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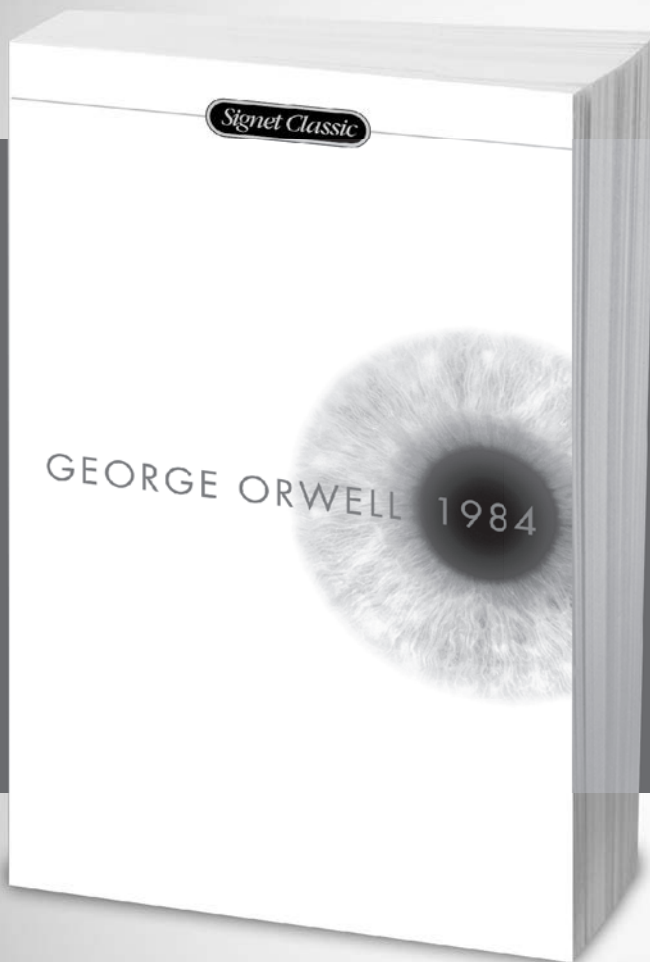
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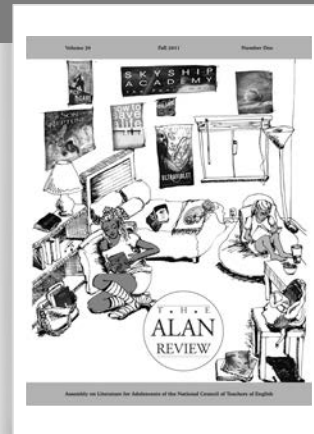
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Volume 40

Number 1

Fall 2012



<i>Steven Bickmore</i>	From the Editors	3
<i>Jacqueline Bach</i>	Call for Manuscripts	5
<i>Melanie Hundley</i>		
<i>Susan Fanetti</i>	A Case for Cultivating Controversy: Teaching Challenged Books in K–12 Classrooms	6
<i>Ann Marie Smith</i>	Resistance, Gender, and Postcolonial Identities in	
<i>Keith H. Johnson</i>	<i>Somebody’s Daughter</i> and <i>Meaning of Consuelo</i>	18
<i>Audrey Peters</i>	Issues of Personal and National Identity in Adichie’s <i>Purple Hibiscus</i>	27
<i>Wendy J. Glenn</i>	Looking into and beyond Time and Place:	38
<i>Marshall A. George</i>	The Timeless Potential of YA Lit in a Time of Limited Opportunity	
<i>Robyn L. Schiffman</i>	Melinda and Merryweather High:	48
	Parallel Identity Narratives in Laurie Halse Anderson’s <i>Speak</i>	
<i>Ashley DeGracia</i>	Images and Limited Text in Narrative Writing	56
	Using David Small’s Nonfiction Graphic Novel <i>Stitches</i> to Teach Memoir	
<i>Zaira R. Arvelo Alicea</i>	Invitational History in Margarita Engle’s <i>The Poet Slave of Cuba: A Biography of Juan Francisco Marzano</i>	64
<i>Melanie Hundley</i>	Clip and File	A1-A8
<i>Daniel Rubin</i>	From a Whisper to a Shout:	70
	Emergent Voice in Latino/Latina Literature	
<i>Cheryl Rainfield</i>	Drawing on My Past to Write: The Author’s Connection	78
<i>M. Jerry Weiss</i>	One More Time? The Publisher’s Connection	82
<i>Jeffrey Kaplan</i>	YA Lit as Springboard for Social Relevance and Classroom Research: The Research Connection	86
	Stories from the Field	91

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Instructions for Authors

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."

