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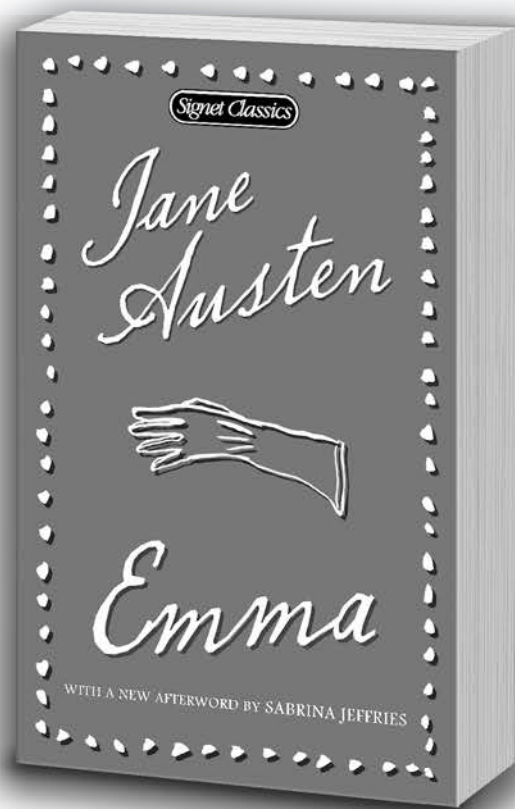


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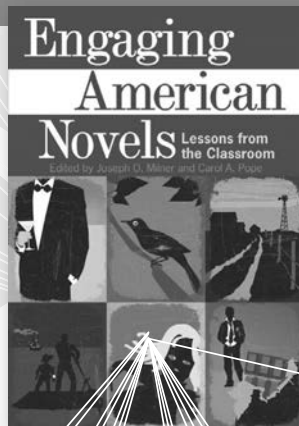


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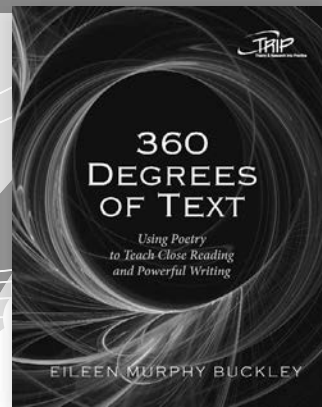
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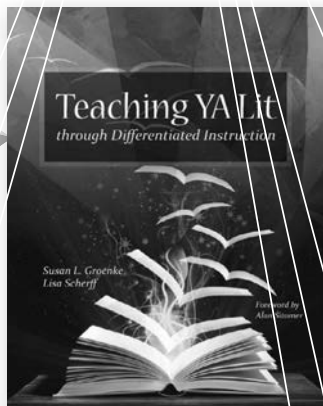
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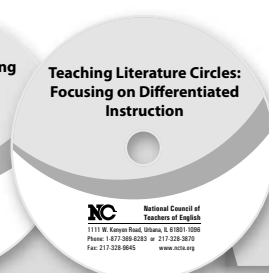
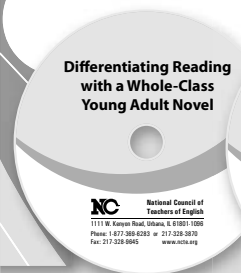
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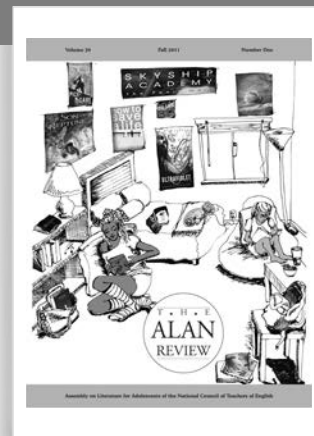
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Volume 39

Number 2

Winter 2012



| | | |
|-------------------------------|--|-------|
| <i>Steven Bickmore</i> | From the Editors | 3 |
| <i>Jacqueline Bach</i> | Call for Manuscripts | 5 |
| <i>Melanie Hundley</i> | | |
| <i>Evelyn Baldwin</i> | What's Going On inside of Me? | 6 |
| | Emergent Female Sexuality and Identity Formation in Young Adult Literature | |
| <i>Patrick Jones</i> | Mind Games | 13 |
| | Mind Control in YA Literature | |
| <i>Derrick Smith</i> | Bringing Fantasy and Science Fiction into the Classroom | 19 |
| <i>Wendy J. Glenn</i> | From Awareness to Action | 25 |
| <i>Ricki Ginsberg</i> | Young Adult Literature as a Road to Reflection and Catalyst for Change | |
| <i>Erin Gaffey, Kate Lund</i> | | |
| <i>Isabel Meagher</i> | | |
| <i>Heidi L. Hallman</i> | Dimensions of Young Adult Literature | 33 |
| <i>Melissa B. Schieble</i> | Moving into "New Times" | |
| <i>Devon Brenner</i> | They Read and Write, but Do They Critique? | 39 |
| | The Four Resources of Literacy Practice in Printz-Award-Winning Literature | |
| <i>Melanie Hundley</i> | Clip and File | A1-A8 |
| <i>S. D. Collins</i> | Swinging His Cat | 49 |
| | A Conversation with 2010 ALAN Award Recipient Jack Gantos | |
| <i>cj Bott</i> | ALAN and YA Lit—Growing Up Together | 57 |
| | The President's Connection | |
| <i>Susan L. Groenke</i> | Continued Absences | 62 |
| <i>Robert Prickett</i> | Multimodal Texts and 21st Century Literacy Instruction | |
| <i>René Saldaña, Jr.</i> | Mexican American YA Lit: It's Literature with a Capital "L"! | 68 |
| <i>James Lecesne</i> | Aliens among Us | 74 |
| | Exploring Identity and Identities in Young Adult Literature | |
| | Stories from the Field | 79 |

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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."

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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 American Psychological Association (APA).

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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.

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| FALL ISSUE Deadline: | MARCH 1 |
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From the Editors

Some deadlines are just too early.

It is too late in December for me (Steve) to be writing an introduction to the Winter 2012 issue of *The ALAN Review*. I should have written it for the Nov. 1st deadline. The articles were all selected and the authors notified. I would have beaten the rush of email exchanges that came right after the ALAN Workshop between our wonderful copyeditor, Carol, and me about manuscripts. The resulting flurry of emails seeking feedback from the authors about the impending changes would have been less guilt ridden if I'd actually finished my own contribution. I should have, but I didn't. Instead, I read graduate papers about the role of the adolescent in literature. Instead, I provided feedback on the unit plans that my English education students created; after all, they were to begin student teaching in the middle of January, and their success as teachers is more important than any deadline. I am so pleased with their progress and their potential that it is worth flirting with the wrath of my coeditors.

The first of November was too early to write this introduction, anyway. Maybe it always is. It was too early because my first deadline preceded the NCTE Annual Convention and the Fall 2011 ALAN Workshop in Chicago. If I had written it then, I would have missed being able to reimagine Icarus in this editorial. Gary Salvner asked us, in his acceptance speech for the Hipple Award, to ponder the notion that perhaps Icarus was a hero; one who dared to test the limits of conformity. What if all of us, as Gary suggested, gave one gift membership to ALAN during 2012? I can just hear Joan Kaywell, ALAN's membership secretary, shouting with joy, only to recoil with trepidation as she imagines the membership doubling. Doubling the

membership would probably give *The ALAN Review* a wider subscription base than *Research in the Teaching of English*. Imagine the range and influence of talking about kids reading books instead of lamenting the time wasted on meaningless test preparation.

Yes, the first of November was just too early. I would have missed John Green's challenge to think smaller and change the world through little actions. I needed his reminder that despite the seeming omnipresence of social media in the lives of adolescents, they need quiet time to think. We all realize that when adolescents truly connect with a book, they aren't rushing to digest micro impulses from twitter, Facebook, emails, or text messages, but are truly engaged in thought. Can we each give one more ALAN membership to a teacher who needs that final nudge to be a stronger advocate for books that matter in the lives of kids?

The first of November *was* too early. Who knew that Laurie Halse Anderson would care enough about addressing an audience at the ALAN Workshop that she would finish a speech prone on the stage, invisible behind the podium while battling what turned out to be a fairly serious bout with food poisoning? Stories matter. Anderson's real story matters and her imagined stories matter; especially when teens who read them find a familiar voice. During the Workshop, I was exposed to so many new titles, new authors, and exciting ideas that I wanted to talk about them. And when I thought about whom I wanted to talk to, I knew exactly who needed a gift membership to ALAN.

No doubt about it. Finishing the editorial before the first of November would have been too early. I would have missed reporting on how the President of

ALAN, Wendy Glenn, orchestrated a beautiful conference that engaged and inspired participants. From all of us in ALAN, thank you, Wendy, for a fine conference and your dedication to teaching, scholarship, and young adult literature. I would have missed watching cj Bott, our incoming president, bustle along the sidelines of the conference as she took notes, helped in every imaginable way, and planned for the next workshop in Las Vegas. She is already hard at work and will share with anyone and everyone the ALAN Mission Statement (<http://www.alan-ya.org/>). I also would have missed observing Teri Lesesne during her first conference as the ALAN Executive Secretary. If she was nervous, I couldn't tell; she sat calmly on the back row, twittering, emailing, blogging, and generally informing anyone not in attendance about the current events during the workshop.

I will try to approach their energy and dedication by giving a gift membership. It's easy. If you are reading this, close the journal, look on the back for the membership form. Copy it and fill it out right now, write the check, and send it off. Today.

Now, let me introduce the articles before it's too late. It might already be too late; you may have already skipped over this to read one of the articles that follow. Many of these articles address the issue's theme of Reading YAL's Past, Writing YAL's Future, which echoes the theme of the recently concluded ALAN Workshop, "Flash Back. Forge Ahead." Baldwin's article reminds us that when books trace how adolescent teenage girls navigate their emerging sexuality, they may, in fact, serve as a therapeutic first step for those who have questions, but don't have an adequate support system in place. This is an issue that has been a constant in the history of YA literature, and Baldwin helps us look to the future of this topic. Jones suggests that from its early beginnings with *The Outsiders* (1967), young adult literature has discussed how the individual is often in conflict with society. His article discusses the issue of mind control in YA fiction. In a post 9/11 world, what will society allow as we strive for safety, higher test scores, and technological advancement? In his article, Smith reminds us that Science Fiction continues to capture adolescent readers, and perhaps we need to consider how this genre might fit more naturally in the classroom.

Glenn et al. suggest that educators can use young adult literature to nurture readers who are ready to become aware of social issues, but could also become

young adults who are capable of action. They discuss several novels depicting issues of social import and provide sample discussion questions to aid teachers in the classroom. Helping students to live critically literate lives seems like a far more productive way to usher students into the future than endless test preparation. Hallman and Schieble claim that perhaps young adult advocates have spent too much time worrying about the age appropriateness of individual texts and instead should focus on whether or not these books address the issues of "New Times." They discuss the implications of New Times as a combination of literacy as a socially situated practice and the issues surrounding an increasingly digital world.

Brenner is also concerned with sponsoring adolescents who think and write critically. Her article examines how Printz-Award-winning literature exemplifies the four resources model developed by Luke and Freebody (1997, 1999) through the literacy practices of its characters. She suggests that among all the literacy practices displayed, they rarely demonstrate examples of acting as text critic. Given this situation, Brenner joins with many other authors in this issue who encourage teachers to help students read widely and think deeply. She suggests that not only should readers examine the reading practices of literary characters, they themselves should think deeply about the ideological suggestions of the texts themselves; they can and should begin to participate in the critical discussion as adolescents. Indeed, this practice and the others suggested throughout the issue would truly help develop lifelong readers.

S. D. Collins provides an interview with Jack Gantos that provides us with a more in-depth look at one of the most entertaining writers in the Young Adult literary community. Then, cj Bott's President's Connection revisits the past with "ALAN and YA Lit: Growing Up Together," in which she interviews past presidents of ALAN and discusses the ways that the presidents have shaped and been shaped by the organization they have built. This nostalgic approach highlights ALAN strengths as a community of scholars and readers. Susan Groenke and Robert Pricket offer a definition of multimodal texts and an exploration of multimodal reading practices in "Continued Absences: Multimodal Texts and 21st Century Literacy Instruction." They discuss the challenges of literacy instruction in a testing climate and the disconnect between teens' digital literacy practices and teachers' digital

literacy practices. In “Mexican American YA Lit: It’s Literature with a Capital ‘L’!,” René Saldaña, Jr. considers the role and importance of Mexican American young adult literature in both classrooms and teacher education classes. He introduces several new books and explores the role that literature can play in a classroom. In “Aliens among Us,” James Lecesne, young adult author, examines the ways in which adolescents often feel alien. He introduces The Trevor

Project and discusses the ways in which LGBT adolescents have responded to it.

We hope you enjoy this issue’s offerings. We think they are fine examples of the intelligent ways so many of you out there are thinking about YA literature. Oh, and by the way, I hope both Claudette and Jenette enjoy their gift memberships enough to join on their own in a year.

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/>.

Winter 2013 Theme: Flash Back–Forge Ahead: Dynamism and Transformation in Young Adult Literature

In her Fall 2011 president’s column, Wendy Glenn reflects that our field manages to “successfully shift and sway with time and changing elements, while maintaining a core commitment to young people and the books written for them.” For this call, we wonder, like Glenn, what topics, voices, and forms have shaped our field and what we anticipate those future ones will be. What titles endure and why? Which ones are poised to become readers’ favorites? As we pursue the next trend in young adult literature, what should we be careful not to lose? What will our future roles as young adult literature advocates be and with whom should we be forging relationships? 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: July 1, 2012.**

Summer 2013 Theme: 40th Anniversary Issue

While we will be soliciting articles from past ALAN presidents and editors as well as influential young adult authors, we welcome submissions that reflect on the past 40 years of ALAN. **Submission deadline: November 1, 2012.**

Fall 2013 Theme: Reading and Using Nonfiction Young Adult Literature

So often our schools tend to privilege the reading of fiction over the reading of nonfiction. But what about those kids who want to read something other than the novels we assign? What about the students who crave nonfiction? The theme of this issue asks us to consider the role of nonfiction in the classroom and in the personal choice reading of adolescents. What is it about nonfiction that grabs students? What role can/should nonfiction play in classrooms? What nonfiction have you used that empowered adolescents? What is it that we must consider or celebrate when we teach/use/recommend nonfiction? 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, 2013.**

Stories from the Field

Editors’ Note: Stories from the Field invites readers to share a story about young adult literature. This section features brief vignettes (approximately 300 words) from practicing teachers and librarians who would like to share their interactions with students, parents, colleagues, and administrators around young adult literature. Please send your stories to: jbach@lsu.edu.

What's Going On inside of Me?

Emergent Female Sexuality and Identity Formation in Young Adult Literature

Growing from a girl into a woman can be a truly traumatizing event. As bodies mature and children become adults, girls are confronted with almost terrifying questions: What is happening to me? What am I becoming? Who am I? Of these changes, the most dramatic may be the growing recognition of oneself as a sexual being. In ways that they have never experienced, adolescent girls begin to see themselves as a gender, feminine in contrast to masculine, part of a distinct group that is markedly different from the other half of the world.

As teenage girls begin to adopt the persona of femininity, the implications of becoming a woman involve a particular kind of vulnerability. In addition to forcing the navigation of identity formation—attempting to adopt womanhood and leave behind childhood—developing sexuality contains the possibility of becoming the victim of sexual abuse. Nearly 11% of all women will be forced into an unwanted sexual experience by the end of high school (Center for Disease Control, 2008).

However, statistics aren't the only indication of this very real danger. Rape as a major concern for young women is evident in the number of recent Young Adult (YA) novels that address the issue. YA literature is exposing the issues of sexual trauma in manners that suggest that it is both a significant concern for adolescent girls and a crucial element in the shaping of their understanding of themselves. From the half-thrill and near-excitement of recognizing that one is no longer in control to the horror of being raped to the guilt and mental breakdown of the abused,

multiple forms of YA literature are detailing the fear and vulnerability of the transition from childhood into womanhood and providing a point of connection for readers experiencing the change.

YA Literature as Therapy

The vast and growing market of YA literature suggests that teenagers can make meaning of their worlds through books. As Feinstein, Bynner, and Duckworth (2006) suggest, engaging in leisure activities such as reading is crucial in helping adolescents make the transition to becoming adults. Logically then, those texts that discuss issues of trauma contribute to identity formation in abuse victims. The content of trauma-texts has

“real life” applications. The concept of bibliotherapy—the utilitarian incorporation of a pathologically significant or sympathetic text—has sanctioned the production of a number of young adult novels discussing sensitive topics such as rape, incest, and drug abuse. (Pattee, 2004, p. 246)

This suggests that the very act of reading can be beneficial for students who have personally experienced sexual abuse or know someone who has. Texts that discuss sexual acts can be a type of “therapy” for readers, and this therapy has pushed forward the publication of these texts.

As part of this movement toward books that openly address sexuality, four texts stand out as significant in shaping young adults' identities: Meyer's *Twilight* (2005), Cohn and Levithan's *Nick and Norah's Infinite Playlist* (2007), Anderson's *Speak* (1999), and

McCormick's *Sold* (2008). (Text summaries of these titles are found in the sidebar on p. 7.) These books were selected for exploration here for several reasons, including their popularity, their uniqueness, and the places they have assumed in the canon of YAL. Though they cover a span of nearly ten years, they fall into three significant categories: fantasy, fiction, and reality. These categories are quickly becoming delineated in the realm of YA Literature, especially as this generation of teenagers is showing a prominent preference for fiction regarding the paranormal. These four texts—though they center on the same topic—are distinct in their modes and methods, allowing us a view of the wide spectrum of sexual-oppression literature.

Fantasy

Of all modern young adult novels, few can be said to have the wide-ranging popularity of Meyer's *Twilight* series. At one point holding all top four spots on the *New York Times* bestseller list, these novels explore the story of forbidden love between a human girl and a vampire boy. Isolated, introspective Bella falls in love with mysterious, undying Edward, and together they embark on a journey that pushes both the boundaries of believability and the limits of human (or vampire) emotion. Although the tale presents a number of classic Romeo and Juliet-style tropes, the story doesn't suggest that a consuming passion for another fallible being is an unhealthy or even dangerous occupation. Rather, Meyer's tale seems to indicate that completely losing oneself in a relationship is the pathway to ultimate happiness. Bella, who spends four novels begging Edward to turn her into a vampire, is willing to reject her family, friends, and spiritual connections in order to live forever as Edward's bride.

It is no surprise that a story of such intensity appeals to those caught up in the *sturm und drang* of adolescent sexuality. It is during adolescence that "an individual, for the first time, perceives her/himself as a sexual being"; furthermore, this identity formation is powerful enough to shape "intrapersonal, interpersonal, and social phenomena for all individuals" (Chapman & Werner-Wilson, 2008, p. 508). This emerging super-charged sexuality between Edward and Bella shapes the course of Meyer's *Twilight* saga. Bella desperately wants to make love to Edward, who is resistant both because of his Victorian-era morals

Text Summaries of YA Novels Dealing with Identity

Twilight saga: A four-book series about a vampire, Edward, who falls for Bella, an ordinary teenager growing up in the Pacific Northwest. While Bella wants Edward to make her a vampire as well, joining the two for eternity, Edward struggles with the morality of turning a human into an immortal. The love between the two is passionate, often crossing over to obsessive. Because she is aware of the existence of vampires, Bella becomes a target for others like Edward. She must choose between her werewolf, yet mortal, friends and the life she wants with Edward.

Nick and Nora's Infinite Playlist: Nora, the daughter of a music mogul, meets Nick, a player in an underground garage band, and the two find themselves spending a night wandering throughout New York. As the night progresses, each reveals truths about their inner pain and struggles. While both have been hurt before, their journey draws them together in a way that is both healing and intense.

Speak: The summer before her first high school year, Melinda is raped at a party by an upper classman. Afraid to speak out, both from fear of the rapist and fear of not being believed, Melinda slowly begins to stop speaking, eventually resorting to complete silence. While her parents and friends become more frustrated, Melinda immerses herself in art to try and restore her sense of self and the voice she once had.

Sold: Written in verse, *Sold* follows the story of Lakshmi, a Pakistani girl sold into slavery—supposedly to become a servant, but really to become a sex slave at a brothel. Lakshmi is kept plied with drugs, pulling her into an almost hypnotic state as she is forced to service client after client. As Lakshmi gradually becomes aware of her surroundings, the horror into which she has been forced takes over. Her only hope is an American man who claims he can get her out, but, betrayed by every man she's ever known, Lakshmi's hopes are dim.

(literally, Edward was originally a teenager in the early 20th century) and because the intensity of his desire could injure her. Edward tells Bella, “I have to mind my actions every moment that we’re together so that I don’t hurt you. I could kill you quite easily, Bella, simply by accident [. . .]. If I was too hasty . . . if for one second I wasn’t paying attention, I could reach out, meaning to touch your face, and crush your

skull by mistake” (p. 310). Neither the intensity of her passion nor her vulnerability at Edward’s hands seems to affect Bella. Instead, she “dream[s] about being with [him] forever” (p. 498).

That teenagers are enthralled with romantic stories is nothing new. Part of the wonder of becoming an adult is the awareness of the pleasures that can

be had from relationships with the opposite sex. In trying such awareness to reality, Finders (1999) suggests that literature is powerful enough to create “real” spaces for identity formation. The information in the text, through interaction with the reader, allows the reader to apply the meaning from the reading to actual relationships.

Meyer’s work, however, is significant in its acknowledgement that, for teenagers, these relationships can border on the obsessive. These texts validate the all-consuming nature of a girl’s first love. Just as early relationships can seem like the end-all be-all when one is a teenager—drawing hearts on notebooks and swearing “I can’t live without him!”—Bella’s adoration for Edward takes over her life. The potential difficulty of Meyer’s work is that, while the average teenager eventually gains perspective on the nature of the world and the place of relationships within it, Bella and Edward are willing to sacrifice everything for their love and the hope of living happily ever after.

(Spoiler alert!) Through their ultimate success of eternity as vampires, Meyer suggests that such a course is not only wise, it is the way to happiness. Though Bella is perpetually in danger of Edward losing self-control, her recklessness wins out in the end. Girls who identify with Bella’s adoration for Edward

may also feel that total abandonment to the objects of their affection is the appropriate response and act accordingly. In Bella’s case, submission to Edward would be a loss of her own humanity. Unlike the other books discussed here, Bella’s relationship with Edward is not a human one; she loves something with a sexuality entirely different from her own. The fact that Edward is a vampire, a being who traditionally subsists on the murder of humans, is compounded by the fact that his sexuality is much more intense than hers. This intensity forms a bond between them that is paranormal, in the truest sense of the word. It is this that makes the infatuation so strong and that prompts Bella to give up the most ingrained part of her nature—her humanness.

However, be the characters human or inhuman, the danger of thoughtless infatuation is nothing compared to the problems of a relationship constantly hovering on the edge of abuse. Edward spends three novels attempting to avoid hurting Bella with his superior strength and, when they finally do have sex in the series’ final novel, the intensity of his passion does harm her: “large, purplish bruises were beginning to blossom” across much of her body (*Breaking Dawn*, 2008, p. 89). Bella’s response to this is not to become angry at Edward. Rather, she begs him for more. Consciously or unconsciously, the text suggests that if one loves enough, “abuse” can be re-termed “passion.”

Fiction

Unfortunately, the reality of emergent sexuality is that it is often much darker. Other, non-fantasy texts suggest that engaging in relationships or coming into womanhood is as much a dangerous pursuit as it is an exciting one. In *Nick and Norah’s Infinite Playlist*, released as a film in 2008, Rachel Cohn and David Levithan follow two teenagers as they spend an insane and wonderful night adventuring across Manhattan’s underground music scene. As the two come to learn more about each other, they discover that they are “musical soulmate[s]” (p. 181) and invest all of their angsty and repressed teenage emotion in each other.

Though Nick and Norah ultimately find happiness in each other, neither came to this out of positive relationship experiences. Nick had recently been betrayed by his ex, and Norah had been used and dumped by her first boyfriend. For Norah especially, this experience had caused her to be distrustful of

The information in the text, through interaction with the reader, allows the reader to apply the meaning from the reading to actual relationships.

men. Cohn (who wrote the Norah chapters) indicates that Norah's ex-boyfriend Tal had pushed her into sex before she was ready and had manipulated her emotionally, intellectually, and physically. Norah, who had abandoned herself to Tal in Bella-esque fashion, readily gave into his demands, thinking that Tal was her world. Though her relationship with Tal is over by the night detailed in the novel, Norah has incredible difficulty trusting males and is resistant to giving herself over to her relationship with Nick.

Like Meyer, Cohn presents a girl altered by an obsessive relationship. Cohn, however, details the potential dangers and inherent uncertainty in such activities. Norah, who had effectively defined herself in terms dictated by Tal, lost much of her individuality. Since the activity of reading has "been described as a prime context for adolescents to [. . .] formulate a personal identity" (Coatsworth et al., 2005, p. 361), adolescent readers are likely to understand Norah's position, especially those who have already been injured by a disturbed early relationship. Her hesitancy and regret upon entering into new relationships parallel those emotions experienced by an adolescent's post-first love. Furthermore, the pain that Norah undergoes could serve both as a touchstone for familiarity or a warning to those in similar relationships.

Reality

Unfortunately, the sad reality is that many adolescent girls will be forced into relational and sexual experiences that they don't want. Though the relational danger is presented as thrilling in the Twilight saga and a memory in *Nick and Norah*, the reality of rape and sexual abuse is detailed in Laurie Halse Anderson's *Speak* and Patricia McCormick's *Sold*. In *Speak*, the emotional destruction that comes post-rape is painted through the story of Melinda Sordino, a ninth-grader who begins high school hiding the secret of her abuse. Melinda's inner turmoil manifests itself in her inability to speak, first about her rape, but as the story grows, about anything at all. Though many of the characters are exaggerated in order to emphasize the intensity of Melinda's trauma, the pain of Melinda's reality is palpable. "My head is killing me, my throat is killing me, my stomach bubbles with toxic waste," Melinda tells the reader. "I just want to sleep. A coma would be nice. Or amnesia. Anything, just to get rid of this, these thoughts, whispers in my mind. Did he rape my

head, too?" (p. 165).

In Anderson's text, Melinda has lost the identity she had before the rape. She is, as Erikson suggested, engaging in selective repudiation, a method by which one identity (Melinda's pre-rape self) has been replaced by another (her mute, post-rape self) due to the incompatibility of the two (Schachter, 2004). The process by which she creates a new identity for herself works both as a plotline in itself and as a metaphor for the struggles of all teenagers engaged in the metamorphosis of adolescence.

Similarly, *Sold* tells of the gradual breakdown and internal destruction of a Nepalese girl sold as a sex-slave in India. From Lakshmi's simple (though not easy) life in a village in the Himalayas, she is taken to the city where she quickly learns a new reality of sexuality—being sold as a prostitute. The horror that she initially experiences gives way to a dejected acceptance as she forces herself to fight for clients, endure the abuse of the madam, and ultimately take the risks that might lead to freedom.

Of all the transitions discussed in this article, Lakshmi's is the most abrupt and brutal. She has no knowledge of her oppressors—she hasn't seen them before and cannot focus her anger or betrayal on a single person. Those around her can't help her as they are all victims of the same abuse. And, unlike the other girls discussed here, Lakshmi has no hope for freedom or for the future. The torture that those girls experience unwillingly once, or twistedly willingly on a regular basis, becomes Lakshmi's entire reality. She becomes nothing but sex.

Together, these two texts present adolescent sexu-

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ality as an incredibly risky business. As girls develop, their femaleness becomes a liability that endangers them. Though they are not actively seeking relationships, such as Bella and Norah did, Melinda and Lakshmi become victims simply because they are women.

For readers learning to understand their sexuality, these texts either shape an awareness of current dangers or act as catharsis for those who have already experienced similar events.

Both novels suggest that growing up female comes with an inherent liability, making it a fearful event. For readers learning to understand their sexuality, these texts either shape an awareness of current dangers or act as catharsis for those who have already experienced similar events. Fortunately, female readers are not simply looking passively at the texts. Hubler (2000) argues that readers “actively construct the

meanings of the texts that they read,” causing them to reject the concept of passive, powerless females while still allowing female-centric texts to “play a role in their construction of female identity” (p. 90).

Looking to the Future

As we look to the future of teenage girls exploring their sexuality, we must recognize that multiple forms of media are bringing it further into the open. Digital media is removing some of the stigma associated with talking about sex and sexuality. And, fortunately for teachers and readers, this means more YA literature focused on sexual repression and abuse—literature that can, as has been suggested, provide readers with support and perhaps a note of hope. (For a list of suggested titles, see “Additional Readings in YAL” on p. 12.)

With this transparency come texts that look even deeper into highly illicit sexual abuse. In *This Gorgeous Game* (2010), Freitas writes about Olivia, a high school writer taken under the tutelage of a highly published and respected writer who also happens to be a priest. Gradually, the mentor relationship breaks down, as the priest wants far more of Olivia than he should. Olivia’s sexual abuse *appears* to come not only from an individual, then, but with the backing of

the entire church. To stand up and speak out against such an attitude is, for her, nearly as impossible as it is for Melinda in *Speak*.

