readers who are able to evaluate claims, judge the validity of sources and conclusions, and critique the use of language to manipulate point of view. Young adults must become text critics.

Teachers who wish to provide models of young adults engaging in text critique may have to deliberately choose novels that depict characters engaging in critical literacy. There are some books that do so, such as the explicit examination of whether stories are lies in *Breaktime* (Chambers, 1978), and characters' evaluation of whether *Huckleberry Finn* should be censored in *The Day They Came to Arrest the Book* (Hentoff, 1983). More likely, teachers who wish to teach text critique will have to model their own critical response as they engage with texts in the classroom. Teachers who examine their text sets and their own instruction with the four resources model in mind may provide a greater range of literacy practices for their students, practices that are increasingly important.

Devon Brenner is professor of reading and language arts at Mississippi State University in Starkville, Mississippi, where she teaches courses in middle level literacy, content area literacy, and the teaching of writing. She can be contacted at devon@ra.msstate.edu.

Teachers can use the four resources model to examine the literacy practices represented by the texts they share with young adults.

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