MANUSCRIPT FORMAT. Manuscripts should be **double-spaced** throughout, including quotations and bibliographies. A **title page** with author's name, affiliation, address, and a short professional biographical sketch should be included. The author's name should not appear on the manuscript pages; however, pages should be numbered. Short quotations, as permitted under "fair use" in the copyright law, must be carefully **documented within the manuscript** and in the bibliography. Longer quotations and complete poems or short stories must be accompanied by **written permission** of the copyright owner.

Author interviews should be accompanied by **written permission of the interviewed author** to publish the interview in *The ALAN Review*. Interviewers should indicate to authors that publication is subject to review of an editorial board. The title of *The ALAN Review* should not be used to gain an interview.

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).

SUBMITTING THE MANUSCRIPT. Authors are to submit manuscripts electronically to alanreview@lsu.edu. In the subject line please write: **ALAN manuscript submission**. All manuscripts should be in a recent version of Microsoft Word and use APA format. Complete submissions include, as separate attachments, the following documents: (1) A manuscript without references to the author(s). (2) A separate title page with author's name, contact information, affiliation, and a 2-3 sentence biographical sketch. In the case of multiple authors, the author submitting the manuscript will serve as the primary contact unless stipulated otherwise. (3) A brief statement that the article is original, has not been published previously in other journals and/or books, and is not a simultaneous submission.

REVIEW PROCESS. Each manuscript will receive a blind review by the editor and at least two members of the editorial review board, unless the length, style, or content makes it inappropriate for publication. Usually, authors should expect to hear the results within eight weeks. Manuscripts are judged for the contribution they make to the field of adolescent literature, clarity and cohesiveness, timeliness, and freshness of approach. Selection also depends on the manuscript's contribution to the overall balance of the journal.

PUBLICATION OF ARTICLES. *The ALAN Review* assumes that accepted manuscripts have not been published previously in any other journals and/or books, nor will they be published subsequently without permission of *The ALAN Review*. Should the author submit the manuscript to more than one publication, he/she should notify *The ALAN Review*. If a submitted or accepted manuscript is accepted by another publication prior to publication in *The ALAN Review*, the author should immediately withdraw the manuscript from publication in *The ALAN Review*.

Manuscripts that are accepted may be edited for clarity, accuracy, readability, and publication style.

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.

DEADLINES. Please observe these deadlines if you wish to have your article considered for a particular issue of *The ALAN Review*.

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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

“Famous” from *Words Under the Words: Selected Poems* (Portland, Oregon: Far Corner Books, 1995). Copyright © 1995 by Naomi Shihab Nye. Used by permission of the author.

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- Nye, N. S. (1995). Famous. In *Words under the Words: Selected Poems* (p. 80). Portland, OR: Far Corner Books.
- Nye, N. S. (2007). *I’ll ask you three times, Are you ok?: Tales of driving and being driven*. New York, NY: Greenwillow.

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/>.

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.**

Winter 2014 Theme: Reaching Them All, ALAN Has Books for Everyone

The theme for the 2012 ALAN workshop is “Reaching Them All, ALAN Has Books for Everyone.” Current ALAN president cj Bott notes that there are young adult books for boys, 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, and so on. We welcome submissions related to this theme—how young adult literature reaches young adults. 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, 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.

A Case for Cultivating Controversy:

Teaching Challenged Books in K–12 Classrooms

We seem to have come to a moment in the evolution of our culture in which the very idea of controversy is dreadful, its definition warped and twisted into a horror. But when divested of the nefarious trappings we've given it, the word itself simply means an exchange of differing views. That is what I propose that we should cultivate: the exchange of differing views. It shouldn't be a revolutionary idea, but, as a culture, we fear controversy. Teachers and school librarians who encourage students to engage with challenging (and thus usually challenged) literature have, in this moment, more reason to fear than anyone else. I believe, though, that we can make a space for healthy controversy in the classroom, despite the sometimes contentious relationship among “stakeholders”—students, teachers, administrators, parents, and community—and despite recent legislative moves like those in Arizona to criminalize controversial ideas in education. The space for healthy controversy can only exist in a neutral zone where all parties feel welcome and enfranchised.