In Hand’s novel *Illyria* (2010), the ultimate forbidden sexual encounter occurs—a relationship between family members. The magical-realist novel traces the falling in love and intense sexuality of cousins Madeline and Rogan, and his eventual betrayal and rejection of her. By the conclusion, Madeline has wasted her life on the memory of a single sexual relationship, one where her body may have been her lover’s only desire. As the discussion of sexuality as a forbidden object—one that silences—becomes more prominent, fiction will follow.

Implications for Teachers

As teachers, one of the first things we must do is to know our students and be aware of what occurs outside of the classroom. The warning signs of sexual abuse are many, and educators need to be aware of and seek help for students who may be experiencing such violence. (For further information on identifying and helping victims of sexual abuse, see the sidebar on p. 11). However, our literary responsibilities are significant as well. When we suggest novels, we must *know* our students and put the right books in the right hands. While a girl who has never been raped might be able to read *Speak* in an empathetic, albeit distanced, manner, a girl (or boy—males can also be victims of assault, though not as frequently) who has experienced abuse may find that she is not ready to read a book like *Speak*. Another student, having experienced a similar situation, may find in *Speak* the courage and healing to speak out about her experiences. Thus, teachers must be familiar with the nature of their students and suggest books carefully and with great responsibility. It is true that in schools where over a hundred students pass through a classroom in a day, this is a difficult proposition, but it is by no means an impossible one.

We must also temper romance with reality. In our teachings of any book, it is crucial that the celebration of love never take leave of the celebration of rationality. To follow one’s heart is a wonderful message, but it must be tempered with a reminder to always move forward with at least some rational thought. When we book talk, assign reports, or form small groups for

reading, we need to strike a careful balance between upholding the romantic and encouraging critical thought. In a world where darkness seems prevalent, an idealistic escape is a wonderful thing, but we must be careful not to let it turn quixotic, or even dangerous.

In the end, all four novels finish on a note of hope. In an ALAN interview with Laurie Halse Anderson (High, 2010), the interviewer notes that the author has a “moral code of including hope in her stories [and to do so] is a fulfilled responsibility” (p. 71). Bella and Edward live happily ever after; Nick and Norah overcome their hang-ups enough to begin a relationship; Melinda speaks out about her rape; Lakshmi is rescued by an American goodwill association. Whether or not this lines up with the reality of the teenage experience, the “power and terror of changing so fast that your bones literally ache” (Engberg, 2005, p. 1790), must be countered with hope.

Further text-specific research needs to be done to determine quantifiable patterns of female student responses to these novels. What can be suggested is that, regardless of how they arrive at their conclu-

sions, the novels propose that the world is not, after all, a completely dejected place. Despite the uncertainty, pain, and even destruction that may come through sexual development, girls can and will continue to live their lives. Perhaps it is from this that critics may take comfort. If girls are shaping their identities from texts, no matter how dark or dangerous those texts might be, collectively their message is one of survival and, out of survival, hope. At the ends of these novels, and many others like them, we can see the successful transition into femininity and confidence. Girls are able to embrace themselves as sexual beings and let go of the fear and abuse that has been inflicted upon them. They are survivors. And, as we have all experienced, to survive adolescence is all that any of us can ask.

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Resources to Identify and Help Victims of Sexual Abuse

The following is a list of sources provided by the Center for Disease Prevention that discuss sexual abuse—both of students and adults—in detail. They provide descriptions of warning signs and information on where and how to seek help for one’s students:

Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network Hotline
www.rainn.org or (800) 656-HOPE

National Sexual Violence Resource Center
www.nsvrc.org

Violence against Women Network (VAWnet)
www.vawnet.org

Prevention Connection
www.preventconnect.org

STOP IT NOW!
www.stopitnow.org

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- Engberg, G. (2005, June 1). On the verge: Puberty in fiction about girls. *Booklist*, 1790–1791.
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- Finders, M. (1999). Raging hormones: Stories of adolescence and implications for teacher preparation. *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*, 42, 252–264.
- Freitas, D. (2010). *This gorgeous game*. New York, NY: Frances Foster Books.
- Hand, E. (2010). *Illyria*. New York, NY: Viking.
- High, L. O. (2010). Cracks of light in the darkness: Images of hope in the work of Laurie Halse Anderson and an interview with the author. *ALAN Review*, 38(1), 64–71.

- Hubler, A. (2000). Beyond the image: Adolescent girls, reading, and social reality. *NWSA Journal*, 12(1), 84–99.
- McCormick, P. (2008). *Sold*. New York, NY: Hyperion Books.
- Meyer, S. (2005–2008). Twilight series. New York, NY: Little, Brown and Company.
- Meyer, S. (2008). *Breaking dawn*. New York, NY: Little, Brown and Company.
- Pattee, A. S. (2004). Disturbing the peace: The function of young adult literature and the case of Catherine Atkins' *When Jeff comes home*. *Children's Literature in Education*, 35, 241–255.
- Schachter, E. (2004). Identity configurations: A new perspective on identity formation in contemporary society. *Journal of Personality* 72, 167–199.

Additional Readings in YAL

Fantasy

(Books that explore romance and sexuality in a realm outside of the normal world we know)

- Austen, J., & Grahame-Smith, S. (2009). *Pride, prejudice, and zombies*. Philadelphia: Quirk Books.
- Bray, L. (2003). *A great and terrible beauty*. New York, NY: Delacorte.
- Collins, S. (2010). *The hunger games*. New York, NY: Scholastic.
- Fitzpatrick, B. (2010). *Hush, hush*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.
- Meyer, S. (2010). *The short second life of Bree Tanner*. Boston: Little, Brown.
- Pauley, K. (2009). *Sucks to be me: The all-true confessions of Mina Hamilton, teen vampire (maybe)*. Renton, WA: Mirrorstone.
- Stiefvater, M. (2010). *Shiver*. New York, NY: Scholastic.
- Westerfeld, S. (2011). *The uglies* (Reprint). New York, NY: Simon Pulse.

Fiction

(Lighter works that may or may not address love and sexuality in a particularly dark or realistic manner; includes non-fantasy historical novels)

- Brashares, A. (2003). *Sisterhood of the traveling pants*. New York, NY: Dell.
- Cohn, R., & Levithan D. (2008). *Naomi and Ely's no kiss list*. New York, NY: Delacorte.
- Dean, Z. (2009). *The A-list: Hollywood royalty #1*. Boston: Hachette Book Group.
- Edwards, E. (2011). *The other countess*. New York, NY: Delacorte.
- Hopkins, C. (2002). *Mates, dates, and inflatable bras*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.
- Larkin, J. (2011). *Ingenue (the flappers)*. New York, NY: Delacorte.
- Shepard, S. (2007). *Pretty little liars*. New York, NY: Harper Teen.
- Von Ziegesar, C. (2002). *Gossip girl #1: A novel*. Boston: Hachette Book Group.

Reality

(Books that describe the dark and realistic side of abuse and sexual oppression)

- Asher, J. (2007). *13 reasons why*. New York, NY: Penguin.
- Brooks, K. (2005). *Candy*. New York, NY: Scholastic.
- Castle, J. (2011). *The beginning of after*. New York, NY: Harper Teen.
- Cupala, H. (2010). *Tell me a secret*. New York, NY: Harper Teen.
- Green, J. (2006). *Looking for Alaska*. New York, NY: Speak Publishing.
- Hrdlitschka, S. (2008). *Sister wife*. Olympia, WA: Orca Books.
- Myers, W. D. (1984). *Motown and Didi: A love story*. New York, NY: Dell.
- Nelson, R. A. (2007). *Teach me*. New York, NY: Razorbill.
- Smith, K. (2007). *The geography of girlhood*. Boston: Hachette Book Group.

Call for 2012 Halle Award Nominations

The NCTE Richard W. Halle Award for Outstanding Middle Level Educator honors a middle level educator who has consistently worked to improve the quality of middle school education and middle school educators, especially in the English language arts. Originally established in 1996 by the Junior High/Middle School Assembly, this award pays special tribute to the person who has worked to improve schools and schooling for the middle level—teacher, principal, college faculty, curriculum specialist, or supervisor.

Nomination information can be found on the NCTE website at www.ncte.org/awards/halle and must be submitted no later than June 1, 2012. Results will be announced in September, and the award will be presented at the 2012 Annual Convention in Las Vegas, Nevada, during the Middle Level Get-Together.

Mind Games:

Mind Control in YA literature

There are many reasons S. E. Hinton's *The Outsiders*, first published in 1967, is often cited as the pivotal novel in young adult (YA) literature. A great deal of what Hinton accomplished in the first great YA book was new, but the novel was built on something very old. When teachers introduce fiction to students, they often explain the basic conflicts that are the foundation of story, such as "individual vs. society." The title *The Outsiders* alone announces Hinton's intent to explore this theme within the work as she pits Pony Boy (and the other greasers) in conflict with Socs (who represent "polite" society). Perhaps the reason this theme of "individual vs. society" resonates throughout young adult literature is that it speaks directly to the essence of the adolescent experience. Fiction's "individual versus society" mirrors the question taking places in homes and schools, that of freedom versus responsibility.

One of the major developmental tasks of adolescence is for the teen to develop independence from his or her parents. At home, in school, and in society at large, teens seek freedom, while adults seek to limit that freedom. A great deal of young adult literature centers on this theme of teens asserting their independence, often with unintended consequences. But what if? What if adults limited teen freedom not just with rules, but

by more nefarious means? That "what if" has manifested itself into a subset of young adult novels about brainwashing, manipulation, and other mind control techniques. The majority of these titles are speculative fiction set within a dystopian society.

For many students, manipulation isn't speculative fiction, but a fact of life because of the convergence of technology and events. Technology can be used by society to limit freedom. Events such as Columbine and 9/11 become justifications to limit freedom. Titles about mind control lend themselves to discussion about personal freedom in a society that seeks to limit liberty with just cause. This idea is a daily reality for many high school students as their freedom to learn has been limited by a society obsessed with standardized test scores. No Child Left Behind is the modern Big Brother, thus titles about mind control are not only realistic, but relevant and ripped from the headlines.

For many students, manipulation isn't speculative fiction, but a fact of life because of the convergence of technology and events.

In spring 2011, a cheating scandal was discovered in Atlanta's schools related to test scores (Severson, 2011). In fall 2011, children in St. Paul schools began to receive a free breakfast and lunch in the belief that better nutrition would improve scores (Koumpilova, 2011). In Detroit, failing public schools have been transformed into charter schools with a promise of improving test scores (Abramson,

2011). What if a school district went further? Not a little cheating, but a policy of faking scores. Not

In the 1960s, as young adult literature began to take shape, the theme of mind control found another genre, though it appeared most often in speculative fiction, books about cults, or, on occasion, in a realistic novel.

better nutrition, but secretly drugging students to improve their focus. Not drilling students to learn math, but brainwashing them to be obedient. These are some of the issues I explore in my upcoming novel *Control Group*.

Control Group is the story of five culturally diverse teens whose Newark, New Jersey, public school (North East) is privatized and run as a charter school (New Eden). Friends at the start of the school year, they are divided into differ-

ent “groups” as part of the experiment to improve test scores. And the scores do dramatically improve in the three groups that are subjects of drugging, cheating, and mind control. But when some students don’t get with the program, they meet an unfortunate fate. In researching my novel, I wanted to explore how mind control had been portrayed in fiction, particularly in contemporary realistic young adult literature.

Mind Control in Literature

Mind control emerged as a theme out of Gothic literature (Seed, 2004, p. 8). In the late 19th century, the books *Dracula* by Bram Stoker (1897) and *Trilby* by George du Maurier (1894) introduced to popular fiction the “evil character” who would use hypnosis as a form of mind control. The character Svengali from *Trilby* has even entered the English language as “a person who manipulates or exerts excessive control over another” (Merriam Webster). Both novels would become films in 1931, helping to popularize the mind control theme.

In the early 20th century, the fictional use of mind control moved from one evil character using it for personal gain to a society or regime for political control, when the novels *We* by Yevgeny Zamyatin (1921) and *Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley (1932) depicted mind control as a technique used in dysto-

pian societies to exert control over the population. In *Brave New World*, mind control is achieved through drugs and manipulation, while in *We*, a totalitarian state demands and enforces rigid conformity. The ideas of *We* served as the foundation for the ultimate mind control novel *1984* by George Orwell (1948). *1984* produced phrases such as “Big Brother,” “doublethink,” and “Newspeak,” which have entered the language, while “Orwellian” has become a descriptor for any society that uses propaganda or other manipulation for political control.

Political events in the 1950s furthered the theme of brainwashing in literature. *The Manchurian Candidate* by Richard Condon (1959) would popularize the idea of the brainwashed assassin. This concept actually emerged earlier in the film *The Cabinet of Dr. Calgari* (1920), where the evil character hypnotizes another to commit murder. The difference is motive. In *Calgari*, the murder is personal; in *The Manchurian Candidate*, released during the heyday of the Cold War, it is political. By the 1960s, with the explosion of science fiction, the theme of mind control was used frequently, perhaps most notably in the influential novel *Clockwork Orange* by Anthony Burgess (1962). The hero of that novel, Alex, is an “out of control” young man until his mind is re-engineered through an aversion therapy called the Ludovico treatment. Written in a time when juvenile delinquency was on the rise, the novel explores the conflict between society and individual freedom.

In the 1960s, as young adult literature began to take shape, the theme of mind control found another genre, though it appeared most often in speculative fiction, books about cults, or, on occasion, in a realistic novel like *The Wave* by Martin Rhue (1981), which is based on actual events. In the novel, Rhue (actually Todd Strasser) explores a classroom experiment about mind control that goes horribly wrong. A few classic titles also explore this theme, such as *The Chocolate War* by Robert Cormier (1974) where students and faculty at Trinity School use intimidation and manipulation to maintain control. More than just a school group or gang, the Vigils border on being a cult. *The Giver* by Lois Lowery (1983) concerns a tightly controlled society where freedom is surrendered for the sake of harmony. *The House of the Scorpion* by Nancy Farmer (2002) focuses on an individual in an Orwellian society, featuring mindless zombie slaves

(Eejits) and a forced labor camp (the Plankton Factory). More recently, *The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins (2008) concerns an Orwellian police state that controls personal freedom in the name of order and safety. The success of the Hunger Games trilogy has spawned a new wave of speculative fiction about mind control, but the topic has also worked into three recent realistic teen novels: *Candor* by Pam Bachorz, *After* by Francine Prose, and *Little Brother* by Cory Doctorow.

Mind Control in Realistic YA Literature: *After*

This question of how much freedom people will surrender for safety is a central idea in *After* by Francine Prose (2003). Written in the aftermath of school shootings, in particular the murders at Columbine High School, Prose imagines one school's response. Days after a shooting at a nearby middle school, the students at Central High are called to an assembly where they are introduced to Dr. Henry Willner, a clinical psychologist consulting with the school. Willner announces another of the book's themes—the needs for conformity—early in the novel, saying everyone must “change their lifestyle to keep our community safe and make certain that it *won't* happen again . . . maybe giving up some of the privileges that we have” (p. 16). Prose reinforces the theme with allusions to two movies about innocent people overrun by mindless creatures: *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* and *Night of the Living Dead*.

Very quickly, the school starts to change. New metal detectors are installed, more security guards are hired, a new dress code is enforced, lockers and backpacks are subject to random searches. The protagonist, Tom, plays sports and must submit to random drug tests. The school takes more control by banning books, forbidding rap music, and instituting a no cell phone policy. The control extends home as parents are encouraged to turn their kids into snitches and “report any suspicious or possible criminal behavior on the part of their classmates” (p. 151). As happened in many schools post-Columbine, a culture of “snitching” is encouraged.

When even these measures are not enough, students like Tom's friend Silas are removed from school and sent to Operation Turnaround. Operation Turnaround is more than a brainwashing re-

education camp. Silas has learned that it is a place where “kids check in and they don't check out” (p. 166). Tom goes to the school library and learns how Stalin used re-education camps, genocide, and the fear of those fates for political ends. Willner, Tom realizes, is doing the same things: “[H]e wanted us to know . . . one tiny hint of rebellion and we could find ourselves in an even more terrible place” (p. 204). Like Stalin, Willner rewrites history through “Bus TV” and further extends control of parents: “[M]y friends have told me that their parents have started acting like robots. Whenever they try to talk to their parents . . . they repeat the stuff they've read in the school emails” (p. 243).

Mind Control in Realistic YA Literature: *Candor*

While the mind control techniques used in *After* are used in politics, the ones detailed in *Candor* by Pam Bachorz (2009) emerge from commerce and advertising. In 1957, Vance Packard claimed that two-thirds of advertising agencies were using subliminal messages to “get into their consumers' minds . . . to open their psyches, and sell more products” (Streatfeild, p. 185). Subliminal messages are introduced in *Candor* early on: “[M]y Dad's messages stream into my brain. *Academics are the key to success*” (p. 1).

This is the story of Oscar Banks who lives in Candor, Florida, an *extremely* planned community. Not just a subdivision, Candor is a town where mind-controlling messages fill the ears of every person. Most of the messages are aimed at getting children not to misbehave. Oscar's father is the brains behind Candor, and Oscar counter-programs the messages so that he remains the only non-brainwashed teen in town. He uses his freedom to help others, for a price, to escape. When a new girl arrives in Candor, love not money becomes Oscar's motive, and that changes everything. Like *After*, the ending of *Candor* is very dark and resembles another seminal work about mind control: *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* by Ken Kesey (1962).

This question of how much freedom people will surrender for safety is a central idea in *After* by Francine Prose.

The motive behind the mind control in the town of Candor is two-fold. For Oscar's father, it is wealth.

Like the dystopian society in *The Giver* or the students in *After*, the teens of Candor have unknowingly sacrificed freedom and individuality for harmony and safety.

For parents, it is the idea of a perfect family as the messages work quickly: "One day kids are blasting their music . . . doing whatever they're not supposed to do. And then they're dusting. Cooking dinner. . . . Thousands of kids, all changing to fit the same ideal.

. . . Candor fixes everything" (p. 18). Bachorz alludes to mind control touchstones: a character named Winston references *1984*, while the "listening room" resembles both room 101 in *1984* and the behavior modification room from *Clockwork Orange*. The idea in *Candor* and other books on this theme is that society is broken, but mind control works because "the messages were invented to fix us" (p. 84). Like the dystopian society in *The Giver* or the students in *After*, the teens of Candor have unknowingly sacrificed freedom and individuality for harmony and safety.

Mind Control in Realistic YA Literature: *Little Brother*

The idea of surrendering civil liberties in the name of security is also a theme in *Little Brother* by Cory Doctorow (2008). Like *After*, Doctorow takes a very real event (a terrorist attack on US soil) and the real response (Department of Homeland Security [DHS] is created and "enemy combatants" are tortured) as his jumping off point. But Doctorow adds a big "what if?" What if the DHS suspected that the terrorist attacks were carried out by US citizens? The response would be a clampdown including a "Gitmo by the Bay." The heavy hand of the state is evident even *before* the attack as Marcus, the main character, comments that living in the high crime Mission district of San Francisco "makes me one of the most surveilled people in the world" (p. 9). Much like Oscar in *Candor*, who subverts his dad's messages, Marcus is a hacker extraordinaire and cracks the security systems employed

by his school, like the ones that trace students on school computers by tracking their every keystroke.

But Marcus is in the wrong place at the wrong time when terrorists blow up the Bay Bridge and he and his friends are hauled into custody. The terrorist attack becomes the lever to crack down even more on privacy. It becomes an Orwellian world with a "destroy the village in order to save it" logic; as an illegally detained Marcus is told, "You want to preserve the Bill of Rights? Help us stop bad people" (p. 55). Marcus learns in this post-Bay Bridge world that the battle is about control. He says about his interrogator, "She wanted me to submit to her. To put her in charge of me. To give up . . . all my privacy" (p. 56). But Marcus fights back using his skills, which "made me feel in control. My technology was working for me, serving me, protecting me" (p. 88).

The bulk of the book focuses on Marcus using technology, such as setting up the Xnet, to fight back against the takeover of his city by the DHS. He doesn't view himself as a terrorist but rather a freedom fighter against his own government. The DHS clampdown occurs so fast it seems almost pre-planned, with "a lot of surveillance gear lying around, waiting to be installed. . . . The attack on the Bay Bridge had been just what they needed" (p. 89). As Marcus learns more, he discovers a vast conspiracy run by Kurt Rooney (an illusion to Karl Rove?), an adviser to the President; Rooney uses the attack for political gain, to reduce dissent, and to limit privacy in the name of freedom.

The politics of privacy are at the center of this book. The book contains afterwords by hackers who encourage readers to hack into security systems in order to protect their freedom. Those afterwords are followed by a bibliography of pro-hacking books, websites dedicated to open source coding, as well as touchstones of counterculture literature. Those three topics fit together with the theme of *Little Brother* (as well as *We*, *Brave New World*, and *1984*) to support the idea that individuals must rebel against an unjust society to maintain freedom.

Critical Reaction

While the reaction to *Little Brother* was across the board praise, this was not true with *After* and *Candor*, perhaps in part because of the integration of speculative fiction/dystopian setting into the real world. The

review of *After* in *Booklist* noted that “Prose wants to make a political statement about the gradual process by which we lose personal freedom, but she runs into trouble. Caught somewhere between allegory, dystopian fantasy, and YA problem novel, her book never finds a home for itself . . . many of the best fantasy elements—brainwashing the kids’ parents with e-mail—seem patently ridiculous in a realistic context” (Ott, 2003). The review in *Publishers Weekly*, however, argues the exact opposite, “Prose manages, for the most part, to connect shocking events to a reality familiar to most teens. Her introduction of a science-fiction thread seems chillingly plausible. . . . This drama raises all-too-relevant questions about the fine line between safety as a means of protection versus encroachment on individual rights and free will” (*After*, 2003).

Similarly, the *Booklist* review of *Candor* noted that “enforced conformity is obviously a potent metaphor for teenagers and a terrific seed for a dystopian novel, but readers may have to occasionally make the leap from suspending disbelief to abandoning all logic” (Chipman, 2009). The *School Library Journal* review calls *Candor* a “chilling dystopian novel set in the present,” but adds “the rationale for the creation of *Candor* also seems a bit far-fetched” (Rawlins, 2009). The *Publishers Weekly* review notes that *Candor* is a “dystopian novel that takes place in the present, giving the genre a fresh twist. . . . Some of the premise is difficult to swallow, such as that within days, residents of *Candor* become so addicted to the Messages that even a few hours without them could mean death” (*Candor*, 2009). The reviewers of both *Candor* and *After* struggle with dystopian ideas in a realistic setting. Yet perhaps the worlds in *After* and *Candor* are just dystopian for teens but utopian for adult society where teens follow the rules, study for the test, and obey their parents.

Conclusion

As mentioned, the first YA novel to explore mind control in a realistic setting was 1981’s *The Wave* by Todd Strasser (writing as Martin Rhue). *The Wave* concerns a history lesson/experiment that goes wrong when students at a school begin to parrot the behaviors of Nazi Germany. At the end of the book, the teacher who started the experiment looks at his obedient

students and wonders after stopping the experiment just “how long it would be before he’d begin seeing sloppy homework again. . . . Is this the price we pay for freedom?” (Rhue, p. 135). The ordered, safe, and secure worlds described in *Candor*, *After* and *Little Brother* are exactly what many adults want for their teens, but at what cost?

This central question runs through most dystopian fiction with the theme of mind control as well. In return for the perfect state or school or family, how much liberty will people surrender? As people usually do not willingly surrender their liberty, it is often taken from them (for their own good), without their consent, through mind control. Such issues are relevant for students and ripe for discussion. Titles like these are well suited for reading across the curriculum in conjunction with Social Studies classes.

Many of these novels were written in response to societal concerns. How do we reduce juvenile delinquency? Use the Ludovico treatment? How do we make schools safe? Ship people to Operation Turn-around? How do we prevent another terrorist attack? Increase the power of the Department of Homeland Security and reduce the Bill of Rights? How do we make families perfect? Bomb them with subliminal messages until they suffer for aural addiction? At the core, all mind control novels are political novels, meaning they focus on power within a society: who has it, who doesn’t, and how is power maintained? The way to control a people, history has shown, is to control their minds. The fact that mind control fiction emerges when society is “out of control” due to terrorist attacks or school shootings is no coincidence. *After* and *Little Brother* are reactions to the perceived overreactions within society to those threats.

T.S. Eliot’s poem “The Hollow Men” (Eliot, 1925) ends with “This is the way the world ends / not with a bang but a whimper.” Most dystopian fiction takes place after some world-altering event, but if Eliot is right, then the end will come quietly. What is horrifying about *After*, *Candor*, and *Little Brother* is they

The ordered, safe, and secure worlds described in *Candor*, *After* and *Little Brother* are exactly what many adults want for their teens, but at what cost?

show the subtle progression from a free society to a controlled one. They show adults with good intentions who manipulate teens for the good of society. Perhaps personal freedom won't be taken away with a bang, but the whisper of a subliminal message, a random drug test, a DHS spy camera, or with students bombarded with messages about succeeding on standardized tests. If freedom for young adults continues to diminish, no doubt more novels like *After*, *Candor*, and *Little Brother* will emerge.

In some ways, all three novels harken back to one of the great books from the YA Canon, Robert Cormier's *The Chocolate War*. Like Jerry in that novel, Marcus, Tom, and Oscar all dare to disturb the universe, and the universe bites back, hard. The dark endings to *Candor* and *After* echo the harshness of *The Chocolate War*'s finale. Thus, the real core of these three novels is not so much mind control, but teens taking brave, sometimes futile, stands against schools, communities, and societies that would attempt to control them. That core theme is, as noted, the core theme of the adolescent experience: the desire for independence. In response to institutions determined to control their minds, these characters know the only response is two words: stay free.

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Bringing Fantasy and Science Fiction into the Classroom

Young Adult literature (YAL), like its base audience, is a fickle and ever-changing genre, for it is solely dependent upon reader interest for survival, and where teens are concerned, unpredictability is the norm. There are certainly some common themes, and it's generally the case that the stories focus on one or more relatable young adult protagonists, but the tales themselves may vary much like the eclectic interests of their readers. As the YAL genre continues to grow from its modest beginnings following the Second World War to its unprecedented popularity today, we have to examine what it is that makes certain YAL titles so popular, and what it is we can do to harness this opportunity to increase adolescent interest in reading.

It was the 1967 release of S. E. Hinton's *The Outsiders* that initially brought about great change in the way we look at literature as a means of exploring the adolescent experience, but over the years since then, YAL has emerged as a booming legitimate genre often boasting its own colossal section apart from adult fiction and children's literature in almost all modern libraries throughout the country.

With that in mind, I started considering my experiences with reading as a teenager because I grew up alongside this trend in literature. While reflecting, I was able

to recall seeing a few fellow students reading outside of class, but couldn't initially pinpoint what finally caused me to begin reading on my own. And that's because for me, this never happened. What was the major stumbling block, then, that prevented me from wanting to read for pleasure prior to graduation? I had little difficulty reading the books assigned for my Advanced Placement English language arts classes, but beyond getting the grades, I had little desire to read anything beyond the confines of an academic setting.

So, I took a look at what I currently read, which falls mainly into the fantasy and science fiction genres of both adult and YAL, and compared that with what I was exposed to in high school. I realized that not one course had included so much as a mention of either. In fact, I wasn't even aware that these genres really interested me because I'd only been exposed to one such book in my entire academic experience, even prior to high school.

After being unable to come up with any fantasy titles within the curriculum, I stretched it a bit further to include science fiction novels like one of my recent favorites, *Ender's Game* (1985) by Orson Scott Card, but still nothing. I wonder, does this mean these two genres are simply too poorly written or lacking in literary quality to be studied in preparation for the state assessments that were and

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I am convinced that the lack of literary equity among genres now taught is set to grow even further from where it is today.

still are administered at my residence in Upstate New York or the Common Core State Standards Initiative (CCSSI) exams of the near future? Or is it that they are simply too difficult for students to relate to, pushing the already reluctant reader further from text than many already are? There must be some good reason why these genres are rarely, if at all, taught beyond the 8th grade, which was the last time I

can recall reading anything of the sort within a classroom setting.

Then what titles should teens be reading? I took a look at the CCSSI for English Language Arts and Literacy. Because 44 of the 50 states have formally adopted them, and will therefore be guided by these standards in the very near future. After researching the goals and the suggested means of CCSSI implementation, I am convinced that the lack of literary equity among genres now taught is set to grow even further from where it is today.

The literary framework laid out by the CCSSI spells out a percentage of literary texts to be taught versus informational texts, with a sliding scale as students' progress closer toward graduation and "college and career readiness." According to the CCSSI's adoption of the National Assessment Governing Board's *Reading Framework for the 2009 National Assessment of Educational Progress*, students should be reading 45% literary texts by the eighth grade, while the remaining 55% should be informational in nature (National Assessment Governing Board, 2008). What's more shocking is that by the 12th grade, these percentages are to have shifted to 30% literary and 70% informational. Granted, these numbers are meant to encompass readings done across content areas, but it still seems plausible that this shift away from literary reading will only further restrict the variety and flexibility of literary readings beyond the unofficially required classics.

