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From the Editors

> I want to be famous in the way a pulley is famous,
> or a buttonhole, not because it did anything spectacular,
> but because it never forgot what it could do.
>
> *Famous*, Naomi Shihab Nye

The theme of this issue of *The ALAN Review* focuses on poetry and verse in novels for adolescents. Naomi Shihab Nye, one of my (Melanie's) favorite poets, offers a view of fame that is very like the ways we can consider poetry for the readers of young adult literature. Nye proposes being famous "the way a pulley is famous, or a buttonhole, not because it did anything spectacular, but because it never forgot what it could do." Poetry offers something unique to its readers; it can be spectacular and moving and all those things that make it stand out, make us take notice. But, it can also be as necessary and quiet as a buttonhole or a pulley. Poets such as John Grandits, Jack Prelutsky, Karen Hesse, Paul Fleischman, Mel Glenn, Helen Frost, David Levithan, Marilyn Singer, and Julia Alvarez (just to name a few) play with language and use poetry in innovative and thoughtful ways, providing examples of language play with which readers can identify and interact. Often, these poets create narratives with their poetry, using poetry not as spectacular, stand-alone pieces of text, but rather as buttonholes to fasten stories together.

In Nye's *I'll ask you three times, Are you ok?: Tales of driving and being driven*, a character says, "It is really hard to be lonely very long in a world of words. Even if you don't have friends somewhere, you still have language, and it will find you and wrap its little syllables around you and suddenly there will be a story to live in" (p. 3). The poets who write for adolescents are deeply aware of the "world of words" and adolescents' need to belong, to see themselves, to explore the magic of language, and they write texts that help adolescents connect with and expand their worlds. Katie, a seventh-grade student in an after-school reading group that I read with, said, "The thing about books that use poems to tell the story is that I know the writer expects me to see stuff like symbols and simile, but I am also supposed to put the story together from the poems. It's like magic or something. The pieces all come together to do something bigger."

The poetry in verse novels, while rich in symbolism, metaphor, and other literary elements, provide language that "wraps its little syllables around" the adolescent readers and is often much more accessible than much of the other poetry taught in schools. I used Mel Glenn's *Who Killed Mr. Chippendale* in an eighth-grade English class that was studying mystery. The intent was for the students to see a different type of mystery novel; what happened far surpassed that intent. The students were less interested in the story than they were in the types of poetry that he used to tell the story. He wrote parallel or mirror poems, poems in two voices, and poems that included internal dialogue. The students wrote similar poems and practiced playing with the form. Emmett said, "This poetry stuff ain't so bad. I liked reading it. I even liked writing it."

Many of the articles in this issue draw attention to the magic of poetry and the ways that adolescents can engage with it.

"A Case for Cultivating Controversy: Teaching Challenged Books in K–12 Classrooms" by Susan Fanetti raises questions about the educational validity of avoiding controversial books in the classroom and the problems that attempts to ban or marginalize these texts create for teachers and students. Fanetti provides an overview of the current climate surrounding controversial texts and offers suggestions for preparing teachers and preservice teachers to respond.

In "Resistance, Gender, and Postcolonial Identities in *Somebody's Daughter* and *Meaning of Consuelo,"* Ann Marie Smith and Keith Johnson make an argument that characters in young adult novels are involved in "complex processes of identity and gender development." They apply a postcolonial theory lens to two novels about adolescent girls and demonstrate how culture and the clash of cultures contribute to their growth into young women who accept or resist the patriarchy.

"Issues of Personal and National Identity in Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus"* introduces Nigerian siblings Kambili and Jaja. These teens' struggles with an abusive father often mirror the unrest in their country. Audrey Peters argues that this novel explores the teens' identity development as well as family dynamics, cultural conflict, and political change.

Wendy Glenn and Marshall George build a case for the use of YA literature in the current educational climate in "Looking into and beyond Time and Place: The Timeless Potential of YA Lit in a Time of Limited Opportunity." Glenn and George introduce novels and situate them as tools to explore history, themes, culture, and the future, and challenge teachers to avoid oversimplifications of texts due to testing pressures.

In "Melinda and Merryweather High: Parallel Identity Narratives in Laurie Halse Anderson's *Speak*," Robyn Schiffman explores the roles names play in constructing identities within the novel. Whether it's the names Melinda gives to her teachers or the school's search for a suitable mascot, the need to find one's own voice, either by finding a name or assigning a name, serves as a way to connect many of the characters in the novel.

In "Images and Limited Text in Narrative Writing: Using David Small's Nonfiction Graphic Novel *Stitches* to Teach Memoir," Ashley DeGracia explores the use of images and image-based stories with students. She discusses nonfiction graphic texts as tools that can be used to teach required content.

In "Invitational History in Margarita Engle's *The Poet Slave of Cuba: A Biography of Juan Francisco Marzano*," Zaira R. Arvelo-Alicea provides a rationale and a way for not only incorporating verse novels into the classroom, but also using verse novels that are set in various historical periods. Furthermore, she argues, these novels encourage our students to engage with ethical questions faced by the characters found in the novels.

Daniel Rubin discusses voice in Latino/Latina texts in "From a Whisper to a Shout: Emergent Voice in Latino/Latina Literature." He provides both a literature review and a call to action for teachers. This call, to empower students to find voice both for themselves and in the characters, provides a way for teachers and students to engage in critical discussions of literature.

In "Drawing on My Past to Write," young adult author Cheryl Rainfield discusses how the traumas of her childhood became part of the stories that she tells. She illustrates how her scars, both physical and emotional, provide her with both a reason to write and a subject for her writing. M. Jerry Weiss addresses the role and use of controversial texts in his "One More Time?" while Jeffrey Kaplan argues for the value of young adult literature as a way to discuss social issues in "YA Lit as Springboard for Social Relevance and Classroom Research."

This issue's Stories from the Field features pieces written by authors who recall when either they themselves or their students came into contact with young adult literature for the first time. They focus on their first impressions from that experience—the success of recommending the right book at the right time, loving poetry for the first time after reading poetry written for young adults, or realizing for the first time the power young adult literature has on our students.

Note

References

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