I teach two undergraduate courses devoted to the teaching of literature: one for students preparing to pursue their credential in elementary education, and another for students preparing for their secondary English language arts credential. I choose at least half of the required texts in each course from an updated version of the American Library Association's Most Frequently Challenged Books list, and I do so specifically so that we can discuss the reasons these books

are challenged and/or banned, reasons and methods for teaching them, and students' own ideas about whether these books should be taught and whether they themselves would undertake to do so.

When we first encounter texts like *And Tango Makes Three* or *The Giver* (in the K–8 class) or *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* (in the 6–12 class), students don't question whether the texts are appropriate—until I mention that they are among the books most often challenged by parents and community members. When that discussion starts, most students tend to assume that they should not teach these books. Our discussion then moves, as I'd intended, to a more general discussion of the Challenged Books list and censorship itself. The majority of students tend to report that they are opposed to censorship, but they also assert that they believe that certain books are “inappropriate” for certain readers and that parents should be the final word on what students should be allowed to read. Bercaw (2003), Schall and Kauffmann (2003), and Freedman and Johnson (2001) describe similar feedback from their preservice teachers.

Over the course of each semester, as we discuss some of the legal and cultural history of censorship in American public education, students tend to reshape their ideas about what constitutes “appropriate,” how teachers should address issues of controversy in their classrooms, and what their students might be capable of accomplishing. But still, even as their ideas about the value of controversy expand, they remain reluc-

tant to undertake the risks of cultivating controversy themselves. This project has grown from my efforts to give them a scaffold and a safety net for walking that fine line.

Conceiving of Children as Capable

In working through our fear of controversy and ultimately embracing it as the infinitely valuable space for learning that it is, the first hurdle we encounter is our conception of children and childhood. Nodelman (1996), in his influential text *The Pleasures of Children's Literature*, uses Althusser's theory of ideology and "obviousnesses" (that is, ideas that we fail to examine because their rightness is obvious to us) to assert that "our ideas about children are a kind of self-fulfilling prophesy" (p. 67): if we think they are incapable of understanding complex and challenging ideas, we will attempt to protect them from such ideas and, by preventing them from gaining knowledge of and experience with those ideas, we will make them incapable of understanding them.

The problem, of course, is that we cannot protect children indefinitely. We cannot even protect them while they remain children. Nodelman observes that we "often manage to forget—or, perhaps, to try to hide from ourselves—the extent to which the innocent bliss of even fairly well-off children is a fiction," and that this fantasy of childhood we adults would like to create "excludes the experience of the many children who are sexually or physically abused, and of the even more numerous ones who go through the ordinary but nevertheless painful traumas of growth and adjustment to human existence" (p. 77). When we deny children access to stories about people who have faced struggle and trauma, who have felt different and alone, we deny them the chance to learn about—and talk about with their teachers, their peers, and their parents—struggles from a place of safety, and we deny them the chance to learn that the struggles they themselves have faced are shared. Koehnecke (2001) explains that "[w]hen children read about others who face emotional problems, they can be helped in coming to terms with their own repressed emotions of fear, anger, and grief" (p. 29). When we deny them these experiences, we deny them the chance to learn that those who do struggle are not freaks, misfits, or otherwise Other.

Nodelman (1996) also rebuts Piaget's stages of cognitive development, categories on which reservations about a child's readiness for challenging subject matter often depend. He notes that in the many decades since Piaget shared his theory (in which human cognition matures in linear fashion through "preoperational," "concrete operational," and "formal operational" stages—a path from magical thinking through concrete concepts to abstract thought), his idea has been repeatedly challenged, tested, and found wanting. Though Piaget remains entrenched in educational psychology, his theory, Nodelman contends (and I agree), is only useful when understood as a general observation rather than as a rigid linear process. Humans are just not that tidy and predictable.