The CCSSI does contain an exemplar of acceptable stories to be taught in ELA classrooms. There are two lists that span grades 9–12 that together include 35 titles; however, the closest this list gets to recognizing

fantasy or science fiction is the existence of Homer's *The Odyssey*. Don't get me wrong, there are great titles on this list, ranging from *Fahrenheit 451* (1953) by Ray Bradbury to F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1935), with all the generic classics in between, but in terms of texts that today's students are likely to identify with, texts that will help them really learn to love reading, this list is insufficient.

Thankfully, the CCSSI is not bold enough to demand that specific titles *must* be taught. In fact, the standards clarify that teachers are "free to provide students with whatever tools and knowledge their professional judgment and experience identify as most helpful for meeting the goals set out in the Standards" (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices and Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010). However, it seems as though the gradual increase to the mandated 70% concentration on informational texts will likely strangle title selection within the remaining 30%. As fewer literary texts are allowed in the classroom, the chances for variety in genre will shrink significantly unless teachers see the importance of teaching beyond the traditional canon to include YAL and its subgenres of fantasy and science fiction.

Then what titles should teens be reading? If we simply go by the CCSSI's list, we'll be limited to a very narrow field of literature, and I realized when pondering this conundrum that something was clearly missing when the educators, district administrators, and educational gurus responsible for the CCSSI were deliberating . . . teen input.

One might look at what is deemed appropriate by the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA Center) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), who are behind the CCSSI, but in the end, students have to learn to enjoy reading (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices and Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010). And as a former student and current high school teacher, I can easily say that the majority of students do not learn to love reading through informational texts, or even the classics, no matter how educationally beneficial they may be. In order to really get students to love reading, we have to first identify their interests and how these translate into the reading of literature for pleasure.

So what do young adults *like* to read? To answer this, I took a look at the nominees for the Young Adult

Library Services Association 2011 Top Ten list. (See these titles in the sidebar on p. 00; the list and other information are also available at <http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/yalsa/teenreading/teenstopten/teenstopten.cfm>). Based on votes from teen readers across the country, this list gave me a better idea of where teen readers stand on the issue. More than half of these 25 titles fall into the categories of either fantasy or science fiction (American Library Association, 2011).

One example from this list is *The Lost Gate* (2011) from author Orson Scott Card, a 2008 recipient of the annual Margaret A. Edwards Award from the Young Adult Library Services Association; this award honors authors who have made a “significant and lasting contributions to writing for teens” (Young Adult Library Services Association, 2011). This teen-nominated list also includes the novel *I Am Number Four* (2010) by Pittacus Lore, whose story found its way to the big screen in early 2011. Also making the list was *New York Times* bestselling author Suzanne Collins with her book *Mockingjay* (2010), the final book in the popular Hunger Games series.

Another *New York Times* bestselling author on the list boasting unquestionable accolades is James Patterson with his book *Angel: A Maximum Ride Novel* (2011). Patterson is the author of 19 *New York Times* bestselling novels and is traditionally better known in adult reader circles, but according to Bickmore (2012), he is just one of many adult novelists to have recently shifted styles to attract the ever-growing young adult audience as well. So there seems to be a slight disconnect between what young adults are interested in reading, and what adults deem educationally appropriate for them to read. But isn’t the idea to get them to read more, to learn to love and enjoy reading?

The official purpose of the CCSSI is to “build upon the most advanced current thinking about preparing all students for success in college and their careers.” So it must be that the titles selected by teens from across the country do not contain the literary elements and rigor of the more traditional texts, because it would otherwise make sense to choose some of the teen-approved titles as examples of qualifying texts at the secondary level. So I guess what needs to be determined are the characteristics of an educationally sound piece of literature. Surely we can conclude that the classics such as William Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*,

Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter* (1850), Harper Lee’s *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960), as well as a number of other novels listed by the CCSSI fit this mold. But what do they all have in common? Or, more important, what is it that the CCSSI deems important that students learn while reading?

Young Adult Library Services 25 Nominees for the 2011 Top Ten List

- **Bachorz, Pam.** *Drought*. Egmont USA. 2011.
- **Beam, Cris.** *I Am J*. Little, Brown Books for Young Readers. 2011.
- **Beaudoin, Sean.** *You Killed Wesley Payne*. Little, Brown Books for Young Readers. 2011.
- **Black, Holly, and Justine Larbalestier.** *Zombies vs. Unicorns*. Simon & Schuster/Margaret K. McElderry Books. 2010.
- **Card, Orson Scott.** *The Lost Gate*. Tor Books. 2011.
- **Clare, Cassandra.** *The Clockwork Angel*. Simon & Schuster/Margaret K. McElderry. 2010.
- **Collins, Suzanne.** *Mockingjay*. Scholastic. 2010.
- **Collins, Yvonne.** *Love, Inc.* Disney/Hyperion. 2011.
- **Condie, Ally.** *Matched*. Penguin/Dutton. 2010.
- **Cremer, Andrea.** *Nightshade*. Penguin/Philomel. 2010.
- **Fitzpatrick, Becca.** *Crescendo*. Simon & Schuster Children’s. 2010.
- **Grant, Michael.** *Lies*. HarperCollins/Katherine Tegen Books. 2010.
- **Hawkins, Rachel.** *Demonglass*. Disney/Hyperion. 2011.
- **Hawkins, Rachel.** *Hex Hall*. Disney/Hyperion. 2010.
- **Kagawa, Julie.** *The Iron King*. Harlequin. 2010.
- **Lore, Pittacus.** *I Am Number Four*. HarperCollins. 2010.
- **Moore, Peter.** *Red Moon Rising*. Disney/Hyperion. 2011.
- **Nelson, Jandy.** *The Sky Is Everywhere*. Penguin/Dial Books for Young Readers. 2010.
- **Oliver, Lauren.** *Before I Fall*. HarperCollins/HarperTeen. 2010.
- **O’Neal, Ellis.** *The False Princess*. Egmont USA. 2011.
- **Patterson, James.** *Angel: A Maximum Ride Novel*. Little, Brown & Company. 2011.
- **Pearce, Jackson.** *Sisters Red*. Little, Brown and Company. 2010.
- **Smith, Cynthia Leitich.** *Blessed*. Candlewick Press. 2011.
- **Westerfeld, Scott.** *Behemoth*. Simon Pulse. 2010.
- **White, Kiersten.** *Paranormalcy*. HarperCollins/HarperTeen. 2010. (American Library Association, 2011)

It might be advantageous to choose novels that students desire to read, novels that might spark an interest in independent reading beyond the classroom.

The CCSSI specific to my native New York suggests that secondary-level students read a minimum of 25 books or the equivalent per year across all content areas (The University of the State of New York, Regents of the University, 2005). As stated before, the standards do not require that specific literary texts be taught, but do go into detail regarding necessary skills students should acquire along the way. Students should be able to . . .

- “Determine two or more themes or central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to produce a complex account; provide an objective summary of the text.”
- “Analyze the impact of the author’s choices regarding how to develop and relate elements of a story or drama (e.g., where a story is set, how the action is ordered, how the characters are introduced and developed).”
- “Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including words with multiple meanings or language that is particularly fresh, engaging, or beautiful. (Include Shakespeare as well as other authors.)”
- “Analyze how an author’s choices concerning how to structure specific parts of a text (e.g., the choice of where to begin or end a story, the choice to provide a comedic or tragic resolution) contribute to its overall structure and meaning as well as its aesthetic impact.”

(National Governors Association Center for Best Practices and Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010)

This is certainly not a complete list of all of the learning standards, but the aforementioned are most clearly related to the reading aspect, and also seem to indicate a freedom to choose from any available novel that might exhibit the opportunities to examine these

elements of reading comprehension and analysis. So there does appear to be room for flexibility in terms of novel selection on the part of the teacher, since there is no “official” list of required novels associated with the standards of learning.

Surely a teacher has to choose novels that encompass the previously stated literary elements. However, it might be advantageous to choose novels that students desire to read, novels that might spark an interest in independent reading beyond the classroom. By being in touch with what the students want to read, teachers will more than likely meet less resistance along the way from reluctant readers while still satisfying the learning standards and preparing students for the world of higher learning and careers.

According to University of Southern Florida writer Vickie Chachere, fellow student Courtney Pollard researched this very topic of young adult content quality, and her “analysis of classic books and hot-selling young adult fiction was featured in the University of Southern Florida’s Undergraduate Research Symposium” (Chachere, 2011). In her research, Pollard concluded that 60% of novels chosen by young adult readers fall into the category of fantasy or science fiction. So she looked into what the aforementioned genres might have to offer young readers and concluded that they “might be set in made-up worlds with imagined creatures and beings, but the conflicts and challenges faced by their characters reflect real-world issues: the classic struggle with authority, the frustrations of growing up and family problems” (Chachere, 2011). These are the same issues seen within the traditional fiction novels being pushed in the classroom.

Pollard’s conclusion about relevant problems and characters placed in distant worlds may be one of the most appealing aspects of the fantasy and science fiction genres as they apply to young adult readers. Many teens struggle with identity, parental absence, and a number of other difficult adolescent issues. For some, a book that tackles those themes head on using a realistic and identifiable character is a great way of dealing with those issues. However, it might be that the roundabout way many of the fantasy and science fiction novels tend to take on these same issues—by placing them in a safe and distant place—is a more appealing way for teens to deal with them. They might also see an advantage in reading these genres, since reading a particular title doesn’t necessarily identify

them to others as struggling with this issue or that.

Keep in mind that I'm not suggesting we solely teach fantasy and sci-fi and do away completely with the classics that have proven to be ageless masterpieces of great literature. I am simply arguing that exposure to a supplement of more relevant young adult novels might further encourage students to read outside of the classroom. If students are reading more and learn to enjoy it, they will naturally improve in their abilities to interpret and comprehend textual information, making them better equipped to tackle the classic readings unofficially deemed necessary for literary mastery.

I was never personally a lover of reading until exposed to age-appropriate material that I found interesting and relevant, which, unfortunately for me, did not occur until after high school when I came across C. S. Lewis's Space Trilogy, Raymond E. Feist's *The Magician* (1993), and R. A. Salvatore's Dark Elf Trilogy (1992), to name a few.

But what if teachers don't really know how to teach fantasy or science fiction novels? Some educators may not be familiar with these growing genres and might be uncomfortable tackling uncharted educational territory. Fortunately, this issue has been recognized, and books have been published with this very thought in mind. One such book, titled *Teaching Fantasy Novels: From The Hobbit to Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* (2003) by Phyllis J. Perry, would be a great resource for any teacher looking to get into teaching fantasy. A Voice of Youth Advocates review on Barnesandnoble.com stated that "Teachers at a loss as to how to teach fantasy literature in the existing curriculum will delight in this book. Each of the 20 referenced books is keyed through meaningful and enjoyable activities to the NCTE/IRA Language Arts Standards" (<http://www.barnesandnoble.com/w/teaching-the-fantasy-novel-phyllis-j-perry/1005636248>). Another excellent aid in discovering how to incorporate science fiction novels into the classroom can be found in Gary Raham's *Teaching Science Fact with Science Fiction* (2004), which suggests a variety of classroom activities linked to relevant science fiction novels. This book could create a scenario for teachers to not only pique student interest in reading, but might also reach across the curriculum to help students connect with their science classes.

Knowing that there are tools out there to assist in

the transition from purely classic and general fiction to at least some of the novels students really want to read leaves few excuses to refuse this call. But school districts and teachers need to step up and do what's best for their students in the midst of this new and well-intended yet restrictive educational legislation. If the goal is to get students to enjoy reading more, then I suggest that educators and librarians alike expose them to a wider variety of student-recommended novels. Clearly, many students already enjoy them, since they're the voices who recommended them. And if the goal is to get more students to pass the CCSS exams, which would demonstrate competent college and career readiness as it applies to the English language arts and literacy, then it can be concluded that students will still need to be encouraged to read more than what they are currently reading, especially at their leisure. If they are like I was; it was my exposure to fantasy/sci-fi that finally made me a reader.

By combining these 2 goals, and realizing the substantial young adult fixation with the fantasy and science fiction genres, it seems only fitting that the local curriculums shift to include these titles; doing so is likely to achieve and improve teen literacy, both in the classroom and out. And in a time when literary fiction title selection in the classroom seems to be shrinking, it becomes all the more important that fantasy/sci-fi be offered to adolescent students. What better antidote to the often dulling informational texts that push their interests away from a love of reading for pleasure?

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So there seems to be a slight disconnect between what young adults are interested in reading, and what adults deem educationally appropriate for them to read. But isn't the idea to get them to read more, to learn to love and enjoy reading?

ALAN Announces the New Nilsen–Donelson Award

Established in 2011 through the generous donations of Alleen Pace Nilsen and Don Nilsen, The Nilsen–Donelson Award is given to the author(s) of the best article published in *The ALAN Review* during a particular volume year. It recognizes excellence in scholarship in the field of YA literature, scholarship exemplified by former ALAN leaders Dr. Alleen Pace Nilsen and Dr. Ken Donelson. Recipients are awarded an honorarium of \$500 plus given a year's extension on membership in ALAN. Recognition of the award recipients will be made annually at the ALAN Breakfast during the NCTE conference. Members of the Nilsen–Donelson Award Committee were Steve Bickmore, Mark Letcher, Cleo Rhamy, and Mary Arnold.

The first winners are **Connie S. Zitlow and Lois T. Stover** for their article "Portrait of the Artist as a Young Adult: Who Is the Real Me?" The article appeared in *The ALAN Review*, Volume 38, Number 2 (Winter 2011).

From Awareness to Action:

Young Adult Literature as a Road to Reflection and Catalyst for Change

The words an author sets down on the page fail to stay flat and orderly, in straight and tidy lines, once they meet with a reader. Instead, they are transmuted and transformed in the transaction between writer and reader. The curves and lines change somehow in the shift to phrases and sentences and again to images with meaning as they weave and whirl into the mind, home to the lived experiences of the reader. These lived experiences, in their vast variation, further influence and shape the words, creating myriad meanings and shades of difference resulting from diverse lives, perspectives, and realities. From the text to the self to the world, words gather depth and range and power. Those who read them, by extension, see themselves—and see themselves differently.

As educators, we believe we might harness this literary energy by encouraging students to pay explicit attention to the interplay between a text, their own lives, and the larger communities they inhabit. By asking young people to consider (and question) their assumptions about others and themselves as they read, we might guide them in gaining both a critical perspective of the society in which they live as well as a commitment to action in the attempt to improve it.

These efforts are in line with several studies that draw upon literature, particularly young adult literature, to foster consideration of social justice issues among students (Alsup, 2003; Eppert, Etheridge, & Bach, 2007; Glasgow, 2001; Stover & Bach, 2012). In this article, we build upon this literature to examine

the potential of a critical literacy approach grounded in conversation for the teaching of four young adult (YA) novels, *Tree Girl* (Mikaelson, 2004), *Sold* (McCormick, 2006), *If You Come Softly* (Woodson, 1998), and *Raining Sardines* (Flores-Galbis, 2007). We examine particularly the ways in which educators might use these titles to foster awareness of social injustice and a resulting obligation and dedication to social change.

Theoretical Grounding

Identity is negotiable and socially constructed (Gee, 1999). Individuals, through their dress, behaviors, institutional and social affiliations, etc., signal meaning that helps others identify them as a particular kind of person. In this sense, identity reflects a broad set of domains co-constructed in moment-to-moment interaction over local time and over a broader socio-historical context (Nasir & Sax, 2003). Yet, it is discourse, language interaction, that indicates how an individual perceives and is perceived (Fishman, 1989; Gumperz, 1982). Thus, identity formation occurs when individuals come to understand themselves dialogically, through specific conversations, in specific groups.

These conversations are essential if we hope to prepare young people to enter the larger communities and worlds they inhabit. “Critical literacy” is the hallmark of the effective democratic citizen. It is characterized by an intensely engaging, interrogating, and curious approach to the social, political, cultural, linguistic, and economic conditions that we encounter

Ideally, as students develop increased awareness of the self and the other in the process of textual analysis, they develop identities . . . that reflect a commitment to social justice by experiencing a shift from awareness to action.

every day. Classroom teaching strategies and materials grounded in critical literacy aim to disrupt the commonplace, interrogate multiple viewpoints, focus on sociopolitical issues, take action, and promote social justice (Lewison, Flint, & Van Sluys, 2002), thus encouraging students to develop independent, divergent ways of thinking and living that prepare them for visible and sustained participation in a democratic society. Given the honest and complex ways in which many YA authors navigate socioeconomic, racial, and sexual/gendered territories, the texts

they craft provide ideal means to encourage critical and careful examination of the self and society on and off the page.

Moving into Practice

Literacy is empowering only if one is a critical reader—one who analyzes, questions, and evaluates that which is being read (Cadiero-Kaplan, 2002; Christensen, 2000; Freire & Macedo, 1987). Critical readers become empowered through their ability to question the dominant culture as means to better understand how to transform it (Apple, 2001). They recognize that they, as readers and members of a particular social context, have permission to question, and even reject, constructions of reality that do not match their own.

To enrich such study and foster a critical stance, teachers might also ask students to consider the sociocultural identities of these characters and how they fit (or do not fit) into the worlds described on the page—as well as those inhabited by the students who read about them. Ideally, as students develop increased awareness of the self and the other in the process of textual analysis, they develop identities that extend beyond the words on the page and into the world at large, identities that reflect a commitment to social justice by experiencing a shift from awareness to action.

Tree Girl and Sold: Gaining Awareness through Revelation and Critique

In the examination of literature, teachers often encourage a close study of characters and their motivations. As a means to enrich such study and foster a critical stance, teachers might also ask students to consider the sociocultural identities of these characters and how they fit (or do not fit) into the worlds described on the page—as well as those inhabited by the students who read about them. Such opportunities encourage the (re)consideration of assumptions and biases sometimes inherent in both literature and life.

Mikaelson's young adult novel, *Tree Girl* (2004), presents a nonfiction account of Gabriela, a Mayan Indian who lives during the Guatemalan civil war. Escaping the destruction of her family and village by climbing trees, Gabriela witnesses the rape, torture, and massacre of her people. Given the political and social dynamics of the history behind the story, the novel allows for rich discussion of the outside influences that may shape and form identity. Furthermore, the text gives students a window into the harsh realities and injustices of the world, ideally allowing for critique of the United States' involvement in the affair and formation of a stance toward social justice and equality.

Sold (McCormick, 2006) offers similar opportunities. The novel chronicles the terrifying truths of child prostitution in India and Nepal. Using first-person, innocent-eye narration, McCormick develops Lakshmi's character and story through lyrical prose and free verse form. As Lakshmi archives the painful realization that she has been sold to a brothel in the impoverished city of Calcutta, India, by her menacing stepfather, readers are given an honest recitation of the implications of a young girl's naïveté compounded with her gender and cultural roles.

Teachers might use both texts to examine character as a form of critique and revelation. They may wish, for example, to have students assume the role of Gabriela or Lakshmi and consider the following questions:

- Who am I?
- With which groups do I identify?
- With which groups do I have trouble identifying? Why might this be?
- How might I chart the relationships of power in my community?

- Which groups in my community are marginalized? Why might this be?
- Is it my responsibility to change this? Why or why not? If so, how might I change this?

These fundamental questions give students a sense of Gabriela and Lakshmi as human beings and not just characters on a page. In the process of responding through the eyes of these young women, students might come to better understand and analyze these fictional situations, thus fostering a sense of empathy that might extend into their own nonfiction lives.

Similarly, *Tree Girl* and *Sold* might both be used to encourage students to make text-to-self connections that allow them to critically negotiate the similarities and differences inherent in the text and the lives of readers to generate an understanding of how fiction might inform life. To promote such sociocultural connections, students might contemplate the following questions:

- What is the purpose for this text?
- Why did the author compose this piece?
- Whose view(s) does this text represent? Are other views silenced or unrepresented?
- In what format is this text constructed? How does the format influence the reader? Impact the text?
- Is the text meaningful? How is meaning constructed?
- In what way does the text offer readers an opportunity to take a stance on a particular issue?
- How has the text helped to clarify or shape *my own* beliefs and/or attitudes?
- How does the power of language appeal to my emotions? How might I use language to expose a concern?
- In what way(s) can my awareness of global concern influence global change?

Because these novels have the power to elicit both a compelling and foreign emotional response from readers, it is essential that students have an opportunity to “debrief,” so to speak, and thoughtfully process the disquieting yet inspiring content. Pushing students to a level of discomfort in their thinking, requiring them to empathize with characters so far removed from their sometimes sheltered worlds, and then asking them to apply those new feelings acquired through empathy to enact social changes pose a certain chal-

lenge, one that requires educators to be willing to face discomfort in their students and themselves.

Yet, it is through raw accounts like those portrayed in *Tree Girl* and *Sold* that students are able to shine a light on various lifestyles, cultures, and even social problems that would be otherwise left dark and unknown. Through this exposure, students’ awareness grows, and their problem-solving skills are enhanced as educators encourage them to “make sense” of what they have read. While students may struggle to relate directly to Gabriela’s or Lakshmi’s character, unique lifestyle, and unfathomable circumstances, students will find recognition in the shared emotions of fear, despair, inadequacy—and, eventually, hope. From here, a universal skill is born; students can harness these feelings to fuel their understanding of specific problems and initiate action to help solve them.

If You Come Softly and Raining Sardines: Taking Action through the Reclamation of Voice

Students possess a power they might not even realize they command; they have the opportunity to speak, to give voice to their views. Considering the ways in which we negotiate our identities through dialogue and written discourse, it is crucial that we empower our students with the knowledge that their voices matter in their own lives and the larger communities in which they live. It is certainly important to use the texts we read in our classrooms to improve the reading and writing skills of our students; however, if we help students develop strong academic skills and they cannot or do not apply these skills in an effort to improve the world around them, our progress is negligible.

As Bomer (2007) suggests, “civic literacy . . . is especially suited to schools, because the public school system exists to create publics—to make of every student a citizen” (p. 303). Because democracy depends upon active citizens who speak out for change, we cannot afford to model complacency to our students; we owe it to our young people to equip them with the confidence, skills, and practice necessary for them to find, value, and utilize their voices for action.

Students can use critical literacy to move beyond simple awareness of the presence of social, cultural, racial, and gender-based injustices and transform their thoughts into catalysts of change. Language constitutes “one of the most powerful media for transmitting

our personal histories and social realities, as well as for thinking and shaping the world” (Darder, 1991, p. 101). As controllers of their personal and social realities, it is important for students themselves to take an active position as a force behind such changes.

Students can use critical literacy to move beyond simple awareness of the presence of social, cultural, racial, and gender-based injustices and transform their thoughts into catalysts of change.

Woodson’s *If You Come Softly* (1998) forces readers to confront uncomfortable issues regarding race and class as they follow the journey of two 15-year-old New Yorkers—one black, one white—who have fallen for each other and find the world has difficulty accepting their love.

The teens struggle with the reactions of their friends, family, and community. Woodson switches perspectives between the two characters with each chapter, so readers see how the community’s reactions—both the hurtful words and the emptiness of invalidation—affect them both. Readers also bear witness as both teens struggle to find and raise their voices in support of their relationship and in opposition to the discrimination and judgment they face.

The study of *If You Come Softly* might include student consideration of how Miah and Ellie are silenced, sometimes willingly, and how both the characters, and readers themselves, might raise their voices to elicit social change. To that end, teachers might pose questions that encourage reflection, then action, helping students to identify the real-world implications of the issues raised in this fictional account:

- REFLECTION: What position(s) of power does Miah hold? How might Ellie be more privileged than Miah? How do these characters seem to feel about their economic, racial, and social privilege (or lack thereof)?
- REFLECTION: In what ways do Miah and Ellie try to convince others around them to be less judgmental? How do their friends and family react to their perspectives? When do Miah and Ellie fail to speak up for their relationship in the face of discrimination?

- REFLECTION: Could Miah and Ellie have done anything to change the outcome of this book? If yes, what? If no, then how might they have changed the world around them if they had been given more time together? What would they have to do to foster a lasting, strong relationship in the face of discrimination?

- ACTION: What positions of power do I hold? How do I use this power? How might I use this power?
- ACTION: How can I use my privilege to improve the situations of others in my community?
- ACTION: How can I help others recognize their privilege without inducing guilt?¹
- ACTION: How can I encourage my peers to stop using offensive, discriminatory language, especially in social conversations?
- ACTION: How can I use my words to engage peers and family members in meaningful conversation about social inequities?

If You Come Softly (1998) might also be used as a springboard into a participatory action research project that encourages students to see the power of their voices in action. Students might select and investigate a form or example of social inequity described in the novel. If students choose to examine racial profiling, for example, they might interview police officers, store clerks, teens, etc. to gather statistics and examples; administer a survey to teens to garner some idea of how often and on what grounds they have experienced such profiling; and monitor media coverage to see if any patterns regarding bias toward particular groups emerges. Students could make a presentation to classmates about this problem in our society, share statistics that demonstrate how pervasive the issue is, make a creative visual representation of the problem or the solution to be displayed in a showcase at the school, compile a list of local and national resources for citizens seeking help or information regarding this social inequity (such as organizations that assist minority youth with their education or that provide free attorney services for cases of discrimination), and complete a relevant written component (an essay or a reflection).

If students prefer to express their voices through creative forms, they might write and share a creative piece (poem or short story) about a time when they

were incorrectly judged or when they incorrectly judged someone else. Or, students might make their voices heard in the media by writing a relevant op-ed piece for submission to the school or community newspaper.

Raining Sardines (Flores-Galbis, 2007) follows two young adults as they attempt to transcend the social hierarchy that has traditionally conquered, quite literally, their native island of Cuba. Set just prior to the revolution in 1959, Enriquito and Ernestina become entangled with Don Rigol, a wealthy landowner who owns the town’s mountain and unrightfully possesses a magical locket made of legendary Taino gold. Once Enriquito learns that the locket belongs to his ancestors, the political inequality of the situation becomes a personal fight against injustice for the young boy. He and Ernestina set out on a surreal adventure

to return the locket to its rightful owner and empower the people to claim the mountain for themselves, thus bringing justice to the island town.

This novel provides an ideal means for moving students from awareness to action in the fight for social justice. To help students shift from text to self to community, teachers might ask them to engage in a three-step questioning process (see Figs. 1–3). The first step considers general discussion questions based on one theme of *Raining Sardines*. The second then addresses specific questions based on anecdotes from the text, while the third provides questions meant to encourage students to reflect on their realities. Teachers might then encourage students to use their responses to the “Examining Your Reality” questions to brainstorm “Awareness into Action” activities (as described in additional detail within each theme).

Figure 1. Theme: How does ownership influence social class?

| Thought Questions | Examining the Text | Examining My Reality |
|--|---|---|
| What does it mean to own something? | Why is the possession of the gold watch so important to Enriquito? To Alysia? To Don Rigol? | What possessions are most important to me? Why? |
| What can be owned or possessed? What cannot? Why? | What does each character wish to own? What are the implications of such ownership? | What would I do if I had one of my most treasured possessions stolen from me? |

| Possible “Awareness into Action” Activity |
|---|
| Ask students to spend a scheduled period of time (20 minutes, one whole class period, one day, etc.) recording each time they use a possessive pronoun to describe a person or thing (<i>my, ours, hers</i>). For each situation in which they express some form of ownership, have them ask themselves: Do I truly <i>own</i> the object, person, etc. that I modified using the possessive <i>my</i> ? Why did I verbally tie that object or person to myself? What is the ultimate importance of ownership? Ask students to try going for another scheduled period of time <i>without</i> using possessive pronouns. Pose the questions, “Was this a difficult thing to do? Why or why not?” |

Figure 2. Theme: How important is tradition in determining social class?

| Thought Questions | Examining the Text | Examining My Reality |
|--|--|--|
| What is a tradition? Why do people follow tradition? | What traditions are practiced in Enriquito and Ernestina’s community? | What traditions are followed in my society? |
| How might traditions influence perceptions of social class? | What role does El Viejo play in keeping traditions alive? What role does Don Rigol play in keeping traditions alive? | Do these traditions create any barriers between groups of people? Are they fair or unfair? |
| Do social class implications change from generation to generation? Why or why not? | | Who establishes traditions in my family or community? |

continued on next page

Figure 2. Continued

Possible “Awareness into Action” Activity

Ask students to choose three traditions their family members, friends, neighborhood community, townspeople, etc., follow. Have them create a written and visual web that describes and displays the *who, what, where, when, why, and how* of this tradition. Pose this scenario: Imagine that, this year, your group will no longer practice that tradition. What would your life be like in the absence of this tradition? What would happen if your town’s Fourth of July parade was cancelled and could not be celebrated? What if, in spite of turning 15, you or someone you care about will not have a quinceañera like her older sisters did? Ask students to write a one-page reflection on the loss of their tradition, and be prepared to share their thoughts in a discussion centered on the value and power of tradition.