Many children who, when held to a Piagetian framework, would be considered incapable of understanding figurative language or grasping thematic implications in stories or making contextual connections between their lives and the stories they read, do exactly that. "What was thought to be theoretically impossible has proven to be possible in the right circumstances—particularly when adults make the task relevant" (Nodelman, 1996, p. 78). In other words, when we take the opportunity to share challenging work with children and are available and open to their questioning and discussion, their potential to understand increases commensurately. When we believe that children are capable, they are. And capable, thoughtful children become capable, thoughtful adults. A belief that children are capable of understanding and synthesizing complex and challenging ideas is itself an ideology, an "obviousness," as Nodelman points out (p. 83), but it is positive and empowering for both children and adults.

An ideology that regards children as capable and thoughtful people has the added benefit of being politically and morally neutral at its core. While we as individuals might value a whole host of opposing ideals, I think we can all support the ideal that children should grow into capable, thoughtful adults. Regardless of our position on what kinds of choices

When we believe that children are capable, they are. And capable, thoughtful children become capable, thoughtful adults.

Because debates about censorship and appropriateness are ideological and the “stakeholders” tend to be wrapped up in their own obviousnesses.

are “wrong,” we all want children to be able to make good, careful choices, and we want them to grow into adults who make good, careful choices. I argue that teachers and parents need not necessarily agree on which choices are good choices in order to work together to help children learn to make them.

The Nature of Censorship vs Controversy

When we talk about censorship in schools, our cultural concept of the debate is unfortunately simplistic and wrongheaded, and we see each other as cardboard stereotypes: on one side, left-wing, activist teachers pushing a radical political agenda on unsuspecting, impressionable students; on the other, backward, narrow-minded, fundamentalist parents refusing to allow children to think for themselves. Because debates about censorship and appropriateness are ideological and the “stakeholders” tend to be wrapped up in their own obviousnesses, and because what is at stake is influence over children, we probably shouldn’t be surprised that the lines are so starkly drawn. With the sides eying each other suspiciously over the rims of their foxholes, there doesn’t seem to be any common ground. But there *is* common ground. We all want to offer the best possible education to our students, our children. If we can come to the negotiation agreeing on that one principle, there is room to build a foundation of trust.

Besides, though we think of the combatants on this battleground of the “culture wars” as parents versus teachers and librarians, parents are not the only agents of censorship, and active community challenges to books are not the only obstacles keeping children from quality books with controversial content. Censorship occurs on every side. What I’ll call “preemptive censorship”—self-censorship by publishers, libraries, schools, teachers, and booksellers—is the first barrier. In a way, it’s the most insidious, because it happens quietly, with little or no publicity, unbeknownst to most readers. Preemptive censorship is censorship that occurs in anticipation of a challenge that has not

yet happened, a means to avoid it. It occurs when a publisher chooses not to publish a book—or a library, school, teacher, or bookseller chooses not to order it—expressly because its content might be controversial. Preemptive censorship also occurs when a school, library or bookseller chooses to locate a book in its inventory out of reach of a particular audience because its content is deemed somehow inappropriate. This kind of censorship is rarely if ever included in censorship data.

Curry (2001) and Aronson (2003) both describe this preemptive censorship. Aronson (2003), a publishing executive, calls its occurrence in his industry “silent censorship” (p. 76), because it happens unnoticed by anyone except the person deciding to reject the potentially controversial text. He ascribes it to fear—fear on the part of a publisher (or a bookseller) that a book won’t sell, or on the part of school and community libraries that a book will draw protest because they themselves deem the content “too hot” (p. 78). Preemptive, silent censorship is impossible to track, and almost impossible to combat, because no one really knows it’s happening—at least not until it’s too late.

The irony, of course, is that books that are not released or made available to the public don’t even have the chance to become controversial. We don’t know whether they would elicit protest, because we haven’t had the chance to read them. And sometimes a book is not reprinted because a publisher has second thoughts. Aronson describes that situation regarding the gay-themed YA novel *Damned Strong Love*, by Lutz Van Dyke, which was not reprinted due to publisher’s concerns about the content’s potential for controversy—even though the book had not drawn protest (p. 77). A book rejected by publishers due to qualms about its content or left to languish in a dark corner by librarians is still a censored book, even if no one is picketing the library or writing letters to the school board. That silent, preemptive censorship shapes what’s available for students to read and, therefore, shapes what they know.

Moreover, preemptive censorship shapes the ways the community engages with the texts that are released. The more unusual the content of a book, the stronger the potential reaction against it. The fewer books we have an opportunity to read about a “hot” topic, the more likely those books that are published

will be perceived as unrepresentative, inappropriate, one-sided, and offensive—and the more we simultaneously expect those fewer books to *be* representative and condemn them for promulgating stereotypes.

Aronson puts it succinctly: “One person says a book about, say, a Muslim who has anti-American views is true, and another says that, since there are so few books about Muslims, and they are so frequently stereotyped, we need positive images, not negative ones, no matter how true” (p. 79). This places us between the horns of a dilemma: which should we privilege—the authenticity and integrity of an individual story, or the sensitivities (perceived or actual) of a particular group of people?

I argue that we must privilege the former. Readers don’t relate to, or react viscerally to, what bores them—and sanitized content is boring. If a reader relates personally to a story, or reacts viscerally—whether positively or negatively—that’s a valuable moment, one that could lead readers to some kind of self-discovery or insight into their local or global world. Scales (2001) suggests a variety of healthy, ideologically neutral ways to engage students in challenging texts to help them establish meaningful, safe dialogue. We should embrace opportunities for children to learn important lessons about themselves, each other, and the world in safety, with teachers and parents to guide them; we let them down when we leave them in ignorance to figure it all out on their own, especially when the scary stuff is *actually happening* to them or those they care about. When we divest literature of anything that might be exciting or upsetting or infuriating, we leave nothing to talk about. Without anything to talk about, there is nothing to learn.

This argument has been made before; in fact, it’s been made for decades. And still the polemic rages on. We seem no closer to a resolution (we are actually growing farther apart), yet I remain convinced that we can reach *détente*. Earlier, I cast the debate in the harsh, simplistic terms with which each side tends to label the other. Now, I’ll recast the sides in their best lights: on one side are those who believe that access to the widest possible array of ideas across the sociopolitical spectrum offers the best opportunity for students to learn and grow, and that public educators should be the final arbiters on appropriate content for their students; on the other side are those who feel equally strongly that children should be innocent of

the harsher realities of the world for as long as possible and that parents should be empowered to decide what is or is not appropriate material for their own children.

In the heat of conflict, harsh rhetoric is often spouted and the opposition sneeringly discounted, but these are both compelling arguments. It is not unreasonable that parents would be interested in and concerned about what their children are reading, discussing, and learning about in school. Parental involvement in their children’s lives and education is, of course, *ideal*. But neither is it unreasonable that teachers expect to be considered experts in the content of their classrooms and expect a measure of deference regarding their pedagogical choices. As Bercaw (2003) points out, “earning a teaching credential inherently represents an individual’s achievement as one who is able to make decisions in a thoughtful critical manner” (p. 33). Teachers make educated, informed choices in the classroom.

While the conflict has remained so hot, parents and communities have learned to exert a great deal of influence over the choices made in the classroom. Pipkin and Lent (2002) describe (from the perspective of teachers undergoing a strenuous and often extremely unpleasant battle) how much influence a community can have when texts teachers select are challenged. But, as Degroff (2009) and Petress (2005) (and ultimately Pipkin and Lent) explain, when the courts become involved, the law has consistently come down on the side of educators.

DeGroff considers the legal trend on the issue of censorship in schools since the landmark 1987 case *Mozert v. Hawkins County Board of Education*, a Tennessee case in which fundamentalist Christians sued their public school board in protest over the selection of required textbooks, complaining that “the textbooks systematically marginalized traditional values and promoted beliefs at odds with their Christian faith” (p. 82) and that the board refused to allow alternative

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reading selections. The judge ruled that “the First Amendment guaranty of free exercise did not protect the students ‘from exposure to morally offensive value systems or . . . to antithetical religious ideas’” (pp. 84–85). Though the case bounced back and forth in appeal, the final ruling supported the original, with the appellate judge finding that:

even if the district’s policy had burdened the plaintiff’s free exercise rights, the burden was justified by the state’s compelling interest in ‘[t]eaching students about complex and controversial social and moral issues [in preparation for] citizenship and self-government’ (p. 86).