Figure 3. Theme: How do economics affect social class?

| Thought Questions | Examining the Text | Examining My Reality |
|---|---|---|
| What is wealth? What do wealthy people control? | Who works hard in <i>Raining Sardines</i> ? Who does not? | Who has the power to control my economy? |
| What is a meritocracy? What is hard work? | How are these characters rewarded for their hard work—or lack of hard work? | How have I gained an awareness of the economic standing of those around me? |
| Who has the power to control the economy? | Who determines the town’s major economic decisions? | Does this affect how I treat others? |

Possible “Awareness into Action” Activity

Ask students to work in groups of three. Have each group member research an occupation and describe what life might be like for one who works such a job. One member will research an occupation that pays a \$150,000 salary, another member an occupation that pays a \$40,000 salary, and the third member an occupation that pays a \$12,000 salary. Each member should consider the cost of living for each occupation, how much time the worker must spend at his or her job, how much effort he or she must contribute, how many people he or she must support, and so on.

Direct individual students to generate a written profile of a person having the determined occupation, locate a magazine clipping to provide visual appeal, and give the worker a name and personality. Then ask students to use his/her profile and those created by other group members to draft a brief screenplay showing an interaction between these characters. Students should be prepared to explain why specific characters acted as they did and what this might reveal about society. After each group performs its screenplay, the audience will analyze the interactions and discuss the implications regarding how economics might affect social class.

A Call to Action

The YA texts described here (along with additional options, such as those in the sidebar on p. 00) serve as excellent resources for helping students engage with fiction and life in critically literate ways and redefine their conceptions of self and other through story. In their treatment of contemporary social issues, these novels provide teenagers the opportunity to “affirm, contradict, negotiate, challenge, transform, and empower” (Darder, p. 99). By engaging in such behaviors, students learn to perform their duties as

citizens in a democratic classroom; they “address questions related to moral and political agency within the process of their schooling and the course of their everyday lives” (Darder, p. 99). They learn to acknowledge the inequities that exist within their social communities and begin to develop both the consciousness and skills necessary for social change.

We live in a democratic nation, yet it is obvious that not every US citizen shares equally in the freedoms and great promise of America. Change will always be needed. Because the media now constantly

exposes the goings-on of our social and political leaders and floods us with information about their decisions, both good and bad, it can be overwhelming and discouraging to stand as a silent witness to all of the changes, trends, and policies pushed forth by people in power and to feel helpless and voiceless in the wake of these happenings. That is why it is especially important in today's world that our young people truly believe in the power of words, the power of *their* words. We need our students to recognize that their ideas are valuable and that they *can* create change by increasing their own awareness, starting conversations with others, asking tough questions, and engaging in meaningful dialogue about real issues.

So share a story of personal victory with your students, perhaps a letter you wrote to a local paper or congressperson that was recognized, but also prepare your students by sharing the many instances of disappointment you have also endured: the complaints that were filed but went unaddressed, the moments you fought for something you believed in and lost. We must not only teach our students to be leaders; we must model the actions for them. Let's use the YA texts we read in the classroom to go beyond a simple understanding of literature to an examination of self and our world and the spurring of social action. These potential victories and failures in our attempts at being heard and valued are part of real life. But each day is a grand conversation in which our identities, social codes, and politics are constructed and adjusted. Let's make sure our students are no longer voiceless bystanders, but active contributors to this magical, transformative dialogue that shapes us all.

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Other YA Titles to Consider in the Promotion of Critical Literacy

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Note

- 1 We recognize that not all of our students enjoy privilege in the same way. Some have gender and/or race in their invisible knapsacks, while others might benefit from their socioeconomic status or mobility. However, we argue that, in the contexts in which we work, all of our students possess some form of privilege by virtue of their American identity, an essential recognition if we are to encourage them to consider their place in the larger global community.

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Dimensions of Young Adult Literature:

Moving into “New Times”

“I think it is our job to help students be critical readers of issues. [Students] need to be exposed to current topics. I know that a lot of kids are on their own tackling this difficult stuff. Maybe it is our job as literacy teachers to take this on. And young adult literature might be a good way to do that.”

Above, eighth-grade teacher Annette Collins expresses her desire to use young adult literature (YAL) as a way to assist students in understanding current, and sometimes challenging, topics. In her second year of teaching, Annette claims that we, as literacy teachers, should “take this on,” meaning that by addressing current topics in our classrooms, we may be able to shift our perspective on what is important in teaching literacy. What Annette speaks to can be characterized as making a move into “New Times.”

In this article, we explore what a move into New Times might entail with regard to the teaching of young adult literature. We first discuss this term as a way to describe social and technological shifts in perspective, and then point to how young adult literature may be conceptualized through such a perspective in 2012 and beyond.

Teachers of young adult literature have long witnessed the power that YA novels hold in meeting the reading interests of adolescents. In particular, Smith and Wilhelm (2006) have discussed how many students, as a result of their engagement with literature targeted for diverse teens, transform into engaged and enthused readers. These success stories reside as

salient examples of the power that YAL holds with young people. However, over our years interacting with YAL, we have seen that it has waged an “age-appropriate” battle throughout its history. By referring to age appropriateness, we reference the numerous controversies that have surrounded myriad YA “classics,” such as books by Judy Blume, and more recent YA books, such as Anderson’s *Speak*, for tackling issues such as teen sexuality and abuse.

The age-appropriate battle has emphasized educators’ quest to label YA novels according to how their content matches the developmental level of adolescents; we believe that such discussion about the age appropriateness of books written for adolescents has overshadowed other important considerations of YAL. While we recognize the need for an awareness of students’ development as adolescents with regard to what they read, we are increasingly curious as to whether other lenses in viewing YAL may be productive ways for educators to consider the power of books for young adults.

As a response, we propose a New Times framing of YAL as a way to move into the future. Such a perspective offers a contemporary lens for how educators might think about books geared for adolescents.

Such discussion about the age appropriateness of books written for adolescents has overshadowed other important considerations of YAL.

Times has the potential to offer educators, researchers, and adolescents new considerations of young adult literature.

What's New about New Times?

In considering the teaching of YAL, the overarching presence of New Times claims significance, for it demands that we identify how books intended for adolescent readers speak to tenets of literacy learning in our present era. As teachers of YAL, we are called upon to examine our book selections and ask the following questions:

- How does recent YAL respond to New Times?
- How might a framework of YAL for New Times yield new perspectives on the young adult novels we teach?

The term New Times, as used by scholars in literacy studies (Gee, 2000; Lankshear & Knobel, 2003; Luke & Elkins, 1998), is used to characterize the changing social, economic, and technological conditions of our current era. And, at the same time that New Times connotes the ways in which changing conditions have reshaped our society, such a lens also sets forth a reconceptualization of literacy itself (Street, 1995). Literacy moves away from its sole association with proficiency in reading and writing conventional, print-based texts to an association with reading and writing multiple forms of texts (New London Group, 2000). Further, New Times acknowledges a social practice vision of literacy, thereby stressing literacy's highly contextual and locally situated nature. These changes are significant, as they ask teachers to consider what literacy is beyond proficiency in reading and writing.

Second, New Times addresses how adolescents

While literacy research has increasingly embraced a changing perspective of literacy throughout the past decade, attending to technological and social changes (Gee, 1996; New London Group, 2000), we feel that the theoretical perspectives framing YAL must also shift in order to resonate with our current era. Moving YAL into New

are now immersed in a digital world. As Wilhelm (2009) has pointed out, our culture's most powerful tools now involve digital technologies, and adolescents are oftentimes natives to these technologies. Because of students' use of technologies outside the classroom, there is more demand that in-school learning support students' out-of-school learning. This has prompted educators to continuously consider how the integration of technology into language arts classrooms can work alongside the critical and powerful use of today's technologies. In a past era of YAL, educators may not have sought out connections with technology, or with students' out-of-school learning. However, in our current and future eras, educators must consider these facets of YAL as potential sites for reaching students. Figure 1 provides key points about the concept of New Times.

We now build from the New Times framework articulated above to project how YAL can adhere to such a perspective. In the following sections, we explore how specific book choices urge us to consider such a framing of YAL and discuss how teachers might seek other recently published books that respond to this framing.

The Significance of Characters' Cultural and Social Worlds

An aspect of literacy, as conceptualized through a New Times perspective, emphasizes that an individual's literacy is a socially situated practice, evidenced

New Times represents *changing* times and the need for a broader focus in literacy teaching and learning. As such, New Times is characterized by:

- A move away from "age appropriate" toward a connotation with the changing social, economic, and technological conditions of our current era
- A reconceptualization of literacy as a socially situated practice (versus a neutral skill used only in reference to reading and writing proficiency)
- An awareness that the cultural and social context of one's life plays a significant role in one's literacy development
- An emphasis on our immersion in a digital world
- A recognition of new forms of texts (e.g., non-print and visual)

Figure 1. What's new about New Times?

not in one's skill set, but rather in one's behaviors, values, attitudes, feelings, and social relations that exist as patterns of belonging to a social group. In applying this idea to young adult novels, we consider how characters' literate processes are depicted in relationship to the context of their lives. Through recognizing the significance of characters' social and cultural worlds, we understand that literacy does not develop in a vacuum; rather, it is influenced by the social context in which characters live. Applying this perspective to YAL texts has been shown to offer transformative experiences for adolescent readers (Polleck, 2010). We now highlight one young adult novel that illustrates the significance of characters' cultural contexts, An Na's (2001) Printz Award winner *A Step from Heaven*.

A Step from Heaven is the story of Young Ju and her family's move from Korea to the United States. The book begins when Young Ju is just four years old and ends as Young Ju is about to start college. The language and prose used throughout the book develops as Young Ju grows and readers witness the ways that Young Ju's family resides in multiple cultural worlds—Korean immigrants living in the United States with financial hardship. It is these multiple positions—these multiple cultural contexts—that pose challenges for the family. However, readers are able to see how Young Ju's challenges may also be viewed as sponsors (Brandt, 2001), affording and offering her a greater perspective from which to live her life (as opposed to viewing these challenges as hindrances or deficits). Young Ju's negotiation of the multiple positions that she inhabits mirror the author An Na's experience of living what she has called "two sides" of life. In highlighting the cultural contexts of characters' lives, *A Step from Heaven* presents readers with the opportunity to view the cultural contexts in which one lives as deeply connected to one's literacy and one's position in the world.

Books that urge students to consider how one's social context affects one's literacy also adhere to a New Times framing of young adult literature. One example of a novel that highlights characters' social lives is *The First Part Last* (2003) by Angela Johnson, which won both Printz and Coretta Scott King awards. *The First Part Last* is the story of a single, teen father who chronicles his daily life before and after the birth of his daughter. Heidi was first introduced to this book

at her former research site, a school for pregnant and parenting teens (see Hallman, 2009). The students who attended Eastview School for Pregnant and Parenting Teens felt that many of the book's themes resonated with their lives.

In *The First Part Last*, school is seen primarily as a "backdrop," and the real "action" in the text that drives the storyline takes place outside of school. One scene from the novel features the character of teen father Bobby, exhausted from caring for his newborn daughter and struggling to stay awake in school. The out-of-school contexts featured within the book are quite detailed,

and it is in these out-of-school places that readers see the relationship between Bobby and Nia (the teen mother in the book). The times that Bobby and Nia are together, such as when they ride the subway or just hang out, are some of the most poignant parts of the novel. It is in these places of the book that readers see the "real" characters come through.

The First Part Last does not present a portrait of Bobby as an academically motivated student thriving in a school setting; yet, readers do see Bobby as a teen father who is motivated to become a responsible and good father. Bobby, as a character, brings us into his life-world and illustrates how he is successfully and constantly negotiating how to best use the abilities he possesses to advocate for both himself and his daughter.

Witnessing how cultural and social contexts play a significant role in the lives of characters assists young adult readers with undertaking the process that Langer (1995) calls *envisionment*. Envisioning literature incorporates all the stances readers must take in order to comprehend a text. The process of stepping into and moving through a book, essential parts of the envisioning process, rely on readers' ability to relate to many aspects of a text: the characters, the language, the setting. We believe that a heightened attention to characters' cultural and social lives will assist teachers

Through recognizing the significance of characters' social and cultural worlds, we understand that literacy does not develop in a vacuum; rather, it is influenced by the social context in which characters live.

in presenting their students with books that can lead to undertaking the process of envisionment, thus also leading to increased reading comprehension.

Young Adult Literature for New Times: Moving Beyond Print

When considering the forms and formats of texts in New Times, the work of Dresang (1999) and Hassett & Schieble (see Hassett & Schieble, 2007) is helpful in characterizing textual shifts. The guidelines and questions they articulate can assist teachers of YAL in identifying books for the digital age that feature nontraditional forms and formats. These shifts in ways of representing are synonymous with adolescents' familiar visual and digital worlds.

For example, Dresang (1999) provides criteria for what she calls "radical change" in children's texts, the first criterion specifically addressing the format of texts. Dresang discusses the change in how information itself is exhibited on the page of a digital text and notes that graphics and text, instead of being linear

and traditional, are subject to new forms. Dresang notes that "radical change" books incorporate one or more of the following characteristics:

1. graphics in new forms and formats,
2. words and pictures reaching new levels of synergy
3. nonlinear organization and format
4. nonsequential organization and format,
5. multiple layers of meaning
6. interactive formats

Hassett & Schieble (2007) suggest that the characteristics Dresang denotes set up new sociocultural contexts for readers of these texts.

Monster (1999), by Walter Dean Myers, has been lauded for almost a decade, yet it fits the criteria of a New Times text. The format of *Monster*—a text written as both screenplay and journal entries—evidences how Steve, the main character, engages with multiple forms of literacy. Steve's journal entries grapple with his role in a crime scene, and this event drives the book's plotline. As readers, we view Steve as an actor who engages new forms of text to grapple with new contexts, witnessing how he writes his own screenplay and journal entries in response to his time in jail during the trial.

Finally, we turn to the rise of graphic novels within YAL. Carter (2007) argues for graphic novels' "transformative" power in the English classroom, citing an outcome of students' increased vocabulary, comprehension, and writing skills as a result of reading such texts. Yet, Carter also notes that despite graphic novels' popularity among middle and high school readers, a dearth of research still exists concerning how educators might include graphic novels in their curriculum. Schwarz (2010) and Botzakis (2010) have also highlighted the educational significance of graphic novels, and point out that these books are perhaps no longer "alternative" texts, instead fostering the kind of competencies students will need in current times.

Satrapi's *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood* (2003) and Yang's *American Born Chinese* (2006) have become well-known graphic novels within a short period of time (due, in part, to the release of the film *Persepolis* in 2007). As the prevalence of graphic novels has exploded within the past decade, it is important that educators, especially those educators with little experience reading graphic novels on their own,

Here are a few examples of books that highlight characters' cultural worlds:

- Abdel-Fattah, R. (2007). *Does my head look big in this?* New York, NY: Orchard Books.
- Alexie, S. (2007). *The absolutely true diary of a part-time Indian*. New York, NY: Little, Brown.
- de la Peña, M. (2008). *Mexican whiteboy*. New York, NY: Delacorte Press.
- Jaramillo, A. (2006). *La linea*. New York, NY: Square Fish.
- Kadohata, C. (2006). *Kira Kira*. New York, NY: Atheneum Books.
- Resau, L. (2007). *Red glass*. New York, NY: Delacorte Press.

Figure 2. Young adult literature for New Times: Cultural context

These titles emphasize the importance of characters' social worlds:

- Anderson, M. T. (2004). *Feed*. Cambridge, MA: Candlewick Press.
- Asher, J. (2007). *Thirteen reasons why*. New York, NY: Razorbill.
- Collins, S. (2008). *The hunger games*. New York, NY: Scholastic.
- Peters, J. A. (2004). *Luna*. New York, NY: Little, Brown.
- Peters, J. A. (2005). *Keeping you a secret*. New York, NY: Little, Brown.
- Weber, L. (2009). *If you live like me*. Montreal: Lobster Press.

Figure 3. Young adult literature for New Times: Social context

are given opportunities to conceptualize these texts not only as “pleasurable” reads for students, but as books that offer complex themes such as freedom of religion, racial stereotyping, and gender inequality.

Because the visual plays a significant role in readers’ meaning making, understanding the value of nontraditional forms of text opens doors for educators to consider how these texts may assist their students with reading comprehension. Young adult novels that include materials where print becomes almost secondary, such as graphic novels or *The Invention of Hugo Cabret* (2007) by Brian Selznick—a Caldecott-winning book that chronicles the life of a turn of the century filmmaker—requires readers to attend to cues set forth by visuals for understanding plot, characters, and events. These cues, whether reading the “gutters” or white space between panels in graphic novels as clues to the pacing of the story, call on readers to make predictions and inferences in highly complex ways. Rather than viewing these texts from an age-appropriate perspective (as visual texts have historically been viewed as appropriate only in the elementary grades or for struggling readers), a New Times perspective pushes educators to view these young adult novels as engaging teens’ out-of-school visual lives and as curricular materials that offer rich contexts for learning.

Becoming Teachers of Young Adult Literature in New Times

Young adult literature in New Times recognizes that, as technology continues to reshape society, new forms of text will become increasingly significant in the lives of students. Responding to these new forms of text is a critical part of being an educator in our current era. As Gee (2004) notes, one’s success in New Times depends on “the skills, achievements, and previous experiences that a person owns and that he or she can arrange and rearrange to sell him or herself for new opportunities in changed times” (p. 97). Educators are in a unique position to potentially influence the trajectory of a young person’s literacy learning. Though Gee’s portrait of the New Times individual is perhaps somewhat daunting, it also allows educators to acknowledge that one skill set may no longer be enough; instead, an individual’s success in New Times depends first on recognizing the constancy of change and then using one’s literacy as a tool to respond to change.

Beyond seeing New Times as an end within itself, we view such a framing of YAL as ultimately supporting students as readers. We know from research (Moje, 2000) that students’ comprehension is enhanced and supported when relevant texts are used in the classroom. Returning to Annette’s quotation that began this article, we see that many students are “on their own tackling this difficult stuff.” Annette’s observation reminds us that, as literacy teachers, we have a unique space to assist students, thereby easing the burden of knowing that students are often going it alone.

YAL has long embraced the idea that books written specifically for young adults can be productive springboards from which to reach adolescents. In New Times, we must continue to use this power of young adult literature. Through identifying the ways in which YAL responds to New Times, we can become more thoughtful and deliberate about how the identities and lives of the characters mirror contemporary society and the very real concerns that our students face today.

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These books break out of traditional formats to engage readers on a visual level:

- Abadzis, N. (2007). *Laika*. New York, NY: First Second.
- Barry, L. (2008). *What it is*. Montreal: Drawn and Quarterly.
- Helfer, A. (2007). *Malcolm X: A graphic biography* (Randy DuBurke, Illus.). New York, NY: Hill & Wang.
- Scieszka, J. (2008). *Knucklehead: Tall tales and almost true stories of growing up Scieszka*. New York, NY: Viking.
- Sis, P. (2007). *The wall: Growing up behind the iron curtain*. New York, NY: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux.
- Tan, S. (2007). *The arrival*. New York, NY: Arthur A. Levine.

Figure 4. Young adult literature for New Times: Alternative formats

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NCTE Literacy Education Advocacy Day 2012: April 19

Join NCTE members from across the nation for NCTE's Literacy Education Advocacy Day on Thursday, April 19, 2012. NCTE members attending Advocacy Day will learn the latest about literacy education issues at the federal level and have a chance to interact with people highly involved with those issues. See <http://www.ncte.org/action/advocacyday> for details.

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

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.

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

Readers are shown both the ways that representation can create the truth and the tools that authors use to construct meaning.

These and other novels provide models for the ways that literacy can transport an individual away from the challenges of everyday life.

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-

In several novels, characters’ lives are profoundly changed by the relationships they build as they engage in reading and writing.

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.

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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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| <p><i>Anya's Ghost</i> by Vera Brosgol First Second, 2011, 224 pp., \$15.99</p> <p>Graphic Novel/Growing Up/Supernatural ISBN: 978-1-59643-552-0</p> <p>Anya is a typical teen girl who is embarrassed by her family, struggling with her body image, and attempting to fit in at school. When she falls down a well, she thinks that this actually isn't the worst thing that has happened to her. At the bottom of the well, Anya finds a dead body and a new best friend—a ghost named Emily. At first Anya and Emily are close, but Anya realizes that some parts of the story Emily told about her death don't add up. As Anya struggles to sort out fact from fiction, she must also figure out life in high school. Emily begins to play dangerous pranks and Anya must clean up the mess.</p> <p>Brosgol's debut graphic novel provides a quirky, sardonic, and whimsical view into adolescence and the struggle to both fit in and be different from everyone else. Anya is sarcastic, caring, and thoughtful.</p> <p>Melanie Hundley Nashville, TN</p> | <p><i>Astfall</i> by Mike Mullen Tanglewood, 2011, 472 pp., \$16.95</p> <p>Post-apocalyptic ISBN: 978-1-933718-55-2</p> <p>After the supervolcano at Yellowstone erupts, Alex finds himself plunged into an ash-covered world. Eager to find his family, who has gone on a family trip, Alex traverses 140 miles of dangerous terrain and meets people who have resorted to primitive ways of living in order to survive, including extreme acts of violence and utter hopelessness. Along the way, he meets Darla, another teenager who finds herself alone in this uninhabitable wasteland, and the two embark on an unforgettable journey.</p> <p>As in Pfeiffer's <i>Life as We Knew It</i>, Mullen manages to create a believably devastated world in which there are few people to trust and even fewer resources. He deals with some of the more adult aspects of life many teenagers encounter, such as having sex and the embarrassment of relieving bodily waste in public. Readers who appreciate a little romance with their action adventure stories will enjoy Alex and Darla's.</p> <p>Jacqueline Bach Baton Rouge, LA</p> |
| <p><i>Calli</i> by Jessica Lee Anderson Milkweek Editions, 2011, 184 pp., \$8.00</p> <p>Coping/ Nontraditional family/ Love ISBN: 978-1-57131-699-8</p> <p>Calli is just a normal 15-year-old girl. She has a popular boyfriend, a loyal best friend, and two of the greatest moms in the world. However, Calli's world turns upside down when her moms decide that they want to foster a girl named Cherish. Calli's new foster sister is nothing like Calli pictured or hoped for in a new family member. Cherish lies to Calli, steals her friends, kisses Calli's boyfriend, and constantly blames all of her troubles on Calli. Time and again, Calli is left wondering how someone so horrible can get away with the things she does. When an act of revenge turns haywire, Calli isolates herself from her family and friends in an attempt to come to terms with her guilt.</p> <p>This moving coming-of-age story portrays a world where the perils of adolescence can be rectified and mistakes can be undone, especially with the support of two loving and supporting mothers.</p> <p>Kim Coyle Nashville, TN</p> | <p><i>Chasing the Nighthbird</i> by Krista Russell Peachtree Publishers, 2011, 197 pp., \$15.99</p> <p>Adventure/Social Issues/ Historical Fiction ISBN: 978-1-56145-597-3</p> <p>In 1851 New Bedford, Massachusetts, whaling ships came into port. A 14-year-old boy from Cape Verde, Lucky Valera, was preparing for his first real job as a sailor when he was shanghaied by Fernando Vergas, his half-brother. Fernando plans to keep Lucky working for him until Lucky comes of age, sending Lucky to work in one of the mills where the labor is dangerous and backbreaking. Lucky meets a Quaker girl who is an abolitionist and a fugitive slave. He thinks that her problems and concerns are not his, as he attempts his own escape, but in a daring finale, he realizes that slavery is his problem, too. He goes back to sea to help fugitive slaves escape. The ills of slavery, child labor, conditions in mills, and the whaling industry make this book ideal to launch discussions of social issues.</p> <p>Joy Frerichs Chatsworth, GA</p> |

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| <p><i>Drought</i> by Pam Bachorz Egmont, 2011, 392 pp., \$17.99</p> <p>Dystopia/Oppression ISBN: 978-1-60684-016-0</p> <p>For 200 years, Ruby Prosser has been collecting Water. Enslaved by the cruel Darwin West and his gang of Overseers, Ruby and her Congregation must scour the woods each day for the special healing Water, which has sustained their lives for many years but also fueled the greed and oppression surrounding Ruby's community.</p> <p>Waiting for their savior Otto while enduring the hardship of slavery is the Congregation's chosen purpose, but when Ruby meets the new Overseer Ford, she questions the wisdom of the Congregants. Carrying the secret of the Water in her blood, which she adds to the Water every night, Ruby must choose between sustaining her people or venturing outside the woods for the chance at a normal life. Mysterious characters, forbidden love, and one girl's quest for freedom create a gripping story about loyalty, leadership, and purpose in a world where suffering is profound and salvation uncertain.</p> <p>Meredith Suits Franklin, TN</p> | <p><i>Freak Magnet</i> by Andrew Auseon HaperTeen, 2010, 293 pp., \$16.99</p> <p>Grief/Interpersonal Relationships/Family ISBN: 978-0-06-113926-0</p> <p>When "freak" Charlie Wyatt spies "magnet" Gloria Aboud in a coffee shop, he falls instantly in love and, despite warnings from a friend, does everything he can to meet her. They have more in common than a cup of coffee. Both suffer from incredible loss and grief—Charlie's mother is bedridden with a debilitating illness and Gloria's brother was killed in Afghanistan. Charlie copes by feigning courage as he wears his used Superman costume under his clothes, while Gloria does everything she can to annoy her mother.</p> <p>Andrew Auseon tells this unique story from both characters' point of view by alternating chapters. <i>Freak Magnet</i> isn't afraid to touch on timely, difficult topics and uses two likeable characters to address the issues. Teens will root for this unlikely couple to help each other through the most difficult times in their lives. The book would appeal to teens, ages 14 and up.</p> <p>Anne Minton Fayetteville, AR</p> |
| <p><i>Fighting in the Shade</i> by Sterling Watson Akashic Books, 2011, 330pp., \$15.95</p> <p>Sports/Belonging/Masculinity ISBN: 978-1-936070-98-5</p> <p>The year is 1964. Billy Dyer has just moved to the Florida Coast with his newly divorced and secretive alcoholic father. Billy finds a place in the town on the high school football team, the Spartans. Much like the original Spartans, being on the team is a symbol of honor, pain, and elitism. A bad hazing scene gone wrong forces Billy into exile from the team. Billy and his father are forced to make decisions that could potentially affect their lives within the new town forever.</p> <p>This story captures the essence of what it means to grow up, to come into oneself as part of society. The challenge of wanting to belong versus doing what is right is the dominant theme. Billy, his father, and the reader learn that life's decisions don't always turn out the way we plan. This tale transcends time, and will be enjoyed by football and history fans.</p> <p>Kim Coyle Nashville, TN</p> | <p><i>Hey, 13!</i> by Gary Soto Holiday House, 2011, 197 pp., \$16.99</p> <p>Short Story Collection/Growing Up ISBN: 978-0-8234-2395-8</p> <p><i>Hey, 13!</i> is a collection of short stories about the pains and joys of being thirteen. The adolescents in Soto's story collection experience the multiple ways in which their expectations do not match their actual experiences. In <i>The Campus Tour</i>, a young girl visits a college campus expecting to see students studying, professors in tweed jackets, and people carrying on academic discussions about literature or science. What she experiences is completely different. In <i>It's Not Nice to Stare</i>, a young girl struggles with staring and self-image. In <i>A Simple Plan</i>, a boy is forced to abandon the family's dog. Soto's stories capture the naiveté and uncertainty that comes with wanting desperately to be older. These stories focus on issues of choice, perception, family, self-image, and honor. Like Howe's <i>13: Thirteen Stories That Capture the Agony and Ecstasy of Being Thirteen</i>, this collection shows what it is like to grow up.</p> <p>Melanie Hundley Nashville, TN</p> |