This is an important point to stress: the courts determined that *even if individual free exercise rights had in fact been burdened* by the school’s textbook selection and refusal to offer an alternative, those individual rights were trumped by the state’s interest in giving students access to a wide array of perspectives and experiences in the service of educating the citizenry.

Though he ultimately argues that the courts have been wrong, and that parents’ rights should prevail or at least be considered equivalent, Degroff’s review of the law since *Mozert* shows that the landmark opinion has stood the test of many subsequent rulings. Yet Petress (2005), undertaking a similar legal review, concludes that despite schools’ ultimate success in the courts, the legal wrangling often has a chilling effect on teachers’ choices:

Unfortunately, in many instances, objecting parties who lose in their quest to secure decisions they deem correct often resort to judges’ decisions. School officials thus frequently render defensive decisions or opt out of activities or choices in order to avoid the costs and inconvenience of endless hearings, appeals, and courtroom battles. Often useful educational experiences are sacrificed to avoid these battles and children lose out. The loss of confidence in teachers making classroom decisions has grown to large quarter and school administrators and school boards have reacted accordingly. (p. 252)

Here we have preemptive censorship again, at work at the school level, as administrators and teachers recoil from the thought of stirring up trouble, choosing safely rather than wisely. It can be expensive to fight

court battles over the right to offer students controversial material and encourage them to engage with it, and schools are in dire financial straits across the country. But we cannot run from a fight that hasn’t even happened, and we must stand up for what we, as experts, know is best practice.

It comes to this: if we as teachers refuse to select relevant, compelling, interesting materials that breed controversy *and therefore encourage class dialogue and discussion*, then we are not really teaching. The reason we have public education in the United States is not simply so that everyone can read and add. Education is public because it is in the country’s interest that its citizenry be educated. Good citizens know how to think critically, are respectful of and willing to consider others’ points of view, and can defend their own.

Challenges to Using Controversy to Educate

Though the courts have consistently supported schools’ right to educate from broad perspectives despite the specific ideologies of parents and communities, it’s important to see with clear eyes the real challenges of cultivating controversy. Some of those challenges supersede any individual teacher’s ability to combat them. Very recently, new challenges to the juridically endorsed idea of the broader purpose of education—and even to the definition of “good citizens”—have arisen. The most telling and worrisome example is H.B. 2281, a new law in Arizona that, in effect, prohibits ethnic studies programs. H.B. 2281 was signed by Governor Jan Brewer in December 2010, went into effect on 31 December 2011, and was immediately and aggressively implemented in the Tucson Unified School District (TUSD) by the state Superintendent of Education, John Huppenthal. The law states, in part:

A school district or charter school in this state shall not include in its program of instruction any courses or classes that include any of the following:

1. Promote the overthrow of the United States government.
2. Promote resentment toward a race or class of people.
3. Are designed primarily for pupils of a particular ethnic group.
4. Advocate ethnic solidarity instead of the treatment of pupils as individuals.

(H.B. 2281.15-112.)

Huppenthal used his interpretation of H.B. 2281, section 15-112, and of the curriculum of the TUSD Mexican American Studies (MAS) program to determine that the MAS program, among other complaints, promoted race resentment, was designed primarily for Mexican American students, and advocated ethnic solidarity. He shut the program down almost immediately upon the law going into effect. That decision was upheld in district court.

In a January 18, 2012, interview with Michelle Morris on National Public Radio, Huppenthal maintained that his quarrel was not with the books assigned in MAS courses but with the bias he perceived in the instruction:

The books aren't of concern at all. You know, I tell people you can bring *Mein Kampf* into the classroom, but you'd better be really careful about the viewpoint in which you're bringing that into the classroom. So it's never the book. It's all about what's going on, the kind of behaviors, and so what we see replete through the lesson plans were a characterization and literally the creators of the Mexican American studies classes . . . they were very explicit. They laid this out in a journal article. They said they were going to racemize the classes using [Paulo Friere]—he's a writer of the book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, and he, right in his book, talks about [how] that word *oppressed* comes right out of *The Communist Manifesto*. And he talks about having a Marxist structure where the entire history of mankind is the struggle between the oppressor and the oppressed and characterizing—bringing that characterization into this. So the racemizing of the class was to imbue a sense that the oppressed are Hispanic kids and the oppressor is a white Caucasian power structure. And we felt that, in and of itself—and it was replete that that plan [was] to racemize those classes. . . . (Note: elisions were used only to compensate for the most awkward constructions inherent in an oral interview transcript.)