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| <p>Horton Halfpott by Tom Angleberger Amulet Books, 2011, 206 pp., \$14.95</p> <p>Fiction/Humor ISBN: 978-0-8109-9715-8</p> <p>After M'Lady Luggertuck loosens her corset, unprecedented events and a desire to misbehave spread throughout Smugwick Manor. Horton Halfpott, one of the kitchen servants, however, is reluctant to disobey his superiors for fear of losing his job and his wages, which he hopes will one day pay for a doctor for his family. As precious items are stolen from the Luggertucks and preparations for an extravagant ball are being made, Horton must break the rules in order to help his friends, be with the girl he loves, and catch a truly loathsome thief.</p> <p>While the plot follows the traditional storyline of having a poor but noble hero win the heart of the most desired girl and foil treacherous schemes, Angleberger crafts his story with humor and unique characters in order to keep his audience entertained.</p> <p>Sarah Aronow Nashville, TN</p> | <p>HUMAN . 4 by Mike A. Lancaster Science Fiction/Relationships/Technology/Thriller Egmont, 2011, 231 pp., \$16.99 ISBN: 978-1-60684-099-3</p> <p>When teen Kyle Straker volunteers to be hypnotized during the town talent show, he awakens to a different world. Computers and cell phones no longer work, and a strange language streams across the television screens. Everyone around him seems somehow disturbingly different, and Kyle and the three others who were hypnotized must solve the puzzle. The story is told through a series of cassettes taped by Kyle during the beginning of what he realizes is a human upgrade that he and the others missed while under hypnosis. The author's side notes explaining popular cultural references, such as "The Apprentice" and "Cracking Jokes," add depth and humor to this compulsive page-turner. The Editor's Notes pondering the significance of the gaps in Kyle's tapes heighten reader interest and add to the book's complexity. Readers will surely ponder the possible obsolete nature of humanity where even reading is an artifact of the past.</p> <p>Barbara A. Ward Pullman, WA</p> |
| <p>I Am J by Cris Beam Little, Brown, 2011, 326 pp., \$16.99</p> <p>Fiction/Transgender/Identity/Self-Discovery/Families ISBN: 978-0-316-05361-7</p> <p>Convinced that he is a boy born in a girl's body, J has always felt different from everyone around him. As his body began to change, he hid the undeniable physical changes beneath his clothing. Now, on the eve of his eighteenth birthday, a betrayal by longtime friend Melissa prompts him to embark on a journey of self-discovery and empowerment. No longer will J hide—from his friends, his parents, and even himself. There's a whole new world of possibilities outside his front door, even a school where he might find acceptance. J's unhappiness, expressed through his photography, is palpable, and his journey of self-discovery and self-acceptance is inspiring. Navigating the often unfriendly New York neighborhoods, J embraces a hopeful but not easy future with difficult choices. This heartbreakingly honest book features complex characters, including parents whose acceptance is not certain. Back matter includes an Author's Note and Resources.</p> <p>Barbara A. Ward Pullman, WA</p> | <p>Jane Austen: A Life Revealed by Catherine Reef Clarion Books, 2011, 155 pp., \$ 18.99 ISBN: 978-0-547-37021-7</p> <p>Biography/Romance</p> <p>Devoted Austen fans rejoice; a new biography by Catherine Reef pieces together the life of "gentle Aunt Jane." Little is known of Austen's life, and many of her letters are missing due to the efforts of family and friends to censor the way Jane would be remembered in history. Reef attempts to paint a fuller picture of Jane's life within the context of Austen's time and culture, allowing the reader to search for the connections between a single woman dubbed an "old maid" and the novels she became so famous for creating. This text contains fascinating primary accounts from Austen's family members and acquaintances as well as family portraits, original letters, and cultural pieces from the time period. This biography will make the reader want to pick up his or her old copy of <i>Pride and Prejudice</i> once more and discover again why Austen continues to find devotees with each new century.</p> <p>Katie Harris Nashville, TN</p> |

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| <p><i>Me, Myself, and Ike</i> by K. L. Denman Orca Book Publishers, 2009, 192 pp., \$12.95</p> <p>Identity/Friendship ISBN: 978-1-55469-086-2</p> <p>Kit Latimer used to be happy. Now, Kit is a shell of himself, and he won't let his inner feelings out to anybody. He begins to plan his own demise; heroic and fitting, he plans to freeze himself as a human time capsule. His pushy new friend, Ike, guides him on his journey, advising on which things should be frozen with Kit. Kit needs to come to his senses before it's too late, but can he with Ike's questionable guidance?</p> <p>K. L. Denman provides a look at mental illness through Kit. Her first-person retelling is reminiscent of <i>Fight Club</i> and provides a good story for children to read and get caught up in. Kit's story is one of scary perseverance, and his family's attempts to save him are wisely championed by Denman throughout. The story is compelling and offers an interesting take on what teenage mental illness looks like.</p> <p>Max Gertz Atlanta, GA</p> | <p><i>My Favorite Band Does Not Exist</i> by Robert Jeschonek Clarion Books, 2011, 324 pp., \$16.99</p> <p>Fantasy/Romance/Identity ISBN: 978-0-547-37027-9</p> <p>Idea Deity is going to die in chapter 64. Idea believes that he is a vital character in a book written by a belligerent narrator, and he is destined to die. Then there is Reacher Mirage, a lead singer in a band that Idea is supposed to have made up in an Internet hoax. Reacher and Idea come together in the fantastical novel they are both reading—<i>Fireskull's Revenant</i>.</p> <p>The weaving of the three intricate plots makes the story a little difficult to follow at first. However, once the realities of the characters intertwine, the reader is in for a roller-coaster ride of suspense. <i>My Favorite Band Does Not Exist</i> is a thrilling combination of fantasy and reality where one discovers that both worlds can coexist through the imagination.</p> <p>Kim Coyle Nashville, TN</p> |
| <p><i>Okay for Now</i> by Gary D. Schmidt Clarion Books, 2011, 360 pp., \$16.99</p> <p>Fiction/Family/Teen Life ISBN: 978-0-547-15260-8</p> <p>Living in a home he has appropriately called "The Dump," Doug Swieteck is the new kid in a small town. Between his abusive father and bullying brother, Doug doesn't have much to look forward to during his new year at Washington Irving Junior High. The anticipated arrival of his other brother from Vietnam can only make things worse. However, Doug's life begins to change when he steps into Marysville Public Library and spots John James Audubon's <i>Birds of America</i>. Discovering the power of creativity, Doug begins a search that leads him to people and places within Marysville that he never knew existed. Gary D. Schmidt's second novel about Doug Swieteck will remind the reader why the transformative power of art will always triumph over despair.</p> <p>Katie Harris Nashville, TN</p> | <p><i>Original Sin</i> by Lisa Destrochers TOR/A Tom Doherty Associates Book, 400 pp., \$9.99</p> <p>Paranormal Romance/Fantasy/Relationships ISBN: 978-0-7653-2809-0</p> <p>Frannie Cavanaugh has everything she has ever wanted; after all, her love has turned demon Luc into a mortal in love with her. Under his watchful eye and the care of her guardian angel brother Matt, she should be safe. Nevertheless, Lucifer wants his demon back, and he also wants Frannie for reasons that are revealed late in the book. The demons he sends will stop at nothing to do his bidding.</p> <p>In the second book of the Personal Demons series, the battle of good and evil rages on with Frannie's soul hanging in the balance. Temptation surrounds Frannie, and it may be only a matter of time before she falls from grace. Because the story's perspectives shift among the characters, readers know a lot more about what's going on than Frannie and her friends do. Readers will be drawn to this independent-minded teen who vacillates between two angelic guys.</p> <p>Barbara A. Ward Pullman, WA</p> |

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| <p>Perfect by Girls by Alfred C. Martino Coles Street Publishing, 2011, 316 pp., \$9.95</p> <p>Realistic Fiction/Self-discovery/siblings ISBN: 978-1-59316-600-7</p> <p>Melinda is the lone girl on a prestigious wrestling team in a Michigan high school. While Melinda is a wrestler, she is not a tomboy as she sports 4-inch leather heels and designer dresses to events around town. She loves wrestling with her teammates, and since the team captain is her older brother, she scores extra points with the team. However, she struggles with making weight, balancing friendships, and the hostility felt from outsiders for being a girl wrestler. Things seem to be looking up for Melinda, until she chats with a reporter about her wrestling coach.</p> <p>In Martino's third novel on wrestling, he focuses on an adolescent girl trying to bridge the divide between her dream of wrestling and what others think and expect from girls, including members of her family. He addresses the concerns of many girls: weight loss, boyfriends, friendships, family expectations, and older siblings. An enjoyable, quick read.</p> <p>Emily Pendergrass Athens, GA</p> | <p>Pick-Up Game: A Full Day of Full Court Edited by Marc Aronson & Charles R. Smith Jr. Candlewick, 2011, 170 pp., \$15.99</p> <p>Sports/Relationships/Short Stories ISBN: 978-0-7636-4562-5</p> <p>The basketball is put into play in a series of stories from nine young adult authors interwoven with poems about the popular game. But this isn't tournament play; rather, the focus is street ball as it is played on New York City's West 4th Street Court. Each of the stories picks up where the one before it left off, linking the characters and the action seamlessly. Walter Dean Myers starts the game with his contribution describing Boo guarding an eerily silent white player, and the pace never flags. Just as basketball is played in different styles, the stories are written in unique fashions, revealing their authors' personalities and offering brief vignettes of the games being played out, on and off the court. Rita Williams-Garcia even puts into the game the talented Dominique, a character from her earlier novel <i>Jumped</i>. An afterword and contributor comments make this one a slam dunk.</p> <p>Barbara A. Ward Pullman, WA</p> |
| <p>Shelter by Harlan Coben G. P. Putnam's Sons, 2011, 304 pp., \$18.99</p> <p>Action/Adventure.Mystery ISBN: 978-0-399-25650-9</p> <p>This first YA book by the author is a riveting story of Mickey Bolitar who, besides dealing with his father's death and his mother's addiction, gets involved in a series of adventures. Mickey's new girlfriend is missing. His search for her leads him into the darker side of life, involving unscrupulous men and white slavery. The quirky friends, his natural athletic prowess, along with his experiences growing up with his nomadic parents give Mickey an edge on facing foes.</p> <p>Mickey is a white knight coming to save the day. A special symbol, a Nazi survivor, and the questionable death of Mickey's father leave much material for sequels. The realism and action of the book make it a page-turner and one that boys especially will enjoy. This book is an extension of the author's adult series about Myron Bolitar and is the first in a young adult series that should be most successful.</p> <p>Joy Frerichs Chatsworth, GA</p> | <p>Small as an Elephant Abandonment/Family Relationships/Mental Illness/Journeys by Jennifer Richard Jacobson Candlewick, 2011, 275 pp., \$15.99</p> <p>ISBN: 978-0-7636-4155-9</p> <p>When his mother disappears during a camping trip to Acadia National Park, Jack Martel must rely on his own survival instincts, since he fears seeking help from the authorities. He believes his mother will be right back, and if worse comes to worst, there's no way he can risk her being charged with abandonment, which is likely to happen if the authorities realize he's on his own. While it hasn't been easy, life with his mother is exciting, especially during her exuberant periods. But the ups are always followed by periods of malaise and depression, and Jack has learned to carefully hide his family's secrets. After his food and money run out, he decides to make his way home to Boston. Readers will root for him to arrive safely, helped along the way by the kindly strangers who befriend him. Especially poignant is his love for elephant-related trivia and totems.</p> <p>Barbara A. Ward Pullman, WA</p> |

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| <p><i>The Cheshire Cheese Cat: A Dickens of a Tale</i> Intrigue/Historical Fiction/Relationships by Carmen Agra Deedy & Randall Wright (Illus. Barry Moser) Peachtree Publishers, 2011, 229 pp., \$16.95 ISBN: 978-1-56145-595-9</p> <p>In the nineteenth century, Skilly, an alley cat, carries a secret. He loves to eat cheese, not mice. Skilly contrives to be allowed to live in Ye Olde Cheshire Cheese, a tavern frequented by Dickens, Thackeray, and other writers. Secrets abound in the story. Dickens quickly takes note of the growing friendship between Skilly and Pip, the mouse. When Skilly's nemesis, Pinch, a ferocious alley cat, moves into the inn, mayhem breaks out. Even Queen Victoria makes an appearance.</p> <p>The story is compelling, the wordplay charming, the vocabulary enriching, and the use of 19th-century English enlightening. This is a good book for English class. Barry Moser's illustrations seem to make the characters jump off the page. The reader now knows where Dickens received the ideas for his famous beginning to <i>The Tale of Two Cities!</i></p> <p>Joy Frerichs Chatsworth, GA</p> | <p><i>The Coven's Daughter</i> by Lucy Jago Witchcraft/Historical Fiction Hyperion, 2011, 256 pp., \$16.99 ISBN: 978-1-4231-3843-3</p> <p>As a bastard child living in the late 1500s, Cecily Perryn is proud of her job as poultry girl at the grand Montacute House, even though she is shunned by most of her village, except for her best friend William. On her 13th birthday, Cess discovers a mysterious locket in the poultry house just as the villagers discover the dead body of a young man from a neighboring village. During that night, William goes missing, and Cess knows she must save William to prove her innocence before the townspeople begin a witch hunt.</p> <p>Through this adventure, Cess becomes entangled in an intriguing plot to murder Queen Elizabeth and restore Catholicism to power in England. But more important, Cess discovers the origins of her own family and must confront her own witch heritage. Jago's novel is intended for older readers that can analyze serious topics, such as illegitimacy, witchcraft, and violence.</p> <p>Erica Cain Nashville, TN</p> |
| <p><i>The End of the Line</i> by Angela Cerrito Social Issues/Identity/Guilt Holiday House, 2011, 212 pp., \$17.95 ISBN: 978-0-8234-2287-6</p> <p>"Ryan was dead, and I was a murderer," claims 13-year-old Robbie in his first-person account of his struggle at Great Oaks School for juvenile delinquents. Robbie is cold and hungry; however, the only way to get food and blankets is to earn points. He must follow all of the rules, listen to the adults, and come to grips with why he is in solitary confinement. Through flashbacks and his lists of identifying qualities, Robbie tells his tale of how he became incarcerated. <i>The End of the Line</i> is a powerful and suspenseful tale that asks the reader to confront these questions: did Robbie mean to kill his friend Ryan or did he kill him by accident? No matter how you answer the question, you continually want to sympathize with Robbie and the miserable, horrifying circumstances in which he finds himself.</p> <p>Kim Coyle Nashville, TN</p> | <p><i>The Jaguar Stones, Book Two: The End of the World Club</i> Adventure/Fiction by J&P Voelkel Egmont, 2011, 384 pp., \$ 16.99 ISBN: 978-1-60684-072-6</p> <p>As the second book of The Jaguar Stones adventure trilogy, <i>The End of the World Club</i> brings Max Murphy and his Mayan friend Lola back to save the world from the villainous Lords of Death. Racing against time, Max and Lola must travel to the heart of Spain to retrieve the legendary Yellow Jaguar Stone from Max's ancestor's castle and return it to Xibalba. Max and Lola must overcome unprecedented challenges to uncover the horrifying secrets of the Yellow Jaguar Stone. Will Max succeed or will he and his parents be condemned to live out the rest of their lives trapped in Xibalba?</p> <p>This fast-paced action-adventure novel surpasses its prequel, and is filled with Mayan folklore and entertaining humor that will keep teen readers highly entertained. <i>The End of the World Club</i> is an easily recommended novel to pique the interests of adolescent readers in history and mythology.</p> <p>Christine Chau Staten Island, NY</p> |

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| <p><i>The Lost Saint</i> by Bree Despain Egmont, 2011, 404 pp., \$17.99</p> <p>Despain's gripping sequel to <i>The Dark Divine</i> continues the story of high school heroine Grace Divine and her struggle against the curse of the wolf. Grace's boyfriend Daniel, an ex-werewolf, is training her to control the superhuman powers her curse endows. Meanwhile, Grace's werewolf brother Jude has gone missing, and demons are terrorizing the city. When Grace turns her back on her boyfriend and her family to be trained instead by Nathan Talbot, she learns to harness her powers, but at the expense of her own spiritual balance.</p> <p>With ancient demonic wars and high school drama inseparable, <i>The Lost Saint</i> combines intricate mythology and dark mystery to create a thrilling novel that explores human determination and true love's redemptive power, all while whetting the appetite for a sequel.</p> <p>Jonathan Tomick Nashville, TN</p> | <p><i>The Phantom Limb</i> by William Sleator and Ann Monticone Amulet Books, 2011, 208 pp., \$16.99</p> <p>Isaac's having a tough time: he just moved to a new town, his mom is in the hospital, and the Fitzpatrick twins are already stuffing him in his locker. Isaac spends most of his time combing through his optical illusion collection. He then finds a new one in his house: a mirror box used by amputees to ease the pain of the "phantom limb." But when Isaac puts his hand into the mirror box, a different hand appears—and then starts sending him eerie signals: is the limb trying to hurt Isaac, or help him?</p> <p>As he puts the pieces together, Isaac unravels clues leading to either life or death. In this fast-paced, riveting novel, Sleator and Monticone combine elements of the supernatural and murder mystery to create the kind of reading experience that goes by all too quickly.</p> <p>Ty Hollett Nashville, TN</p> |
| <p><i>The Year We Were Famous</i> by Carole Estby Dagg Clarion Books, 2011, 250 pp., \$16.99</p> <p>In this historical fiction, Carole Estby Dagg imagines the 1896 cross-country trek of her great-aunt and great-great-grandmother, Clara and Helga Estby, from Mica Creek, Washington, to New York City in an attempt to raise money to save their family farm. Shy, 17-year-old Clara and her bold, suffragette mother leave behind father Ole, seven younger siblings, and Clara's presumptive fiancé. They face hazardous weather, dangerous travel conditions, Clara's indecision about her future, and the truth about Helga's past, all while trying to meet their seven-month deadline.</p> <p><i>The Year We Were Famous</i> weaves together facts and artifacts from Clara and Helga's actual 4,600 mile trek with imagined conversations, journal entries, and characters met along the way. The result is a compelling story about what is possible for girls and women, and one historical journey that helped make it so.</p> <p>Elizabeth Self Nashville, TN</p> | <p><i>The Sentinels</i> by R. A. & Geno Salvatore Wizards of the Coast LLC, 2010, 297 pp., \$17.95</p> <p>Maimun is a teenage orphan who has already seen more than his fair share of adventures. He is bound to a magical artifact of the goddess of good fortune, Tymora; yet somehow, this good luck charm seems to attract nothing but trouble. In this book, the third of a trilogy, Maimun sets out to destroy the Stone of Tymora with the help of his friend, the young pirate Joen. Maimun soon discovers that things—and people—are rarely as they first appear.</p> <p>The story is set in the world of the Forgotten Realms, a fully developed and richly layered fantasy universe. In this book, Maimun travels through locations such as Waterdeep, Longsaddle, and Silvermoon in search of answers to the many riddles he faces in his quest. He also encounters his occasional rescuer and mentor, the famous elf Drizzt, who is a beloved character in the Forgotten Realms universe.</p> <p>Simon Gooch Fort Worth, TX</p> |

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| <p><i>Things I Know about Love</i> by Kate le Vann Egmont, 2010, 153 pp., \$15.99</p> <p>Romance/Realistic Fiction/Illness ISBN: 978-1-60684-078-8</p> <p>Livia Stowe is a 17-year-old Brit off to America for a summer holiday. She keeps a blog about the experience, but it has a set purpose: Livia is on a mission to figure out love. This trip, and her goal, is complicated by her struggles with leukemia. Finally in remission, Livia looks forward to a chance at a normal life and sees her trip as a new beginning. Her hope continues to grow once she meets Adam, a fellow Brit also visiting America. Their romance, and its heartbreaking conclusion, make Livia's story impossible to put down.</p> <p>Le Vann captures the voice of a teenager looking for love in this short and fast-paced novel. The story doesn't dwell on Livia's cancer, so it's suited for readers looking for a lighter read. It's a novel that will make readers smile, laugh, and cry along with the characters from start to finish.</p> <p>Kelly Gotkin Nashville, TN</p> | <p><i>Words in the Dust</i> by Trent Reedy Arthur A. Levine Books, 2011, 272 pp., \$17.99</p> <p>Afghanistan/War/Deformity/Literacy ISBN: 978-0-5452-6125-8</p> <p>Born with a cleft lip, Zulaikha, 13, is no beauty, and she is teased constantly because of her deformity. Even though her days are filled with household chores in her traditional Afghani family, she dreams of having more. At first her dreams are small: maybe one day she will find a husband, and she and her beloved sister can be together. Hope blossoms when American soldiers arrange surgery to fix her face; then she meets Meena, a former professor who teaches her to read and write. As Zulaikha slowly embraces the possibilities that lie ahead, her beautiful older sister's marriage to a careless older man leads to unnecessary tragedy.</p> <p>The poetic language and details about Afghani customs provide a glimpse into a world where much is changing while much stays the same. Back matter includes a glossary, an author's note, and suggested reading lists, offering more for interested readers.</p> <p>Barbara A. Ward Pullman, WA</p> |
| <p><i>Wither</i> by Lauren DeStefano Simon & Schuster BFFYR, 2011, 385 pp., \$17.99</p> <p>Marriage/Science/Dystopia/Sex/Relationships ISBN: 978-1-4424-0905-7</p> <p>Scientists, searching for a way to make people disease-free and almost immortal, tampered with humanity's DNA. The first generation who received this tampering were nearly immortal; however, in the next generations, males die at age 25 and females die at 20. Our heroine, Rhine Elley, 16 and full of life and cunning, is kidnapped to be the wife of Linden Vaughn, a wealthy, kind, and naive husband. Linden's father, an ambitious scientist, is the master of the mansion. His drive to invent a vaccine supersedes any sort of moral code. When Rhine realizes the horror of her situation, she becomes set on finding an escape. By rejecting her imprisonment, Rhine asserts the value of her life, in spite of its inevitable brevity.</p> <p>DeStefano's dystopia is full of rich, sensory surprises—each scene expertly designed with an ostentatious and futuristic flare.</p> <p>Rachel Wheeler Scarsdale, NY</p> | <p><i>Publishers who wish to submit a book for possible review should send a copy of the book to:</i> Melanie Hundley 1021 Delmas Ave. Nashville, TN 37216-3630</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> |

Swinging His Cat:

A Conversation with 2010 ALAN Award Recipient Jack Gantos

It's an early Saturday morning in November 2010, and more than 500 teachers, librarians, university professors, and adolescent literature aficionados in general have gathered for the annual Assembly on Literature for Adolescents of the National Council of Teachers of English (ALAN) breakfast in Orlando, Florida. A portion of the morning's program is dedicated to naming the recipient of the ALAN Award, an award that honors those who have made outstanding contributions to the field of adolescent literature. Receiving the 2010 ALAN Award—and assuming the coveted (though imaginary) crown, scepter, and sash to sport all through 2011—is prolific and ebullient author Jack Gantos.

Jack Gantos: The Writer

The ALAN Award recipient may be a publisher, author, librarian, scholar, editor, or servant to the organization of ALAN. Most people know Jack Gantos primarily as a writer, one who “can take a reader from ‘cradle to grave’—from picture books and middle-grade fiction to novels for young adults and adults” (“Jack Gantos’ Bio and Photos,” n.d., para. 10). Jack’s productivity and accomplishments as an author, alone, merit him honor as an outstanding contributor to the field of adolescent literature. His books are tremendously entertaining; however, it is the balance of physical and emotional events in a Jack Gantos book that subtly hooks readers and keeps them coming back for more. Common threads through all of his

books and stories are forgiveness and second chances, and in an interview with *BookPage* (Meet Jack Gantos, 2007), Jack encourages children to endlessly invent themselves.

Jack traces his interest in becoming a writer to as early as sixth grade when he snuck and read his sister’s diary. Once he convinced his mother to buy him his own journal, he began practicing the simple habits that allowed him to become the writer he is today: He paid attention to what was happening in his world, and he recorded bits and pieces of what he saw, heard, and thought. Although Jack described this process as owning “a box full of jigsaw puzzle pieces, and there was no telling if they’d ever fit together” (Gantos, 2002a, p. 21), he developed a certain discipline and ignited an insatiable curiosity about life happening around him. His journals became the home of overheard teachers’ lunch conversations, maps of his ever-changing neighborhoods, wild streams of thought, and long passages from books. Jack’s journals even served as a repository for an endless assortment of collected objects, such as a wart he worked long and hard at extracting from his foot (Gantos, 2010).

Once Jack began writing books, he was an instant success . . . if you don’t count all the time after high school that he worked construction for his father, the 15 months he was a resident of Ashland Federal Prison, the years he spent studying creative writing at Emerson College, or the numerous picturebooks he wrote that were rejected—at times viscerally so.

Meet Jack Gantos and you will find him quick-witted, honest, appropriately irreverent, and inspiring. Simply, he makes himself unforgettable.

Finally, in 1976, after months of immersing himself in quality books for children, speaking with other writers to gain insight into their processes, and “swinging his own cat” as a writer, he and illustrator Nicole Rubel

published *Rotten Ralph*, their first of many Rotten Ralph books. As the endearing gigantic dog Clifford, Ralph is red; however, that is the extent of similarities between the canine and feline. Simply put, Ralph is rotten and recalcitrantly mischievous. Still, even a cat as rotten as Ralph needs love and acceptance, and Sarah is the person who remains by

Ralph’s side through all of his misdeeds and adventures.

Then there are Jack’s books geared at intermediate-aged readers, the first collection being his Jack Henry books. Starting with the publication of *Heads or Tails: Stories from the Sixth Grade* (1994), Jack chronicles semi-autobiographical junior-high tales of Jack Henry and his often-unpredictable life and family. This was followed with four other Jack Henry books. Not a Jack Henry book but still a young adult read that fuses memoir and fiction, Jack’s latest creation, *Dead End in Norvelt* (2011), chronicles “an exhilarating summer marked by death, gore and fire” (Review of . . . , 2011). Reviewer Elizabeth Bird (2011) writes, “Folks, it’s a weird book. . . . It may also be one of the finest [Mr. Gantos] has produced in years.”

Also for intermediate-aged readers (or anyone who was once of an “intermediate age”) are Jack’s books featuring Joey Pigza. Jules Danielson (2007) of *Seven Impossible Things before Breakfast: A Blog about Books* suggests that in all of middle-grade fiction, there is not a more sympathetic, lovable character than Joey Pigza. The first Pigza book, *Joey Pigza Swallowed the Key* (1998), begins, “They say I’m wired bad, or wired sad, but there’s no doubt about it—I’m wired” (p. 1). Thus begins the adventures of Joey—a well-meaning kid who has ADHD and finds himself in all sorts of precarious situations when his meds wear off and his moods/behavior become more difficult to control. Joey not only won the hearts of

readers, but *Joey Pigza Swallowed the Key* was named a National Book Award finalist and a *School Library Journal* Best Book of the Year. In 2000, Jack delivered *Joey Pigza Loses Control*, which was awarded a Newbery Honor; he followed with *What Would Joey Do?* (2002b). Then—surprising his readers with one more Pigza book after stating he would stop at a trilogy—Jack published *I Am Not Joey Pigza* (2007).

Targeting older adolescents, Jack wrote *Desire Lines* (1997), which is about 16-year-old Walker who gets caught up in a witch-hunt against homosexuals; *Hole in My Life* (2002a), Jack’s Printz Honor and Robert F. Sibert Honor autobiography describing the period of his life after graduating high school in which he spends time in prison for drug smuggling, all the while hoping to become a writer; and *The Love Curse of the Rumbaughs* (2006), which focuses on a young woman named Ivy, who must sort out if she has inherited her family’s curse of excessively loving her mother as well as an aptitude for taxidermy. Jack has even published a novel geared toward adults: his jailhouse narrative titled *Zip Six* (1996).

Jack Gantos: The Teacher

Not only has Jack contributed to adolescent literature as a writer, he travels the world working directly with students, teachers, librarians, parents, and administrators. To date, Jack has visited over 500 schools and has helped tens of thousands of kids and teachers develop and write their own stories. He also is a frequent conference keynote speaker and university lecturer. Corresponding with Jack via email is similar to participating in a frenetic electronic travel log:

Hey—I’m just finishing up a two week speaking tour in Qatar and Dubai. (personal communication, December 14, 2010)

Hope you are well. Doha (capital city of the state of Qatar) has been interesting. (personal communication, December 16, 2010)

Gang tackled with work in Boston then shot down to NYC . . . then took off for a speaking tour in Bangkok . . . now on the flight back from Narita to DC, then back up to Boston. (personal communication, March 5, 2011)

Not long ago, during one of his visits to Tennessee, Jack led three separate days of workshops in three different geographical sections of the state (east, middle, and west). It takes only a quick glance at a

map to see that Tennessee is a L-O-N-G state. Still, Jack being the trooper that he is gave each gathering of high school and middle school students an incredible presentation. All together in those brief three days, Jack spoke with nearly three thousand adolescents and made certain to sign every copy of all the books that each young person handed him.

Meet Jack Gantos and you will find him quick-witted, honest, appropriately irreverent, and inspiring. Simply, he makes himself unforgettable. Although he is a master storyteller and entertainer, most of his conversations are spent listening to others and making inquiries into their lives.

Furthermore, common to all master teachers, Jack Gantos is an encourager. As he accepted his ALAN Award in Orlando, Jack encouraged all of us who work with learners—regardless of our grade levels or our professional roles—to “swing our cats,” to give every ounce of energy we have to getting children, adolescents, and the adults around us involved in their own books and their own writing.

Who better to represent the multifaceted field of adolescent literature through his writing and service than Mr. Jack Gantos.

Jack Gantos: The ALAN Award Winner

S. D. Collins (SC): Jack, first things first, thank you for taking time away from the frenzied schedule of “swinging your cat” to speak with us. Most importantly, congratulations on receiving the 2010 ALAN Award.

Jack Gantos (JG): It is an honor that caught me by surprise since there is no advance warning, no short list circulating, no public nomination process, no tip sheet to alert me that I may receive the award. I was sitting at a desk on the fifth floor of the Boston Athenaeum when your email arrived with the news, which was delicious to read. I sit in the library herding sentences for the most part and am focused not on awards but in just getting a page or two to comply with my intentions, no matter how accidental. This is not always the most graceful job. The work is labyrinthine and at the end of the day, no one claps as I exit the library and stroll toward home across the Boston Common and Public Gardens where the squirrels and ducks

and birds and trees are being their mysteriously charming selves.

Nature is so constant when compared to the slippery human artifice of language, and watching a squirrel perform only squirrelish tasks reminds me of how much time I spend inventing texts instead of being myself. What is so lovely about receiving the award is that it feels like a scene from a daydream—some wordless confection indulged in when the words won’t come to the paper, and I’m staring up at the ceiling and pampering my ego with imaginary awards so I don’t sulk and turn against myself. I can be pathetically juvenile. In the meantime, squirrels remain squirrels.

SC: Past recipients of the ALAN Award include Robert Cormier (1982), Madeleine L’Engle (1986), Katherine Paterson (1987), Gary Paulsen (1991), Walter Dean Myers (1994), S. E. Hinton (1998), and Jacqueline Woodson (2004), to name a few. Will you describe what it’s like to be named to such an excellent group of people who have contributed to the field of adolescent literature?

JG: So many great bookish people, including fine writers, have received the ALAN Award, and it is very satisfying to join their ranks. It takes endurance to write a book, but when the task is finished, the book takes on an ambitious endurance of its own. There is nothing more the writer can do to it. The book is what it will always be as it fervently journeys off to find a pair of hands to hold it, and a fresh mind it can influence. I’m sure that no matter how many young adults I address in my speaking tours, their deeper and more enduring relationship will be with the book—not with me—and I firmly believe that is as it should be.

The ALAN Award, on the other hand, points to the writer—the person behind the curtain, the slight-of-hand con artist who conjures up a story more articulate, shapely, elegant, and powerful than his or her own daily life. So often books hog the spotlight and steal the awards, but the ALAN Award kindly nods toward the writer.

SC: Would you take us a bit further behind your curtain? What is your process of creating a story and the potential influences on the writing as the text evolves?

JG: For me, it seems that gaining access to the voice of the character is what helps me puncture the plane between being clueless and outside the story, to entering the story and beginning to understand the main character and to take his or her pulse. The “voice” of the character really charts the early path of the story for me, and once I seem to have summoned the voice, I begin to

paint in the setting.

But, even though I feel somewhat confident in the voice of the character and the paint has dried on the setting, it is not until I begin to gather my ideas for the book that I envision the cast of themes that will add bite to the story and must ultimately add thoughtful resonance to the tale, beyond the typical action line of “he did this

and she did that.” It is the clash of voice and theme that is critical, because neither can be allowed to win as they both have to be equally attractive in the full bloom of their potential.

For instance, when Ivy from *The Love Curse of the Rumbaughs* (2006) is first revealed, she is opening the story and unfolding her character through her voice. We meet her, and gather round her, and are magnetized toward her once she finds the taxidermed Rumbaugh mother. Yes, the taxidermed mother is an interesting proposition, but it is only because Ivy is a sympathetic character that we feel what she feels. Once we settle into her character, she can then carry the weight of the story and advance the themes. In *The Love Curse*, I wanted to examine the American Eugenics Movement, which was a darkly racist and sexist movement in this country built on Social Darwinism. Basically, the movement advances an all Aryan Supremacy, which was not unlike Hitler’s vision of a superior white superman. The history and theme within the book have to have equal weight with the character and plot.

Any platform of information can launch the story in one direction or another. The research behind the book was constantly causing me to

rewrite—and in fact I would say during the course of a writing day I did as much rewriting of the manuscript as I did pushing the story forward by a thousand words or so. Plot and pace weakness is always on my mind because once I establish a pace for telling the story, I don’t like to deviate too much or get bogged down in needless (even if it’s beautiful) detail, or move forward so fast that the action far outstrips the character’s emotional and mental responses.

And then, of course, there are the 40 rewrites or more and all my fussy obsessing over every little image, all the dialogue flourishes, and the kitchen sink. So, when I say that the ALAN Award points toward the writer, I’m just saying that the award is aware of far more than the finished book (which always looks so elegant and effortless)—the ALAN Award is also aware of the “how” the story was muscled, begged, and manipulated and occasionally romanced onto the page by the writer. Believe me, I’m not after sympathy; I’m just appreciative that the award looks beyond the book, which loves the spotlight on the red carpet.

SC: You are a prolific reader and mention more than 60 novels/stories/authors in *Hole in My Life* (2002a). How does reading figure into your process while you are working on a project?

JG: In general, I have to be careful with what I’m reading when writing fiction, which is why I read a lot of nonfiction when I’m working on a book. I don’t want to inadvertently pick up the fumes of other prose.

SC: Jack, the characters you create are complex and possess multiple emotional layers; furthermore, they can be outlandish and unpredictable when it comes to their actions. On the other hand, a Gantos story seems to have a certain tenderness about it, a certain mercy imbedded in the narrative. What do words like “forgiveness” and “second chance” mean to you?

JG: The impulse to write *Rotten Ralph* (1976), my first published book (a picturebook created with Nicole Rubel), was not just to tilt the cart a bit and have a lot of fun with a character who gets carried away

The ALAN Award is also aware of the “how” the story was muscled, begged, and manipulated and occasionally romanced onto the page by the writer.

and truly enjoys intentionally breaking the rules of good behavior, but also to cap the story with the theme of “unconditional love.” I suppose, from the beginning, my characters have been in a tug of war with themselves—going both ways at once. Rotten Ralph loves to be rotten, yet loves to be loved despite his behavior. Some might say he just wants everything his way, to be self-indulgently rotten and not have to suffer any consequences. I prefer to think that he is granted, despite his own faulty behavior, a great measure of Sarah’s love, understanding, and forgiveness—just as any child would hope to receive despite their worst moments.

In the Joey Pigza books, we see the subject of forgiveness in a more complex way. Rotten Ralph only wants forgiveness for his transgressions; Joey, on the other hand, not only wants to be forgiven for his out-of-control behavior, but he also has the task of forgiving others (mother, father, grandmother) who have caused him a great deal of grief and harm. Though his behavior at times is manic and may seem intentionally self-indulgent, he would prefer not to cause others emotional or physical pain. And in the case of his grandmother, he learns to love her very deeply. He realizes his grandmother’s strengths and weaknesses, despite her tough love tactics and her own “wired” behavior, which often results in the grandmother belittling Joey. And yet, he seeks her love just as he offers her his own affection.

In the case of Joey’s father, Carter Pigza, the gift of “forgiveness” is at the crossroads of *I Am Not Joey Pigza* (2007). Carter, who has been a delinquent father, to say the least, has the gall to ask Joey to forgive him for all the meanness he has brought into Joey’s young life. It is not easy for Joey to turn the corner from resenting his father to forgiving him, but he applies himself to the task and earnestly does forgive Carter—who of course loves being forgiven and then turns right around and guts Joey once again.

The Jack Henry books are laced with Jack needing forgiveness and offering it in return, but when we get up to *Hole in My Life* (2002a), we can see another manifestation of forgiveness—which would be self-forgiveness. For me, the burden of my own criminal activities—which were exacerbated by my personal failures as a young writer—had to be set

aside. I had to, in some way, suspend how harshly I was judging myself until I could sort out what I needed to forgive myself for, and I had to determine what I needed to forever remember about myself.

Personally, I do think being forgiven and receiving second chances to be the better part of yourself is a great gift to receive. It is just as essential to offer that gift to others. This push-pull of forgiveness within a character certainly creates a lot of room for depth, and it can show off strengths and weaknesses in a character’s foundation.

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SC: You end *Hole in My Life* (2002a) with the words, “And I’m out in the open doing what I have always wanted to do. Write” (p. 200). During those early days as you were gaining steam as a writer, do you recall when the thought first hit you, “Hey! I am *really* a writer!?”

JG: It was a moment after I finally got out of prison and ended up at college to get my BFA in Creative Writing. I felt as if I had finally met a lot of other young people, who like myself, were looking for a supportive group where you could actually call yourself a writer and be treated like one. Getting my BFA in Creative Writing was about one of the smartest decisions I ever made as it gave me instruction, allowed me time to write and rewrite, and eventually to publish my work.

SC: Obviously, judging from your reams of accomplishments, writing was the work you were meant to do; however, are there ever days when the writing becomes interrupted? If so, what do you experience when that happens.

JG: I always *want* to write. But some days that just doesn’t happen. Sometimes circumstances are to blame (speaking on the road, heavy travel schedules, family activities . . .), but mostly, I always feel

I am at fault when the work is not tackled. I have great stretches of writing when there is good flow, and then there are other times I'm just crabbing around and figuring out yet another way to avoid moving the book forward. It's a bit of a revolving door into and out of your own madhouse.

As I respond to this specific question, I'm on a flight back from speaking for six days in Bangkok, and though I did write while there, and found a lovely neo-classic jewel box of a library around the corner from my hotel where I could tuck away and think, I wouldn't exactly say I pushed my novel forward. In fact, I think I could easily say I did a lot more substantial eating than I did writing. It is a great privilege to have the time to write (just ask someone who doesn't have the time), and so when I fritter time away, I feel like a slacker.

SC: Doubtful anyone would ever accuse you of being a slacker, especially since you always seem to be mentally engaging the world—either the actual world or your story worlds. Since writing demands such a generous portion of cerebral resources, how do you see creative writing bolstering a young person's cognitive development and learning in general?

JG: In the same way that it is good for architects to first learn how to actually build a house before they design one. In the same way that doctors are rigorously trained before they take on patients. In the same way that librarians should design their own libraries because they know what they need and what they don't.

When a person spends a lot of time writing, they begin to see the rigging between the content and the structure of the story. They begin to realize the importance of words, the variety of sentences, the use of dialog, and all the vast numbers of skills that it takes to construct a book. When someone learns how to write, and write well, then when they open a book to read—for information or pleasure—they see more deeply into the book and into the craft and content. It is this ability to deeply explicate a book that is made keen through writing a book, or story, or poem. As educators, what we are always after is depth of explication—the how and the why of the construction in conjunction with the content

and humanity.

Plus, if you can sit still in a chair and read 50 pages at a crack, then we are talking about “strength of focus.” Once I was fortunate enough to scrub up and enter a surgical theatre where a patient was having a complex by-pass operation. The patient's heart was stopped; a machine was circulating his blood, and my friend, the heart surgeon, was suturing the new healthy vein together with a suture material you couldn't see with the naked eye. It took five hours for the surgeon to deftly suture the new veins. When the patient's heart was started and his blood pressure was clearly at a healthy level and his chest was being sewn up, the nurse looked over at me and whispered, “The doctor has a gift of focus.” Focus is what she admired most.

Writing will give you focus. You set goals and you master those goals. No matter the subject, without focus you are out to sea. As students advance from grade to grade and from elementary to middle to high school to college, the demands on their ability to focus will increase. It has been shown that multitasking is not the genius-making strategy it was thought to be. Just think of how text messaging and driving have been a formula for disaster. Writing is thinking with logic and clarity. That skill will take you far, even if you have no interest in writing novels.

SC: In an interview with Gail Gregg (2001), you mentioned how you never had the opportunity to write creatively while you were a public-school student and never had any teachers encourage you to write creatively. As you visit classrooms across the country, how do you perceive the various opinions of creative writing?

JG: Before answering this question in full, let me say that I went to 10 schools in 12 years, so it was not entirely the fault of the school system that I didn't receive a nicely dovetailed education as I passed from grade to grade. My family moved a lot, so my choppy education is largely a result of our peripatetic life. That said, I did not have an education that valued creative writing. I did have music and art, but no creative writing. At times, I was a member of the chess club and Latin club. I believe

there were times when I could have worked on the school newspaper, but for reasons I do not recall, I was not interested in that. Most likely, I found it dull.

Currently I visit about 40 schools per year, and the schools I enter are vastly different from the schools I exited as a student. I'm invited to schools because they read my books, but also because my creative writing and literature presentations focus entirely on teaching students how to write their own books. Schools that invite me understand this goal, and so I assume that (a) they want me to teach creative writing forms and approaches to writing that students can put to work with success, and (b) they are actively working on creative projects in the classroom. So, I end up in schools where their educational mission and my accomplishments parse and combine to inspire students to read good books and write good books.

I am sure there are schools out there across America that do not include time for creative writing in their curriculum. I don't think this is out of any mean intent. I think that some schools just don't realize how much creative writing is related to good, solid writing practices as well as related to creative and logical thinking in general. The root cause of this lack of creative instruction is not entirely found in the culture of standardized testing where schools teach to the test; I think that the universities that train teachers need to provide more creative writing instruction. No one wants to teach a subject in which they feel insecure, so when student teachers have the opportunity to write creatively and workshop their material, they will gain the confidence necessary to teach the subject to students.

SC: What's your advice for teachers who recognize the value of writing but are insecure and don't know how to proceed.

JG: You ask a very difficult question—one that points out a truth I see all the time (keep in mind I have visited 40 schools a year for the past 20 years). The truth is, there is not one parent who doesn't want their child to write better, or a teacher who doesn't want their students to write better, or one school who doesn't want better student writers. But, when

you ask a school to devote more time to writing, to devote more inservice resources to teaching writing instruction to their teachers, to become a school that is known for their "writing" accomplishments, and to ask parents to place inspired writing on par with math and science and other meat-and-potatoes subjects, then you get some push-back.

Every institution wants students to be great writers, but they hamstring their teachers and students by not giving the teachers the professional development they need and the class time needed in the curriculum that will nurture and instruct and produce great, articulate

writers. There is some sort of nonsensical old-world notion that writers are self-made—as if the hand of God smacks a kid on the head and declares them to be a writer. Parents and teachers would never allow that romantic idea to apply to science or math or other content and problem-solving subjects.

So how do we advise teachers? I'd play "small ball." Drop Everything and Read (D.E.A.R.) is a great approach to reading a bit every day. Writing can be layered into the daily school schedule in the same way. It is not that the students have to write volumes every day—they just have to write consistently and with purpose. So, a little bit of focused writing each day (either on a creative form or essay) is what I would suggest.

The key, of course, is the focus. Students have to be guided in choosing what they want to write about and then instructed about the form in which they write. If they are writing short stories, they should understand the general notion that the character, setting, and problem are introduced in the beginning of the story; they should understand that the action building to a crisis should appear in the middle; and they should understand that the resolution and emotional/physical endings should be revealed at the finish. Of course, we all know that if a student wants to write poems, they should be reading poetry. If they write short stories, they should be reading short stories. If they write pic-

Writing is thinking with logic and clarity. That skill will take you far, even if you have no interest in writing novels.

turebooks, they should read picturebooks.

Matching the reading up with the writing is a key component for good writing. Then, teaching students how to be thoughtful *rewriters* is essential. I certainly don't believe I'm suggesting anything to teachers that they don't already know: If you want better writing students, it takes teacher training and student instruction time in order to achieve positive results.

SC: Jack, I thank you for your generous gifts of time, thought, and words for this interview. As we come to the end, a final question: With all that others believe you to be (writer, teacher, consultant, friend . . .), what do *you* believe to be your role in the field of adolescent literature?

JG: It is difficult to imagine a role more important for me than writing good books for adolescent readers. That said, I think my role is also twined with being an educator, literature enthusiast, and bibliophile. Each year I visit quite a number of schools where I speak to young adults about reading and writing. I work with teachers on orchestrating creative writing and literature workshops in schools. I speak to young adults in prisons and to those who freely show up for readings and book talks at public libraries. And though it is not my intent to usurp the ambition of my own books, I do feel that public speaking is a calling of sorts for me to hit the road and promote the love and transformative power of literature.

Author's Note

In addition to my gratitude to Jack Gantos, I am indebted to Jules Danielson, the big cheese of *Seven Impossible Things before Breakfast: A Blog about Books* and librarian extraordinaire, for her insight from years of interviewing authors, her suggestions regarding research resources, and early collaborations on Gantos. Furthermore, I thank Cecilia Jenkins and Upper Cumberland Writing Project Teacher Consultants, whose responses and questions helped shape the interview.

Editors' Note: Just as this issue of *The ALAN Review* was headed to press, the Association for Library Service to Children, a division of the American Library Association, presented Jack Gantos the 2012 Newbery Award for his screwball mystery *Dead End in Norvelt*, published by Farrar, Straus and Giroux. The Newbery Award was actually Gantos's second award in less than a week as he also received the 2012 Scott O'Dell Award for Historical Fiction, again for *Dead End in Norvelt*.

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ALAN and YA Lit—Growing Up Together

In 1967, *The Outsiders* by S. E. Hinton was published along with *Mr. and Mrs. Bo-Jo Jones* by Ann Head and *The Contender* by Robert Lipsyte. *The Pigman* by Paul Zindel followed shortly after, and the new age of Young Adult Literature took root. Teens could finally read about characters who looked like, dressed like, sounded like, and had problems just like they did.

“During those years, NCTE created a new structure to encourage development of assemblies, each with a special focus. In 1973, 25 people signed up and paid one dollar to begin the process of forming the Assembly on Literature for Adolescents of the National Council of Teachers of English, which came to be known as ALAN. Marguerite Archer took the first presidency. In New Orleans the next year, with its own constitution, ALAN became official” (Nilsen, 1999, p. 330). M. Jerry Weiss, who is still active in the assembly today, followed Archer as president. Jerry remembers those early days, and his continuing involvement has helped ALAN grow:

There is no doubt ALAN has promoted the use of YA books mainly in middle schools and has helped remedial

reading teachers find interesting materials they could use with students. I convinced IRA and NCTE to have Featured Author Strands because if teachers couldn't stay for the workshops, they still ought to be able to hear and meet YA authors. Publishers loved that idea. Once I was a part of getting ALAN really going, I worked on anti-censorship programs. In any way I could, I worked to get authors involved with teachers. (M. J. Weiss, personal communication, September 5, 2011).

After the first convention in 1973, ALAN President Marguerite Archer sent out a two-page summary of events, which she followed with a four-page *News from ALAN*, Vol.1, No. 1 in August of the same year; this brief newsletter was the beginning of *The ALAN Review*, or *TAR*, as we know it today. Alleen Pace Nilsen then convinced Ken Donelson to coedit this new publication. Alleen's husband Don later became ALAN Humor Editor. Soon Alleen, Don, Ken and his wife began a tradition of writing, copying, organizing, creating mailing lists, sorting by zip code, and sending off 200 copies of the then *ALAN Newsletter* (from “The Beginnings of *The ALAN Review* by Alleen Pace Nilsen, which appeared in

Two Decades of The ALAN Review, NCTE, p. 330). “Clip and File” reviews were included in these early newsletters.

TAR has continued to grow in influence and volume. Jim Blasingame, ALAN President 2009, coedited *TAR* with Lori Goodson during 2003–2009. Jim shares some of the ways that *TAR* has advanced. He says:

During our years we expanded *TAR*'s page count and added a square binding [perfect binding]. We attempted to explore new topics and young adult literature that blazed new trails, including indigenous peoples, disabled characters, and transgendered protagonists. We also saw the advent of technology and the rise of books with social media, blogs, smart phones and video games that were a normal part of the teenage experience but provided new issues from cyberbullying to online match-making and their dangers. We loved the annual cover design process in which we attempted to choose nine covers that reflected what had been the big hits of the previous year—not an easy reduction to make! (J. Blasingame, personal communication, August 24, 2011)

ALAN has also grown in its online presence. In 2000, President Teri Lesesne asked David Gill to “give ALAN a home,” and the

Voices from ALAN's History

We were at an NCTE convention and Marguerite Archer asked me if I'd like to be on the Board of this new ALAN group. I was happy to do so. At that point, we were a small and supportive group. Some more literary types seemed to feel that YA was an inferior genre. But how it has blossomed! A YA novel is the basis for "War Horse" at Lincoln Center, which is one of the greatest theatrical productions I have ever seen. And who would ever have dreamed about the billions to be made from the YA series Harry Potter?

We were lucky to be there at the beginning and now to see the kind of YA development in Marcus Zuzak's *The Book Thief*. (S. Schwartz, ALAN President 1977, personal communication, August 25, 2011)

My most vivid memory is of one morning in cold, cold Chicago before it was even close to daylight, I was out on the loading dock at the convention center with two other wonderful helpers breaking open the bundles of books, dividing each one in half, and stapling that half into a different bag because twice as many people were going to show than had been expected when NCTE made arrangements for the book giveaway. (A. Pace Nilsen, ALAN President 1978, personal communication, September 1, 2011)

I met Ken Donelson at my first ALAN workshop; I was awed and impressed, but Ken was warm and welcoming. The next week he sent me a packet of articles for my dissertation research. He's an example of the kind of supportive atmosphere that has always been the spirit of ALAN.

Sharing titles, hearing authors at the beginning of their careers as well as those whose names I had known for a long time, discussing teaching strategies, and mostly catching up with old friends was always a joy for me. I have such fond memories of getting rejuvenated each year at the ALAN workshop. (B. Samuels, ALAN President 1988, personal communication, August 28, 2011)

ALAN website was born, eventually securing its own URL—www .alan-ya.org. When David became ALAN president in 2007, Matt Skillen became webmaster until 2011, when David returned to take ALAN to another level.

The site has grown exponentially over the past 10 years, and with the advent of social media, the site will become more of an online community than a static site. The next year [2012] will bring an even larger community and more features—none of which were imaginable way back at the turn of the century. (D. Gill, personal communication, August 24, 2011)

As more authors and more teens discovered each other, it wasn't long before awards were created for this growing field. Listed below are just a few of the national awards and the first title each honored:

- Coretta Scott King Book Award went to Lillie Patterson in 1970 for her book, *Martin Luther King, Jr.: Man of Peace*. <http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/rts/emiert/ckbookawards>
- In 1974, the first ALAN Award was given to Stephen Judy (now Tchudi) and G. Robert Carlsen at the ALAN Breakfast. The ALAN Executive Board had created the ALAN Award to recognize an individual who had impacted the ALAN community as an author, publisher, librarian, teacher, or officer of the ALAN organization. <http://www.alan-ya.org/awards/>
- The Margaret A. Edwards Award was established in 1988 and was given to S. E. Hinton for her body of work, which began with *The Outsiders*. [http://www.ala.org/template.cfm?template = /](http://www.ala.org/template.cfm?template=)

CFApps/awards_info

- In 1996, the National Book Award's first YA winner was given to *Parrot in the Oven: Mi Vida* by Victor Martinez. <http://www.nationalbook.org/nba/winners>
- In 2000, The American Library Association (ALA), presented the first Michael L. Printz Award, named for a Topeka, Kansas, librarian, to Walter Dean Myers for his innovative book, *Monster*. <http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/yalsa/booklistsawards/printzaward>
- ALAN's Amelia Elizabeth Walden Book Award was first awarded in 2009 to Steven Kluger for his novel, *My Most Excellent Year: A Novel of Love, Mary Poppins, & Fenway Park*. <http://www.alan-ya.org/amelia-elizabeth-walden-award/>
- In 2010, for his inspiring and seemingly limitedness body of work, Walter Dean Myers became the first recipient of the Coretta Scott King-Virginia Hamilton Award for Lifetime Achievement. <http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/rts/emiert/ckbookawards/>

The ALAN Workshop also continued to increase the number of presenting authors. In 1980, President Hugh Agee featured six speakers during his workshop, including authors Sue Ellen Bridgers and Ouida Sebestyen. ALAN President Don Gallo had ten authors on his 1987 Los Angeles program. In 1991, ALAN President Joan Kaywell presented 26 authors in her workshop. ALAN President Connie Zitlow featured 29 authors in 2000. And President Wendy Glenn invited

48 authors to her 2011 Chicago workshop. Every year, publishers, teacher-educators, and high school and junior high/middle school teachers also presented.

ALAN has been growing in part because the number of young adult books has also been growing. In the late 1960s, the number of YA titles published each year only reached single digits. *Bowker Books in Print* (online and in print by subscription at <http://www.bowker.com/index>) reports higher numbers in this millennium: 4,787 YA titles in 2004; 5,300 in 2005; 5,059 in 2006; 5,933 in 2007; and 5,028 in 2008. YA books in all genres are expanding in libraries and book stores.

Nancy Garden has helped nurture the growth of books containing lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning characters (LGBTQ).

Since 1982 when my novel *Annie on My Mind* was published by Farrar, Straus and Giroux, our trickle of an LGBTQ YA sub-genre has become a steady stream.

We've gone from not having gay or lesbian (or bisexual or transgender) main characters to having them regularly, plus a suddenly growing, albeit small, number of transgender protagonists, and—still rarely—an occasional bisexual one.

We've gone from almost all White protagonists to a growing number of African American and Hispanic ones, and a handful of main characters from other ethnic groups.

We've gone from telling primarily coming-out stories—which I think will always be important in our books—to stories also focusing on other aspects of LGBTQ kids' lives and touching on more universal themes.

We've gone from very solemn stories to those sprinkled with welcome humor.

Voices from ALAN's History

I began my doctoral work in 1973 straight from a canon-driven education and teaching background. Robert Small, my advisor, soon changed that by introducing me to adolescent literature, and in clichéd terms, my life was forever changed. He also encouraged me to join ALAN, in its infancy at that time. I became happily involved in ALAN, serving as secretary before we had Ted Hipple to help run the organization, then as president, and later as coeditor of *The ALAN Review*. My career as an English Education professor grew up with that of adolescent literature.

The term adolescent literature has given way to young adult literature. Novels, though tame by high school hallway standards, address a wide range of youth problems in far more realistic ways. Young adult literature is more multicultural and diverse than in its earlier years; it looks like and talks like its readers. (P. Kelly, ALAN President 1989, personal communication, August 27, 2011)

In 1992, Robert Cormier was my breakfast speaker and Ted Hipple was my keynote for the workshop. I believe we had 13 or so other authors. Boy, has ALAN grown since then! (K. (Bushman) Haas, ALAN President 1991, personal communication, August 29, 2011.)

One of my fondest memories of my ALAN presidency is having Ouida Sebestyen as keynote speaker at the ALAN breakfast, where I presented her with the newly published Twayne book, *Presenting Ouida Sebestyen*. This was the only time Ouida spoke at ALAN, and her speech was so tender and inspiring. She was truly a remarkable, talented writer who kept too low a profile in the publishing world. (G. Monseau, ALAN President 1993, personal communication, September 1, 2011.)

A dominant thought when I think about ALAN is how inspiring it is to be one of hundreds of participants at the workshop. Being with others who love books and young people and who care deeply about bringing them together—the middle school and high school teachers, the librarians, publishers, and teacher educators—is a unique and wonderful experience. We all go home with new ideas and titles, lots of YA books, memories of meeting the authors, and an excitement that is contagious.

At my workshop in 2000, there were 29 featured authors. I have such a vivid memory of leading the tribute to Robert Cormier during the time he would have spoken. We were all so sad. (C. Zitlow, ALAN President 1999, personal communication, August 29, 2011.)

What I most admire about ALAN, and why it has remained a healthy organization in this time of dropping memberships elsewhere, is that it has managed to “marry” many different literacy organizations together. We have members from NCTE, of course, but also from ALA and from IRA. This cross-pollination means our members are involved in literacy on many different levels and in many different classrooms and schools. (T. Lesesne, ALAN President 2000, Executive Secretary 2011, personal communication, August 30, 2011)

Voices from ALAN's History

ALAN has been a wonderfully friendly, comfortable professional home for me, and the annual workshop has become a blend of professional work and reunion each year. I've always felt lucky to have had the chance to hear from and meet some terrific YA authors and many of the movers and shakers in the YAL business. It's a pleasure and a blessing to know these ALAN folks as colleagues and as friends. (C. Crowe, ALAN President 2002, personal communication, August 29, 2011)

I believe it is in large part thanks to ALAN's tireless efforts that young adult literature has increasingly been finding a home in classrooms all across America, helping young people find themselves in good books that also meet their emotional, psychological, and developmental needs. Accolades to ALAN for its history of supporting the best in young adult literature, for supporting those who teach YA literature, and for supporting the life needs of America's young adults. (M. Cart, ALAN President 2003, personal communication, September 2, 2011)

ALAN has grown so much from its birth in the '70s when Alleen mimeographed the *ALAN Newsletter* and "problem novels" were flourishing. As ALAN has grown, so too has YA literature—and ALAN membership! I love the diversity of ALAN membership representing every facet of interest in YA lit. Introducing new people to ALAN is a joy. For example, I connected an English department head from a local middle school, a library school practicum student, and another library school student in North Carolina to ALAN through *TAR* and the website. (www.alan-ya.org). (D. Tuccillo, ALAN President 2005, personal communication, September 1, 2011)

ALAN was YA lit's first social network. ALAN was Facebook and twitter before the Internet was invented. (D. Gill, ALAN President 2007, personal communication, August 24, 2011)

ALAN has always felt like *home* in academia. The people who populate the field *welcome* conversations about the books, authors, topics, and themes. We really do tend to be *open*-minded thinkers. The one area that I continue to despair about is that, while authors offer so *many* books on people who contribute to our understanding from myriad races and ethnicities, our membership continues to be more white than speckled. (P. Carroll, ALAN President 2008, personal communication, August 27, 2011)

Be Well.

(Ted Hipple, ALAN President 1976, ALAN Executive Secretary 1977–2000, and hug-able guy)

The mainstream press still produces the majority of LGBTQ YA books. But recently, an increasing number of authors of our books are self-publishing, and gay presses—notably Alyson Publications—occasionally do a YA title, and just recently Victoria Brownworth has started a new LGBT YA house, Tiny Satchel Press.

So despite the shaky state of print publishing in general, the steady stream of our sub-genre still seems to be growing. I am optimistic about its future, especially since LGBT adults in general have become increasingly conscious of the problems our youth still face—and some of those adults are bound to be writers, editors, and publishers who know how much books can help validate, encourage, and support beleaguered kids. (N. Garden, personal communication, August 20, 2011)

Other genres have grown as well. Though fantasy books have always been part of YA titles, Harry Potter came into our lives in 1997 and changed the world's view of fantasy books forever, and there are still more coming. Steampunk, "a sub-genre of science fiction, fantasy, alternate history, and speculative fiction that came into prominence during the 1980s and early 1990s" is on the rise again (Wikipedia.org/wiki/steampunk#Origin).

YA literature is also introducing readers to people and cultures in other parts of the world. *VOYA (Voice of Youth Advocates)* Review Editor Lisa Kurdyla says, "*VOYA* has seen a marked increase in the number of titles for young adults that include protagonists of many different cultures. Notably, Asian and Hispanic characters have increased significantly. Many of these titles specifically explore their heritages and cultures, and how

the characters ‘fit in’ with life in America” (personal communication, September 5, 2011). I agree. I belong to a YA book group that prepared a bibliography, “The Richness of Many Cultures Represented in YA Books—2005 to 2010,” containing 143 titles, which we presented during an ALAN breakout in 2009 (email bottcj@aol.com for a copy). Diversity in YA Fiction (<http://www.diversityinya.com/>) is another great place to find new and old titles representing a wealth of diversity. Even with this new awareness of the many cultures and ethnicities in our world, many more books are needed to help us understand people around the world, particularly books set in the present.

John Mason, Director of Library and Educational Marketing for Trade Books at Scholastic, and former ALAN Board Member, believes young adult literature has had several effects on the publishing world.

The huge popularity of Harry Potter proved that books for young readers in hardcover could sell in the millions, and that in this age of computer games, social networking, and smartphones, people still like to curl up with a good book. The *Hunger Games* has pushed the envelope for “crossover” young adult books—books that adults will buy and read for themselves—thus blurring the line between “young

adult” and “adult” and giving more visibility to young adult books in our society in general. The Printz Award and the National Book Award have also contributed greatly to bringing more respect and recognition to writing for young adults. So all in all, I think we are in a golden age for young adult books, and more and more people are discovering that some of the best writing anywhere is in books for young adults. (J. Mason, personal communication, August 24, 2011)

There are more YA books now than 10 years ago—a new wealth of books for teens to read, books that do not insult them but include them *all*. The field of YA books, however, is not without its problems, as Robert Lipsyte points out.

Forty-four years after *The Contender*, which was early in the creation of YA, it’s a full-blown genre with heroes and history. And cycles. This one is interesting because the revenue stream is so important to so many publishers and the quality is stunning (M. T. Anderson!), yet most of the books are the equivalent of processed food—well-made, carefully engineered, cynically marketed commodities with little nutrition and possibly long-term negative side-effects on individual health. You can argue, for example, that *Twilight* is really a reworking of *Romeo and Juliet*, but it is also an escape into unreality at a time when kids—particularly with video games, social networking, etc.—need to face the issues that are overwhelming their world. YA should be an extension of teaching, not of mindless entertainment. There’s a

responsibility here that is not being met, particularly by publishers. But I’m confident that the cycle will move on—if the world doesn’t implode first. (R. Lipsyte, personal communication, September 2, 2011)

The theme for the 2012 ALAN workshop is “Reaching Them All, ALAN Has Books for Everyone.” This means books for boys, books for girls, for challenged readers, brilliant readers, LGBTQ teens, teens in other countries, teens from other countries who now live here, Christian kids, Jewish kids, Muslim kids, non-believing kids, kids with problems at home—alcoholism, illnesses, incest, divorce—as well as kids from happy, fun-loving homes, homes with two moms or two dads or one mom or one dad or one of each or grandparents, teens who live in cyberspace, teens who can’t afford a computer—*young adults*, *all young adults*.

I hope to see you in Las Vegas in 2012 for the next ALAN workshop. The acronym officially stands for the Assembly on Literature for Adolescents of the National Council of Teachers of English. Personally, I prefer Adolescent Literature, Always Needed.

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Continued Absences:

Multimodal Texts and 21st Century Literacy Instruction

The demands of today's digital media and visual texts continue to require complex new ways of coding and decoding image-text relations. Indeed, *the way we read is changing*, but you typically wouldn't know it to look at reading instruction in most public secondary schools. Texts considered "high quality" and "complex" continue to be defined by the Western, canonical tradition, and are predominantly narrative and print-centric. It would seem Freytag's pyramid still reigns supreme in secondary reading instruction (Hundley, 2008).

In the late 1990s to early 2000s, we started hearing the buzz words "multimodal literacies" in our professional communities. As young teacher educators, we weren't exactly sure what these literacies were, or what they looked like, but we were curious. We attended sessions at NCTE, read theoretical literature (research on adolescents' multimodal reading processes remains scarce), and appreciated NCTE's publication of the position statement on "Multimodal Literacies" (National Council of Teachers of English, 2005). We realized we'd learned a new name for the sophisticated kinds of literacy practices that mark a predominantly visual and increasingly digital culture. We grew inspired; maybe NCTE's formal recognition of the new social contexts that mark the 21st century was a sign that "multimodal literacies" would soon be taken up in secondary English/language arts classrooms.

But, alas, two decades of disastrous federal reading policy (the Common Core reading standards being

the most recent manifestation of this) have proven otherwise. The "career- and college-ready" definitions underlying the current federal "Race to the Top" initiative don't acknowledge the sophisticated social communication contexts in which today's young people are immersed—contexts that require new literacy practices (e.g., the ability to multitask, to be active readers and communicators, and to negotiate multiple modes of expression simultaneously). The "digital disconnect" that exists between today's English teachers and adolescents grows larger. And standards-writers and school literacy leaders refuse to acknowledge that 21st century texts—multimodal texts, postmodern texts, "radical change" texts (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006; Dresang, 2008; Groenke & Youngquist, 2011)—require an entirely new form of reading and, consequently, a place in the ELA classroom.

But we remain hopeful, and continue to seek out opportunities to interact with teens about the ways they engage with multimodal texts. In what follows, we offer a definition of "multimodal texts," highlight several different multimodal text experiences, and consider the new ways of reading (and teaching) that multimodal texts require. We do so in an initial attempt to show that taking up multimodal literacies in the English classroom puts "complex texts" at the center of literacy instruction, and helps adolescents learn to navigate the sophisticated "real-world" reading processes and literacy practices required in the 21st century.

What Are Multimodal Texts?

Multimodal texts are texts that include multiple modes (or genres) of representation, with combined elements of print, visual images, and design. As Kress (2008) and other literacy theorists have suggested, multimodal texts decentralize the written word; print is no longer the central mode of communication. As such, readers must consider the juxtaposition of multiple modes of communication, as graphics, images, and other modes “extend, and often replace, the printed word as the primary carrier of meaning” (Hassett & Curwood, 2009, p. 271).

Dresang (2008) suggests that multimodal texts must be considered for their *digital design* and *inter-textual* elements. She explains that the juxtaposition of text and image in multimodal texts “requires, or at least promotes, a hypertextual approach to thinking and reading” as they “incorporate references to or imitations of a preexisting content in another context, often in subtle ways” (Dresang, 2008, p. 42). As Hassett and Curwood (2009) explain, multimodal texts “include various pathways to follow, parallel displays of information, [and] extensive cross-referencing elements” (p. 271). We describe some popular young adult novels that exemplify these elements below.

What Do Multimodal Texts Look Like?

We see many of these elements in popular young adult novels being published today. Walter Dean Myers’s (1999) *Monster*, a story about a young African American male who struggles with his own racial identity, could be considered multimodal, as the story of Steve Harmon is told through journal entries, a screen play, and black-and-white images. Navigating the multiple modes in *Monster* can be a dizzying experience, but Myers wants the reader to be involved, and doesn’t allow for too-easy conclusions about Steve (Groenke & Youngquist, 2011). Sherman Alexie’s award-winning *The Absolutely True Story of a Part-Time Indian* (2009) could also be considered multimodal, as it draws on both traditional print and cartoon images to communicate meanings about the protagonist’s conflicted identity and feelings about life on the rez. Graphic novels have always been multimodal, and such works as Art Spiegelman’s *Maus* (1986), Gene Luen Yang’s *American Born Chinese*

(2007), and Vera Brosgol’s *Anya’s Ghost* (2011) continue to stretch readers’ skills as they present complex narratives with complex graphics and text structures.

Patrick Carman’s popular *Skeleton Creek* (2009) series can also be considered multimodal as one character, Ryan, is depicted predominantly in print, while another character, Sarah, is depicted solely through digital video (which can only be accessed by reader via Internet). Readers must engage two very different modes of communication to “read” the two characters and fully realize the story. Carman has said he wrote the *Skeleton Creek* books to mimic the technological multitasking he sees today’s teens engaged in (Groenke & Maples, 2010; Groenke, Bell, Allen, & Maples, 2011). Carman’s latest series, *Trackers* (first book published in 2010), is another multiplatform narrative where the printed text and a related website create the narrative.

Yet another multimodal text experience could include the Harry Potter franchise (Rowling, 1997–2007), which has gone well beyond the written words on the page (perhaps challenging the very definition of multimodality that we offer here). It is now possible to read the original seven books in the Harry Potter series. It is now possible to watch all eight film adaptations. It is now possible to travel in the real world to London and take Harry Potter tours to sites that were used in the film or that inspired Rowling’s writings. It is now possible to travel in the real world to Orlando, Florida, and experience “The Wizarding World of Harry Potter” at Universal Studios, drinking a butterbeer as you walk through Hogsmeade. It is now possible to purchase the merchandise, (official and unofficial) artifacts, memorabilia, clothes, etc. from the Harry Potter world—wands, scarves, patches, robes, magnets, mugs, rememberalls. It is now possible to *be* Harry Potter in many games, including a LEGO version of Harry Potter. It is now possible to log onto the Web and explore the virtual worlds of Harry Potter through fan fiction sites such as Mugglenet.com, Universal Studio’s online *Wizarding World of Harry Potter*, J. K.

Multimodal texts decentralize the written word; print is no longer the central mode of communication.

Rowling's "personal" website, and, as of this writing, the imminent *Pottermore*, the latest online incarnation of the world of Harry Potter.

Rowling has said *Pottermore* is "something unique—an online reading experience unlike any other," that will "continue the story of the young boy wizard" (Rowling, 2011). Also available on the website will be the seven Potter novels as e-books

and audiobooks in several different languages. The website will also reveal background details on characters and settings Rowling says she's been "hoarding for years" (Cooke, 2011). Burbules (1998) explains that the practice of reading always takes place "within contexts and social relations . . . [and] significant differences in those contexts and relations alter the practice" (p. 102). Certainly, new economic and social con-

texts mark the rise of the "convergence culture" that surrounds the Harry Potter franchise expansion. Henry Jenkins (2008), a popular culture theorist, defines "convergence culture" as a 21st-century phenomenon in which content flows across multiple media platforms, multiple media industries (e.g., music, film) cooperate with each other, and media consumers "will go almost anywhere in search of the kinds of entertainment experiences they want" (p. 2).

Unlike the traditional multimodal experience of moving among print, text, and other elements within the same physically bounded artifact, the Harry Potter franchise extends the reading experience across space and time (Jenkins calls this "transmediation"). Jenkins explains that in a convergent media culture, participation across multiple platforms becomes a way of broadening and deepening the reading experience beyond the confines of the print-bound text. Through the physically real opportunities of Universal Studios or London, through the written fan fiction expansions of characters and stories, and through the online back stories and insights of J. K. Rowling's websites, the Harry Potter story is told across multiple platforms—

page, film, theme parks, locations, Internet, video games, and merchandise. The variety of offerings allows for further nonlinear experiences that combine to enrich and further the original story.

These nonlinear experiences certainly allow for a central characteristic of multimodal reading—"interactive narration," where readers (not authors) choose how to engage with certain aspects of the text (Hassett & Curwood, 2009). Rowling has created a multimodal world, if you will, where Potterphiles can practice this "interactive narration" and access the world of Harry Potter whenever and however they want. We feel fairly confident that Potter fans—as engaged, sophisticated readers—can and will navigate the multiple modalities of the Harry Potter franchise and make connections among them.

But we know, too, that some students who sit in our classrooms need help from teachers to navigate increasingly complicated textual worlds. Most recently, Susan talked about Deborah Wiles's popular *Countdown* (2010) with 8th-grade students at a local middle school. *Countdown* is another multimodal novel (the first in a planned 1960s trilogy) that intersperses traditional narrative with biography and black-and-white documentary footage from the 1960s. The book's narrative print mode, portrayed on white, grey-bordered pages, relays the story of Franny Chapman, an 11-year-old girl who is feuding with her best friend and trying to get the attention of the cute boy across the street. Interspersed with Franny's narrative are evocative black-and-white, archival images that include well-known photographs (e.g., the bombing of the Freedom Riders bus), newspaper advertisements, public safety communications (e.g., fallout shelter signs), newspaper articles, song lyrics, quotes from prominent people (e.g., politicians, popular athletes), and movie posters. In addition, yet another mode of meaning includes four grey-colored, multipage biographical vignettes on President Harry Truman, the Kennedy family, Pete Seeger, and Fannie Lou Townsend Hamer.

Certainly one way to read the book (and the predominant way that Susan's 8th-grade students read the text) is to privilege Franny's story—the written mode—and push to the background the images and biographical vignettes. But reading *Countdown* multimodally requires the reader to periodically decentralize the written language and foreground the other

Rowling has created a multimodal world, if you will, where Potterphiles can practice this "interactive narration" and access the world of Harry Potter whenever and however they want.

various visual and textual elements. In an interview with Vicky Smith for *Kirkus Books*, Wiles describes reading the book as a “weaving in and out” process where the images and biographical elements work to “give readers context” and “show large history, the large arc of history and within that, a person’s smaller story, which is really big, is everything to that character” (Smith, 2011). Wiles further comments that the biographical elements work to provide:

. . . a chance to breathe as a person—you’re reading a really intense story—[and you can] take a step back, and see more about the history of that time. . . . Harry Truman could show us how we got into World War II, and how Vietnam’s little whisperings began and what the Cold War was, and then Pete Seeger was a way for me to talk about the Communist scare and McCarthyism, along with folk music and protest in that way, and pacifism. The Kennedys gave me a chance to say, is it Camelot or not? And Fannie Lou Hamer gave me a chance to talk about the Civil Rights movement, which was going on as 1962 unfolded and the Cuban missile crisis was here and so, I had this overall arcing large history through these biographies and Franny’s story weaving in and out, in and out, in and out. We teach history so often as a series of names and dates and places, but it’s so much more than that. (Smith, 2011)

Indeed, reading the text feels a lot like “weaving in and out,” as the juxtaposition among the narrative, images, and biographical elements continually moves us from the personally lived experience of Franny, to the extended, expanded experience of life in the 1960s. But Susan’s 8th graders ignored the pictures and the biographies, and instead focused solely on the narrative. Susan felt the students might have done so because they were more comfortable with the narrative element. Students remarked that the images were “distracting” and “confusing.” In essence, the students didn’t know what to do with the pictures, so they ignored them.

What Do We Do with These Multimodal Texts?

Susan’s experience is instructive for us, as we consider what multimodal reading instruction requires. As Hassett and Curwood (2009) explain, multimodal aspects of texts set forth new roles for readers, but they set forth new roles for teachers as well. It would seem, as Susan’s students’ experience with *Countdown* suggests, that students need help decentralizing the written word in multimodal texts. Are adolescents

so used to traditional print-centric, linear narratives in school (we’re reminded again of Freytag’s pyramid), that it’s difficult for them to imagine reading in different ways? That texts can operate differently? Are adolescents savvy multimodal readers outside of school, but so aware of the “game of school” that they struggle in school with texts that don’t fit the dominant textual mode? This would account for their focus on the written narrative of *Countdown* (a school-valued mode) and their rejection of the rest, unless directed there by a teacher.

We think these questions need attention by literacy researchers and teachers. We also think that if today’s adolescents are to grow confident as multimodal readers, they need opportunities in secondary English/language arts classrooms to discuss and reflect upon how texts are changing and becoming more multimodal—and thus, how reading itself is changing. Students also need opportunities to consider how pictures, images, graphics, sound—nonwritten modes of communication—express meaning, and they need opportunities to consider how such nonprint modes extend and expand upon meanings gleaned from written modes. How do multiple modes work together? Why are multiple modes used? What do different modes afford?

Larson and Marsh (2005) explain that many traditional roles for teachers remain necessary in a “new media age”: teacher as facilitator, teacher as instructor, teacher as model, and so on. But they also suggest that teachers will need to take on another role “in order to facilitate adolescents’ navigation of complex, multimodal, electronic worlds” (p. 73)—that of “co-creator of knowledge.” Indeed, It was only when Susan started working collaboratively with the students, walking through the book together—talking about the story, looking at the pictures together, find-

**Reading [*Countdown*]
feels a lot like “weaving in and out,” as the juxtaposition among the narrative, images, and biographical elements continually moves us from the personally lived experience of Franny, to the extended, expanded experience of life in the 1960s.**

ing the songs on iTunes and singing along, Googling information about the Cuban Missile crisis that they didn't know, and going back through the book-making connections—*reading recursively*, that the students (and Susan) started to feel like they were getting, as one student put it, “the whole story.” By the end of the book “walk-through,” the 8th graders had a new appreciation of the book and wanted to read it again.

Multimodal aspects of texts set forth new roles for readers, but they set forth new roles for teachers as well.

Potter series and the forthcoming *Pottermore* extend what multimodal looks, sounds, and feels like; one can envision many opportunities for students and teachers to explore the multiple layers upon layers upon layers of narrative, insight, and experience through interactive readings. Whether reading about the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and the nuclear threat in the 1960s or Professor MacGonagall's back story, students and teachers interact with not only the written text, but the multiple modes of these texts to create a richer, deeper understanding and reading experience.

As Leu (2000) has suggested, when students engage in multimodal experiences in the classroom, they become critically oriented to ever-evolving digital media and multimodal forms. From Susan's initial experience, the small amount of research and theory available, and the growing opportunities with multimodal, multiplatform narratives, we do believe that teachers need to begin their multimodal textual explorations—their guiding, supporting, and collaborating—with their students in these new environments. Only then can students begin to acquire the conceptual bases needed to interpret complex text/image/design relationships. And only then will the students begin to acquire a 21st century literacy skill that expands and furthers their understanding of the changing way we read texts, especially multimodal ones.

They gained some confidence in their own skills, it seemed, and wanted to know when Wiles's second book in the trilogy would be out. They were ready to “try another book like that.”

Like Myers's *Monster*, Carman's *Skeleton Creek* series, and Wile's *Count-down*, Rowling's Harry

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Call for Nominations: James Moffett Award

NCTE's Conference on English Education offers this grant to support teacher projects inspired by the scholarship of James Moffett. Each proposed project must display an explicit connection to the work of James Moffett and should both enhance the applicant's teaching by serving as a source of professional development and be of interest and value to other educators. All K–12 classroom educators who teach at least three hours or three classes per day are eligible to apply for the grant. Proposals on which two or more K–12 classroom educators have collaborated are also welcome.

Applications for the Moffett Award must include:

- A cover page with the applicant's name, work and home telephone numbers and addresses, email address, a brief profile of the applicant's current school and students, and a brief teaching history (when and where the applicant has taught).
- A proposal (not more than 5 pages, double-spaced, 12-point font) that includes an introduction and rationale for the work (What is the problem or question to be studied? How might such a project influence the project teacher's practice and potentially the practice of other teachers? Why is such a project important?); a description of the explicit connection to the work of James Moffett; initial objectives for the project (realizing these might shift during the project); a clear, focused project description that includes a timeline (What will be done? When? How? By whom?); a method of evaluating the project (What indicators might reviewers note that suggest the work was valuable to the applicant and to other teachers?); and a narrative budget (How will the money be spent?).
- A letter of support from someone familiar with the applicant's teaching and perceived ability to implement and assess the proposed project.

Moffett Award winners receive a certificate designating the individual as the 2012 recipient of the CEE Moffett Award and a monetary award (up to \$1,000) to be used toward implementation of the proposed project.

Submit proposals to CEE Moffett Award, NCTE, 1111 W. Kenyon Road, Urbana, IL 61801-1010 or cee@ncte.org, Attn: CEE Administrative Liaison. Proposals must be postmarked by **May 1, 2012**. Proposals will be judged on such criteria as the strength of the connection to James Moffett's scholarship and the perceived value and feasibility of the project.

Mexican American YA Lit:

It's Literature with a Capital "L"!

I met Bill Broz several years ago when he came to deep South Texas to interview for an English Education position at the university where I was teaching. As happens during these visits, Broz was expected to either teach a class or present his research to a group of colleagues. He did what many of us have done in that situation: he combined the two. In a classroom full of students whose space had been invaded by a job candidate and a handful of various faculty members—there to determine whether or not he would be an asset to the department, the college, and the university—Bill both taught the class and gave a not-so-formal-yet-obvious colloquium. He met with my children's and adolescent literature class, which was populated by all Mexican American and Mexican students, most of whom were preparing to become teachers.

Initially, I was apprehensive because my main concern in teacher training courses has always been less for my own students and more for theirs in the near and distant futures. Why? Because the academic successes or failures of those future students are tied directly to me. My teacher candidates' students are my own by association. Gay (2000) describes culturally responsive teaching as "a personal endeavor" (p. 183); in other words, I take teaching personally. Therefore, I better be in top form. And so should anyone else who's responsible for teaching my class, even for a day, even as part of the interview process.

So, on the day Broz stood before my class, I sat somewhere toward the back wondering whether this White professor from Iowa, the very middle of the

Midwest, would be similarly concerned with future generations of Rio Grande Valley students and their academic well-being. That he had been a teacher in the public school and university classrooms for decades helped to allay my fears, but only somewhat. Of course he cared about children; he'd devoted the majority of his life to educating them, and here he was, interviewing to take yet another teaching position. To me, though, he was still an outsider, so would he grasp how special our brown-skinned, Spanish- and English-speaking kids are? Could he identify with young people who have grown up on the Texas-Mexico border, for whom a trip three hours northward to San Antonio was more out of the ordinary than a trip three hours to the south? In those few moments that ticked by as we waited for the students to settle in and for Broz's formal introduction, I found myself wondering what, if anything, he could possibly bring to the deep South Texas table.

He spoke about the work he was presently doing with rural young Iowans, basing his research, in large part, on Luis Moll's "funds of knowledge" concept (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992), that is, children's "historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and well-being" (p. 133), resources that will help educators to "organize classroom instruction that far exceeds in quality the rote-like instruction these children commonly encounter in schools" (p. 132). The answer to my question: yes, Broz *got* our students.

Real Multicultural Education

At the time, I had only recently discovered Freire (2000; Freire & Macedo, 1987), who'd begun to inform my focus of instruction and to shape my list of required texts. For me, at the time, his literacy theory boiled down to perhaps his most-oft quoted statement regarding literacy acquisition: "Reading the world always precedes reading the word, and reading the word implies continually reading the world" (p. 35). I found Freire through the Freemans (2003, 2004), who were writing about the use of culturally relevant literature in traditionally underrepresented classrooms as an attempt to encourage non- and reluctant Mexican American and other Latino/a readers to take up the act of reading, to find their groove on their path to engaged interaction with books.

It came as no surprise, then, that my students connected with Broz and he with them, and less of a surprise that he was offered the job. Fortunately for our South Texas students and theirs in the future, he accepted the offer. Since his move to the Rio Grande Valley, he has shifted his attention from the fiction of the rural Midwest (Hedges, 1991, *What's Eating Gilbert Grape?*; Stong, 1932/1996, *State Fair*; Waller, 1992, *The Bridges of Madison County*; and other similar titles) to the fiction and poetry of Mexican American and other Latino/a writers for children and young adults. On his lists he includes, among others, the works of Viola Canales, Diane Gonzalez Bertrand, and Rudolfo Anaya, all Mexican American. Broz (2010) has found that when teachers include works that are representative of the local community, readers respond positively, with relatively few exceptions (p. 94).

Menchaca (2001) describes several reasons for using this sort of literature with Latino/a students: It "provides different examples from those presented in textbooks, counteracts current views placing Western males primarily as the hero in all events, and shows students and teachers from the majority culture that women and minorities have participated in many kinds of activities"; it "builds and strengthens the self-esteem of Hispanic students"; it helps to instill "in their hearts and in their minds" that their home or familial culture should remain at the fore; and Latino/a readers "will more likely relate to the examples, and thus make connections to the content being learned" (p. 18).

Others would add a few more rationales for advocating for this literature's implementation in underserved classrooms: for instance, Banks (1993), addressing multicultural education, from which culturally relevant or responsive teaching stems, argues that a "major goal of multicultural education . . . is to reform the school and other educational institutions so that students from diverse racial, ethnic, and social-class groups will experience educational equality" (p. 3). He also writes (2008) that an additional goal of multicultural education, and by extension culturally relevant teaching, "is to provide students with cultural, ethnic, and language alternatives" (p. 2). These alternatives would help relieve some of the negative effects marginalized students experience when exposed to a chiefly Anglo-dominant curriculum. These negative effects include "find[ing] the school culture alien, hostile, and self-defeating" (p. 2).

The alternatives don't apply exclusively to the student of color, though; they also serve White readers, according to Webster (2002): locking horns with a text by the *other*, about the *other*, aimed at the *other* can bolster a White student's "ability to question the status quo" and can help him/her in developing the wherewithal to take "a critical stance toward the social, political, and economic systems that influence our daily lives" (p. ix).

The use of culturally relevant texts undoubtedly benefits the disenfranchised students. As a published Mexican American author of young adult fiction, I have heard stories from both teachers and students over the years about how one story or another of mine has had positive effects on reading lives, especially for young Latino/a readers. I'm grateful for the reaction. "They were non- or reluctant readers," teachers have said of certain students, "until, that is, they read your novel *The Whole Sky Full of Stars*"; or, "They'd never been passionate about reading and then they picked up a copy of *The Jumping Tree*, and they so identified with your story. You may as well have called the main character by my student's name." The tenor of most that teachers have shared with me about how my fiction has transformed their Mexican American

The use of culturally relevant texts undoubtedly benefits the disenfranchised students.

and Mexican students has almost exclusively followed in that same vein—the work as it applies to a student through culture.

Literature with a Capital “L”

Using works by Mexican American writers in the ways described above, hoping that students of color will somehow experience transformation, is a starting point, but “good intentions” are not enough (Gay, 2000, p. 13). When implemented at this superficial level, there is the danger of Mexican American litera-

ture being relegated to a secondary position in the literature classroom. (The same can be said of works by all minority authors.) Gay (2000) writes, “Goodwill must be accompanied by pedagogical knowledge and skills as well as the courage to dismantle the status quo” (p. 13).

It seems, though, that novels, collections of short fiction, and books of poetry by Mexican Americans exist in the class-

room almost exclusively either to teach the dominant community about the *other’s* culture as it is portrayed by someone from within and therefore authentic, or to prompt the Mexican American non- or reluctant readers into the act of reading by introducing them to writing that they should share an obvious connection with. This is problematic—from the standpoint of the author, definitely, and for the multicultural educator—because students, especially the ones who benefit from the use of this literature as a cultural resource, will inevitably understand the purpose of this literature’s existence as solely that. In other words, they may take it to mean that Mexican American titles serve a more culturally therapeutic function instead of serving as straight-up literature, as do their Anglo counterparts.

Though it might exist, I have never read an article dealing with the work of Viola Canales or Benjamin Alire Sáenz as Literature, capital “L,” though I have read articles that speak to their cultural usefulness. By no means is this an attempt to undervalue the incred-

ible work undertaken by Banks, Broz, Gay, Nieto, the Freemans, and a great many more similar voices who know intimately the field of multicultural and culturally responsive education. I could not agree more with them that multicultural education, when implemented system-wide as a guiding philosophy and practical matter in the classroom, will most assuredly prove beneficial: students will be transformed into participating and contributing citizens globally, and the world, from the local classroom to its farthest reaches, will be enriched, as well.

Nevertheless, multicultural education must be treated as “reform movement” (Banks, 2008, p. 39) or as true “curriculum transformation” (p. 19). If instead, it is regarded as a mere strategy or “curriculum infusion” (p. 39), or worse yet, a genuine way of learning that is outright disregarded as rubbish, anti-education, or anti-Western, then it is wasted for the most part—especially as it pertains to Mexican American students. Subconsciously or otherwise, these students will understand that Mexican American literature takes a backseat to the dominant culture’s literature, the one most often studied in the classroom, analyzed carefully, written about critically. They will perceive that the *other’s* work continues to be relegated to a secondary position, which will be accepted as further proof that the student of color is not a full citizen in the classroom and without.

To prevent conveying such perceptions to these students, we educators must recognize when and with whom to use Mexican American literature as a literacy acquisition tool that will assist this select group of students in moving from non- or reluctant readers to actively engaged readers; we must know also when to use it with White and other non-Mexican American students to help dispel prevailing stereotypes; and we must understand when to use it in the same ways we do the novels of Chris Crutcher, John Green, Gary Paulsen, Graham Salisbury, and Terry Trueman—that is, as Literature, capital “L.” We don’t deny Mexican American works’ cultural value—we will even bring it up in class—but we don’t treat it as a lesser literature (lowercase “l”) by assigning it *because of* its cultural significance. It *is* that, of course, but it is also more, just like the books by the above named authors. When Mexican American students see their literature positioned in the same space with the dominant culture’s, they will begin to see themselves as members on par

with the tradition; no longer *other* or *lesser*, they will acknowledge that they are equal and equally different, sharing this space in which we celebrate the differences not at the infusion level or superficially, but as a lifestyle, a core philosophy, as true reform.

Teaching Multicultural Books as Literature

Following is a short, annotated list of Mexican American titles that are well known to educators and are widely used in our nation's classrooms, but that have suffered from mere curricular infusion. The annotations include sample alternative classroom approaches, strategies, or projects for use with these books. Of course, we educators know well how to come up with our own ways to make Literature come alive for students, so don't take these suggestions as anything else but that.

Bertrand, D. G. (1999). *Trino's choice*. Houston, TX: Arte Público Press.

Bertrand, D. G. (2001). *Trino's time*. Houston, TX: Arte Público Press.

When readers first meet Trino, he is running away from a certain beating by Rosca and his thuggish cronies for having witnessed a crime they committed. From deep poverty and fear, Trino learns to survive by relying on his real friends, his family, and his pursuit of knowledge. Without them, he is not the man he can be. With them, he is well on his way to true manhood.

Teachers can use this book to study the theme of enjoying or suffering the consequences that result from making choices. Students will analyze hypothetical or actual situations and how to predict probable outcomes. Using Robert Browning's "My Last Duchess" as a model, they will write an "if-then" dramatic monologue in which they place their character in a situation that they must resolve.

Burciaga, J. A. (1993). *Drink cultura: Chicanismo*. Santa Barbara, CA: Joshua Odell Editions.

In this collection of essays ranging in topics from the very personal to the more historical in nature, Burciaga writes in a very eloquent yet simple way about subjects with which students will identify, no matter their race or ethnicity. In one chapter, he deals with mixed marriages in which he describes his marriage to

a Mexican American woman, mixed because he's from Texas and Cecilia's from California. He also addresses Mexican and Mexican American history, culture, and language in sometimes witty and other times more somber ways.

Students who read these essays will discover several approaches to writing essays. Not one of Burciaga's entries follows the five-paragraph format, so teachers can introduce young writers to his more organic method of communicating ideas clearly. Teachers and students can attempt to map or outline a few of the essays, which usually are more circular or winding than straightforward, then have students overlay these maps onto their own essays; then they can attempt a revision in which they mimic Burciaga's formats and see where it takes them.

Carlson, L. M., & Hijuelos, O. (1994). *Cool salsa: Bilingual poems on growing up Latino in the United States*. New York, NY: Henry Holt.

Carlson, L. M., & Hijuelos, O. (2005). *Red hot salsa: Bilingual poems on being young and Latino in the United States*. New York, NY: Henry Holt.

Though not composed solely of Mexican American poems, these anthologies by one of the foremost anthologists of poetry by minorities includes pieces by some of Mexican American literature's strongest voices. Among them Ana Castillo, Sandra Cisneros, Abelardo B. Delgado, Luis J. Rodríguez, Trinidad Sánchez, Gary Soto, and Gina Valdés.

Teachers will be able to generate several topics based on their reading of these poems. Students could respond to them in the form of narrative quick-writes. Once they've composed several responses, they can divide the lines of prose into lines resembling poetry, add figurative language and poetic devices, and subtract that which keeps the pieces from being poems. Then publish a class anthology of original work.

Jiménez, F. (1997). *The circuit: Stories from the life of a migrant child*. New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin.

Jiménez, F. (2001). *Breaking through*. New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin.

Jiménez, F. (2008). *Reaching out*. New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin.

In his three-part memoir, Jiménez recounts the sometimes tragic, other times hopeful story of one

family's journey across the border from their home in Mexico to California where they become primarily field laborers. Beginning with *The Circuit*, Jiménez introduces the idea of how vital education is to attaining success in life. To that end, Panchito, the narrator, begins school until he is uprooted due to the plight of migrant families. In spite of these difficulties, his love for acquiring knowledge serves as the catalyst for his continued efforts to seek it out. Along the way, he learns how to appreciate home and family. In the final installment, Panchito leaves home for college, a dream come true.

One of the more attractive parts of Jiménez's books is his use of photographs that help to document these years. Student writers can create photo essays using 3–5 family photographs that, when placed side by side, tell a story; then they will write that story.

Martinez, V. (1996). *Parrot in the oven: Mi vida*. New York: HarperCollins.

In Martinez's tragic historical novel, 14-year-old Manny is in danger of filling his father's shoes, problematic because his father is a no-good drunk who is verbally and physically abusive, at one point aiming a rifle at Manny's mother, making "a shooting noise with his lips *Kapow. Kapow*" (p. 60). Life is tough enough for Manny, and there is not a mountain in sight, much less greener grass on the other side. Manny will come to a crossroads where he must decide to step into his father's shoes and head down that tragic path or chuck them and find his own pair.

Leading up to reading *Parrot*, small groups of students could research different aspects of the story and present them to classmates. Digital presentations would be at least three minutes long. Examples of research topics include, but are not limited to, the *bracero* movement, educational inequity as it pertains to Latinos at the time the story takes place, health care for minorities during the 70s, pop culture of the times, etc. When reading the book, students will understand more deeply many of the issues that may previously have gone unnoticed.

This next list includes other titles that students are sure to enjoy. They also fall into both categories previously mentioned—multicultural and/or culturally relevant literature and Literature.

- de la Peña, M. (2005). *Ball don't lie*. New York, NY: Delacorte Press.
- de la Peña, M. (2008). *Mexican whiteboy*. New York, NY: Delacorte Press.
- Jaramillo, A. (2006). *La linea*. New Milford, CT: Roaring Brook Press.
- Lopez, D. (2009). *Confetti girl*. New York, NY: Little, Brown.
- Martinez, C. G. (2008). *The smell of old lady perfume*. El Paso, TX: Cinco Puntos Press.
- Mora, P. (2000). *My own true name*. Houston, TX: Arte Público Press.
- Rice, D. (2003). *Crazy loco: Stories*. New York, NY: Speak/Penguin.
- Rice, D. (2011). *Heart-shaped cookies*. Tempe, AZ: Bilingual Press.
- Sáenz, B. A. (2005). *Sammy & Juliana in Hollywood*. El Paso, TX: Cinco Puntos Press.
- Soto, G. (2000). *Jessie de la Cruz: A profile of a United Farm Worker*. New York, NY: Karen and Michael Braziller Book.
- Soto, G. (2006). *A fire in my hands*. Orlando, FL: Harcourt, Inc.
- Stork, F. X. (2010). *The last summer of the death warriors*. New York, NY: Arthur A. Levine Books.
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- Moll, L. C., Amanti, C., Neff, D., & Gonzalez, N. (1992). Funds of knowledge for teaching: Using a qualitative approach to connect homes and classrooms. *Theory into Practice*, 31(2), 132–141.
- Saldaña, R. (2001). *The jumping tree*. New York: Delacorte.
- Saldaña, R. (2007). *The whole sky full of stars*. New York: Wendy Lamb Books.
- Stong, P. (1996). *State fair*. Iowa City, IA: University of Iowa Press.
- Webster, J. P. (2002). *Teaching through culture: Strategies for reading and responding to young adult literature*. Houston, TX: Arte Público Press.
- Waller, R. J. (1992). *The bridges of Madison County*. New York: Warner Books.

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**.



Aliens among Us:

Exploring Identity and Identities in Young Adult Literature

Alien (*noun*) 1: a person of another family, race, or nation. 2: a foreign-born resident who has not been naturalized and is still a subject or citizen of a foreign country. (*adj*) *a*: belonging or relating to another person, place, or thing. *b*: relating, belonging, or owing allegiance to another country or government. *c*: differing in nature or character typically to the point of incompatibility.

Growing up, I always knew I was different. I had no word for what I was, no story to which I could affix myself. So it's only natural that I considered myself an alien. I remember sitting at my bedroom window night after night, searching the starry sky for hours and hoping to catch a glimpse of some tiny speck, proof that my extraterrestrial tribe was on its way back to earth to get me.

Then at 15, I was invited to be an apprentice at a summer stock theater located on an island off the coast of New Jersey, and everything changed. Even before I knew what the job entailed, I jumped at the opportunity to escape my hometown. The lure of the something “other” was too great, and despite the objections of my parents, I took off.

The theater's schedule was grueling—14 musicals in 14 weeks—and as an apprentice, I was expected to do anything and everything in exchange for a bunk in a crowded room crammed with eight or nine other boys. Along with my fellow apprentices, I served meals, cleaned and maintained the theater, built and moved the scenery, hung and ran the lights, and

eventually (to my great delight) was asked to grab a costume and step onto the stage. The job involved long hours, little sleep, no pay, and a slavish devotion to the legendary Joe Hayes, the man who had founded and managed the theater. What kept me in the game, what made me lose sleep and run myself ragged that whole summer, was the discovery of story.

At the time, I knew very little about the business of telling stories; I knew even less about the theater. I'd seen a few plays and had been involved in the odd school production featuring Pilgrims, but the business of people actually making a living by dressing up as someone else and telling stories on a well-lit stage in front of an eager audience was a revelation. Every night, I stood in the wings and watched as a leading actress transformed herself into a Sally Bowles or a Dolly Levi or a Mame; I studied Doug and Tom and Bob as they turned themselves into Tevye or Will Parker or Captain Von Trapp. I befriended these people during the day and then watched at night as they conjured a more fantastic persona, one designed for happy endings. I had discovered a nexus where two entirely separate realities were allowed to meet, where the story of Tevye lived inside the story of Doug. Might there be a more fantastic story rolled up inside of my everyday life, my own alternate persona waiting to be conjured? I was determined to find out.

Then one night about halfway through the summer, I found what I was looking for—I kissed a boy in the left mezzanine of the theater, and just like in those Greek myths that I'd been reading in school the year

before, I was instantly transformed. Overnight, I was allowed to shed my alien status. I had found my tribe, my story.

Before that summer, homosexuality was something to be avoided, ignored, resisted, and love was meant for movie stars. Way back in the Twentieth Century, homosexuality was rarely mentioned; it was a time when being gay or lesbian was still considered a form of mental illness, a crime, or worse. But ever since I could remember, it also had been a part of me, an urge that by its very nature couldn't be separated from who I was, because it was my nature. And yet, it had to remain unspoken and unacknowledged, even to myself. Disowning it took so much work, and in jettisoning that essential part of myself, I naturally lost touch with other parts as well—like my ability to love and the confidence to be fully myself. The fact is, I was so busy policing myself into a kind of submission, forcing myself to be someone other than myself, I didn't need anyone pushing me around.

At 15, I was an expert at bullying myself. But if I ever slacked off, there was no shortage of those who were happy to step in and do it for me. And not just people—a book could do it nicely. My brother owned a precious and dog-eared copy of *Everything You Always Wanted to Know about Sex*. I remember pouring over it, page by page, looking for some kind of validation or permission to feel the feelings that I thought were mine alone. Instead, I was shocked to discover that homosexuals were a class of men who had sex in bowling alley bathrooms and enjoyed activities such as putting light bulbs up their butts. Really? Homosexuality, I decided, was not for me. And so I kept quiet, fell below the radar, and made a decision to be less than myself. At a time when my peers were busy pressing themselves on top of girls in the back seat of cars, renting tuxedos, and coming into their own, I was trying desperately to pass. In a world where emotional development depended on my ability to participate, I fell behind a bit. I took to my room, imagined that I understood the lyrics of popular singing divas, sulked, decoupled my lunch box, made hand puppets with human hair, wore a dickie, read Jane Austen, and was cast in musicals.

Fortunately, that first kiss was more powerful than anything I'd yet encountered, and it managed to trump even my own desire to remain invisible. Love was no longer meant for other people, normal people,

people in movies and books—it belonged to me as well. I was part of the human race, and no one would deny me that right ever again. Love provided me with a story that I could believe in.

We are all storytellers. Every one of us arranges, discards, upends, and transforms the flimsy details of our personal circumstances until our lives and the world all around us makes some kind of sense, until we recognize ourselves in the landscape. Creating stories about ourselves, our parents, our ancestors, our work, and place of worship is one of the main features of our species and sets us apart from all others. Story is how we locate ourselves in the world and how we identify ourselves to one another, but even more important, it's how we come to know ourselves.

But as adolescents, we don't yet have the ability to create a proper narrative of our lives; we don't have the perspective necessary to make sense of certain events and to place each episode in its proper context. What does this mean? Why did that happen? How will this affect that? And that is one of the reasons why storytelling is so important to us when we are young adults; we are in the early stages of learning how to construct a narrative of our lives, and we need all the help we can get.

As my summer of love was coming to a close, my boyfriend slipped me Mary Renault's novel *The Last of the Wine*. A parting gift. He told me to read it while we were separated and perhaps I might see a bit of our own love reflected in the story. Though the book had been published in 1956 and the story was set in Ancient Greece, I was thrilled to discover that the plot involved a relationship between two men. Here was evidence that someone (other than me) believed that such a love was not only possible, but also desirable. If only I lived in ancient Greece.

When I returned to the routine life of a high school junior, I tried to make up for the loss of excitement by submerging myself in books. I read the stories of T. H. White, Charles Dickens, F. Scott

Story is how we locate ourselves in the world and how we identify ourselves to one another, but even more important, it's how we come to know ourselves.

Fitzgerald, Carson McCullers, J. D. Salinger, Charlotte Brontë, and Kurt Vonnegut. To be honest, I also turned to books because I wanted to find some kind of validation of the life I dreamed for myself, a blueprint; and though I never did find exactly what I was looking for, the habit of reading took hold in me, and eventually I found my way to writers like Denton Welch, James Baldwin, Virginia Woolf, and Djuna Barnes, writers who presented, if not exactly a homosexual slant, than certainly a queer one.

That same year, I was assigned to Mr. Shust's English class. Mr. Shust was a cranky and fastidious man of middle years who dressed in tweeds and flannel and insisted that his students keep a journal. He told us that the experience would enrich our lives (whatever that meant) and that we would be graded not on the quality of our writing, but on our willingness to participate.

So every evening after my homework was finished, I dutifully made an entry into the black-and-white speckled composition book. I began by chronicling the minor and major moments of my life, the hurts, hopes and heartbreaks, and soon writing had become a habit as well. That first journal turned into many, and by the time I was in my early twenties, I had a shelf filled with the written record of my adolescent years.

These books certainly came in handy years later when I began to write novels for young adults. My first book, *Absolute Brightness* (Harper Teen), is especially indebted to these journals for the many details of my summers on the Jersey coast. And my second novel, *Virgin Territory* (Egmont), also set in a seaside town during the summer months, explores issues of faith and love that I was struggling with and writing about in those early journals.

So, picture me a grown up, sitting at my desk and sipping morning coffee at the age of 35. Behind me, those composition books are lined up like witnesses never called upon to give their testimony. On the radio, a news report about teen suicide. According to the statistics, a young person who identifies as Gay or Lesbian is three to four times more likely to attempt

suicide than his or her heterosexual peers, and of all teen suicides, 33% can be attributed to homosexuality. I am appalled by this fact, shocked that nothing is being done to prevent the loss of what I consider our greatest natural resource—our youth. Instinctively, I turn to my old journals and I begin to read.

For the first time in years, I am reminded of just how confusing it was to be an adolescent, how painful and lonely. It is my story.

I then write the first few lines of a story about a 13-year-old boy who confides to his journal. I call him Trevor.

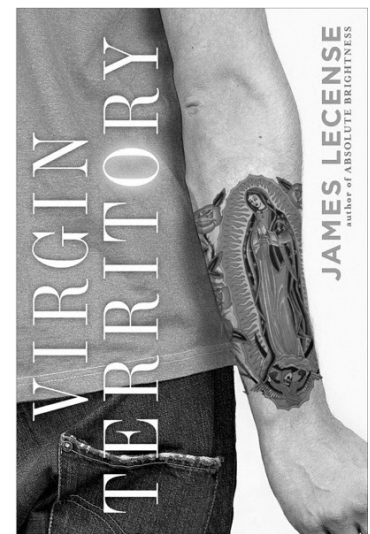
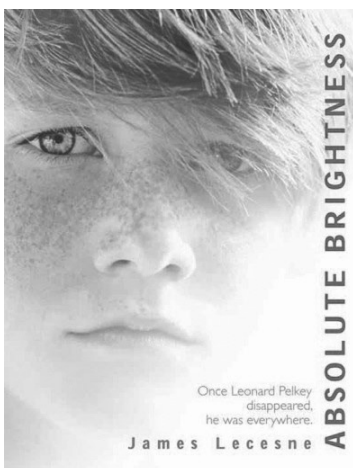
Dear Diary,

Tonight I walked into the living room while Mom and Dad were watching TV. Fell dead to the floor. No response from them. I think that television reruns have replaced their natural spontaneity. I mean, unless I'm on the eleven o'clock news, I don't think they'd care. And even then they might sleep through it.

And so the story began.

Eventually, Trevor discovers that he is different—different from his parents, different from his schoolmates, and different from his best friend. But when he realizes that he is gay and has no one in whom he can confide, he considers ending his life. *Trevor* is a poignant and surprisingly funny portrait of a boy in crisis, but it's about anyone who has ever felt as though they just can't get it right, that they don't fit in no matter how hard they try.

It wasn't that difficult to find the inspiration for Trevor. All of us have felt this way at one time or another, especially during our teenage years when we are just beginning to piece together a story of ourselves. Fortunately, my story was close to hand and my journals were stuffed with poems, rants, dreams,



prayers, vows, ideas, and remembrances of what it meant to be 14, 15, 16 The irony is that just as I was beginning to discover myself, I was becoming a stranger to the people I loved the most—my family. They couldn't know me, not really, because if they knew who I was, they would most certainly reject me. I couldn't live with that—not even as a possibility. And so I kept myself a secret from them, removed myself further and further from them, and began to explore life and love without them.

I went on to perform *Trevor* on stage as part of my solo show, *Word of Mouth*, and eventually the show found its way to the HBO Comedy Festival in Aspen, and then to Off Broadway where, incredibly, I won the Drama Desk Award for best solo performance of that year. One night following a performance of *Word of Mouth*, I met Randy Stone and Peggy Rajski, and they asked me to consider writing the screenplay for a short film based on the story of *Trevor*.

This 18-minute film (produced by Randy Stone and directed and produced by Peggy Rajski) went on to win many awards, including an Academy Award for Best Live Action Short. It was an exciting time as we watched our little film find an audience and spread the word that gay was okay—and at a time when LGBT issues were just beginning to find their way into the news. The times were changing, and *Trevor* was in some small way able to contribute to that change. In 1997 when we sold the film to HBO, we thought it might be a good idea to flash a telephone number at the end, just in case there happened to be a kid out there who could relate to the character of Trevor and needed someone to talk to. We wanted to let young people know that it was all right to reach out and ask for help. Someone would always be standing by to listen to their problems. But after doing some research, we found that there was no 24-hour crisis intervention and suicide prevention helpline for gay teens. And so we set about creating one.

Three months later, *The Trevor Project* was launched, and finally Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning teens had someplace to turn. That first night, we received over 1500 calls, and we've been at it ever since. Every year, we receive approximately 30,000 calls from young people around the country. Of course, not every call requires a rescue, and not all of the young people identify as LGBT, but every call comes from someone who is struggling

with issues of identity and is a person between the ages of 13 and 24 who is in need of someone who will listen. Thrown out of their homes, shunned by friends, often with no one to whom they can turn, these young people have found the help they need simply by calling *1-800-4-U-Trevor*.

These days, YA novels are full of lesbians and gays. Twenty-first century authors like David Levithan, Alex Sanchez, Jacqueline Woodson, Bill Konigsberg, and Mayra Lazara Dole write eloquently and often about the lives of LGBT teens. We don't have to travel to ancient Greece in order to find a reflection of our lives, because contemporary portraits closer to home abound. Perusing recent YA publishing lists of any major house, one might get the idea that it's not such a bad time to be a teen who is LGBT identified. But amazingly, alarmingly, the statistics today remain no better than they were over 20 years ago when I first sat down to write *Trevor*. LGBT youth are still killing themselves, and statistics indicate that they are in fact four times more likely to attempt suicide than their heterosexual peers. Fortunately, a solution now exists, and *The Trevor Project* is providing every young person with needed encouragement to fully live his or her own story. For over 14 years, *The Trevor Project* has been there for youth, listening to their stories, encouraging them to be fully themselves and, most important, saving them from taking their lives.

Recently, Dan Savage's very successful IT GETS BETTER campaign created a viral revolution and allowed adults to send out a message loud and clear to youth that life would indeed be better, if only they could hang on a bit. It also helped *The Trevor Project* become the go-to organization for youth who were struggling with their sexuality and identity. As a result, our call volume has spiked. We've opened a third call center, which is located in Harvey Milk's old camera shop in San Francisco and is fittingly dedicated to his memory.

We've also taken a much more active role in communicating to youth that we are there for them 24/7. In addition to the Lifeline, we've designed outreach and educational programs. We launched *TrevorSpace* last year, a secure online destination where youth can connect with one another, offer one another peer-to-peer support, and share information; in less than a year, close to 20,000 members have registered and are using the service. Another feature we offer is *Ask*

Trevor; young people can write in and ask questions that are not time sensitive, and our responses are then posted online. We have launched *Trevor Chat*, an online destination where teens can chat with a

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everyone.**

trained counselor and get some guidance *before* a crisis occurs, and we have also been instrumental in introducing anti-bullying legislation on the state and federal level. And finally, we have developed an in-school program where we train educators and students, meeting youth on their home turf and talking to them about the power of words and the value of listening.

And yet despite all our online services, we remain first and foremost a Lifeline, offering voice-to-voice communication, saving lives and working to normalize help-seeking behavior. In a world that is becoming increasingly de-personalized because of digital media, we remain dedicated to providing every young person, regardless of his or her identity, the opportunity to be heard—and they needn't wait until a crisis occurs to call on us. If I had understood at 14 that asking for help is an essential part of the human experience, I might have been able to get the help I needed sooner rather than later.

Of course, there is still much to do for youth everywhere. The passing of the Marriage Equality Act in New York State was a great win for youth who believe in the story of love; but the love of a teen in Texas is not yet equal to one living in New York, Connecticut, Iowa, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Vermont, or

Washington D.C. And further afield, homosexuality is illegal in more than 30 African nations, and in some places is a crime punishable by death. In some Islamic countries like Iran, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, and Yemen, homosexuality is a crime punishable by imprisonment, corporal punishment, or in some cases, execution. The globe has shrunk to the size of the worldwide Web, and every young person has access to it. They get the message, they hear the news, and we will have to work harder to change the story. Martin Luther King once said: "A threat to justice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere," and his wisdom has perhaps never been better applied than to the struggle to make one person's love equal to everybody else's—regardless of gender, race, or sexual orientation.

Changing the story of LGBTQ youth throughout the world and giving them the right to love is one way to ensure a better and more loving future for everyone. Young people, all of them, belong to our future, and without them we cannot hope to live into the world of tomorrow. Convincing even one kid that his or her life is worth living is to convince ourselves that the world itself is worth saving.

As I said, there is still so much work to be done. But *Trevor* stands as a major milestone and a miracle in my life. Next year, an updated version of *Trevor* will be published by Seven Stories Press, and hopefully a whole new generation of LGBTQ teens will be able to relate to the story. There may be aliens among us, but they are our aliens to love and to cherish and bring into the fold. I know because I was one of them, and it was story that saved me. All young people need to find a story that they can believe in, one that will bring them closer to understanding that they are a part of something bigger and better than themselves alone, something wonderful—and not just when they turn 25 or 35 or 45 years old—but right now.

Stories from the Field

Editor's Note: *Stories from the Field* invites readers to share a story about young adult literature. This section features brief vignettes (approximately 300 words) from practicing teachers and librarians who would like to share their interactions with students, parents, colleagues, and administrators around young adult literature. Please send your stories to jbach@lsu.edu.

A Hunger for *Homeboyz*

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"This book is not for the weak," I seriously exclaimed, as I held a shiny new copy of Alan Sitomer's *Homeboyz* in front of the class (Hyperion, 2007). When I had the opportunity to speak with Sitomer in the summer of 2010, I was introduced to this book and knew it would be one of the first ones I presented to my 8th-grade students.

Selling a book is not always an easy task, and middle schoolers are a tough crowd, but my sincerity was apparent. I gave a brief synopsis of the book and read the first page. I also spoke passionately of my online discussion with Sitomer and how real he was as an author of YA lit; how his classroom experience enabled him to write about teens so accurately. They were hooked.

Kids wanting to check out this book were so numerous that I had to write a list just to keep track! I

immediately went to Barnes & Noble to buy all of their copies in stock, so each class had at least one to share. On a day when one book was returned and impatiently waiting kids pounced, I had a classroom guest, a parent observing me for college credit. I had taught all three of his children. Imagine my surprise when the next day, he brought in four copies of *Homeboyz* that he had purchased the previous night!

Homeboyz has become so popular that students I don't even have are seeing their friends with it and borrowing it from me. You know a book is amazingly engaging when an 8th-grade male reads it willingly, simply for fun, and declares that it is the first book he's read completely since 4th grade.

Journal Joy

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I first taught Ross, a preservice social studies teacher, in an undergraduate literacy course. He did fine work, though he was a bit skeptical about my enthusiasm for using young adult literature in the secondary history classroom. I saw him sporadically after that semester. I discovered that we attended the same church: he was studying to become a Catholic. I heard about his marriage. In the spring of 2011, Ross appeared in my graduate course, "Literature, Art, and Media." His enthusiasm for historical fiction, biographies, and informational trade books was growing. At one point, he mentioned his wife was pregnant. In early summer,

he took my Young Adult Literature course as an elective; by this time, he was giving me recommendations and creating book trailers; you know how passionate converts can be.

One July night, I was leaving mass when I realized Ross was galloping toward me, waving his arms; it looked like he might leap over a few pews to reach me. “It came yesterday!” he called, beaming. I was confused. Why was he telling me and not others? Was his wife’s due date this soon? And why was he calling his baby “It”?

“*The ALAN Review!* It came in the mail yesterday!” Ross shouted. Oh, *The ALAN Review*. Everything fell into place for me. When I teach the young adult literature course, I require students to get a student membership in ALAN. During the 6 weeks we’re together, we read many young adult books, and I lend out my older copies of the journal so we can discuss issues being written about young adult literature by practitioners in the field. On our last day, I give a homework assignment, telling students I want to hear from them when they receive their first copy of *The ALAN Review*. Ross complied.

I can’t wait to see him the first day he brings his new baby to church.

You Just Never Know

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In the undergraduate Young Adult Literature course I teach, I am often confronted with my students’ gendered beliefs about the reading practices of the K–12 students they will encounter in their future classrooms. As a result, we talk throughout the course about these assumptions, exploring conventions of genre and evaluating the complexity of the characters

we encounter, the themes present in the assigned texts, and the choices the authors make as they construct their respective narratives. In our discussions, I encourage the class to consider the possibility that their future students may surprise them—that a particular student might respond powerfully to a book that, at first glance, might not seem an obvious choice.

As an example, we read author Michael Dorris’s essay “Trusting the Words” (1993, *Booklist*, 89 (19/20), pp. 1820–1822) in which he revisits his childhood love of Wilder’s Little House books. As a “mixed-blood, male, only child of a single-parent, mostly urban, fixed-income family,” Dorris acknowledges that he was not the “likely target audience for the Wilder books.” However, it just didn’t matter. Despite his eventual critique of the series, the books “hooked” him as a child.

In order to make this point personal, we talk about my students’ reading preferences and their amazement when they enjoy a book they expect to dislike. Judd Winick’s graphic novel, *Pedro and Me*, is a good example. In the case of Winick’s text, my students, most of whom are young women, have never read a graphic novel (“for boys”), nor have they read a text, Young Adult or otherwise, with any LGBTQ content. Despite their genre apprehensions and the fact that the text has little to do with their own experience (they’re not reality TV stars or AIDS activists, and most self-identify as heterosexual), this book touches them deeply; it hooks them.

What I hope becomes apparent to my students is the need to move beyond their gendered assumptions about genre and story in order to make better, broader recommendations to the students they will eventually teach. When it comes to powerful reading experiences, you just never know. In my most recent class, it was the moment a 20-year-old young man earnestly professed his love for *Out of the Dust*, Karen Hesse’s Newberry-award-winning verse novel about a 14-year-old girl living through the Great Depression, that helped to drive this point home.