One wonders if it's possible that Arizona's decision to censor an entire academic field could boil down to no one in John Huppenthal's office or on the Tucson Unified School District school board remembering their high school chemistry. Huppenthal is misunderstanding the word "racemize"—later in the interview, he tells Morris that it's a word the authors of the journal article about MAS "created in their journal article."¹

Now, I'm an English professor, and my own knowledge of chemistry is limited, but a racemic mixture, as I understand it, is one comprised of equal parts of opposing ("left-handed" and "right-handed") molecules. Used as a metaphor for the MAS cur-

riculum in Tucson, racemizing ideas would seem to be best practice—creating a whole out of equally powerful but contradictory parts. In other words, a racemized curriculum would include all perspectives in all their complexity. That's best practice *and* completely within the supposed spirit of H.B. 2281, the first section of which states: "The Legislature finds and declares that public school pupils should be taught to treat and value each other as individuals and not be taught to resent or hate other races or classes of people" (H.B. 2281, section 15-111). It seems that Huppenthal, et al., saw the first four letters of the word "racemize" and stopped thinking there.²

Huppenthal's misreading—or, at least, limited reading—of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* is also telling, and it speaks to an apparently instinctual antagonism within a significant portion of American society to ideas like "communism" and "Marxism." That antagonism seems to belie Huppenthal's insistence that the law is unbiased as well as his insistence that "it's never the book."

In fact, the disbanding of Mexican American Studies in Tucson has had the specific effect of banning books, both directly and indirectly. Seven books were officially removed from shelves throughout the district, boxed up, and sent to storage, far away from student hands. Herreras (2012) shared that list for the *Tucson Weekly*:

1. *Critical Race Theory*, by Richard Delgado
2. *500 Years of Chicano History in Pictures*, edited by Elizabeth Martinez
3. *Message to Aztlan*, Rodolfo Corky Gonzalez
4. *Chicano! The History of the Mexican Civil Rights Movement*, by Arturo Rosales
5. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, by Paulo Freire
6. *Rethinking Columbus: The Next 500 Years*, edited by Bill Bigelow and Bob Peterson
7. *Occupied America: A History of Chicanos*, by Rodolfo Acuña

That's the list of books officially, expressly banned by the TUSD (though, of course, the TUSD does not use the word "banned"). When we also consider the books that had been taught in now-discontinued MAS courses, books to which students will have effectively no access or materially compromised access, the list is much longer. Calderón (2012) provides the complete list in her post for *La Política*. It is too long to share in

its entirety here, but I offer a representative sampling in Figure 1.

Yes, it is effectively about the books. It's about the books because books are the tangibles of instruction. One can point to the word "Marxism" in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. One can bring a copy of *The Fire Next Time* to a school board meeting and read a passage, out of context, wherein Baldwin expresses rage at white society. The intangible—what teachers and students do with those books, the context they understand and the context they create—is much harder to carry into a school board meeting and complain about. The context is harder to apprehend and thus harder to trust. It is also where education actually happens. We educators need to do a better job of forging bonds of trust with our communities. We need to pull back the curtain a bit and invite parents into their children's education in more individual, intimate ways.

H.B. 2281 is a new law and sure to be thoroughly tested in the courts. If precedent continues to hold, and the free exchange of ideas continues to be valued by the judicial branch as a whole, then the law will be struck down. Still, juridical support, which is far removed from the classroom, is not much of a shield for any individual teacher, and not much of a deterrent to parents acting out of a perceived need to protect their children. Pipkin and Lent describe a tortuously long year in their teaching careers in Florida during the 1980s, a year that started with a letter of protest from a parent to the school board superintendent regarding a middle school reading selection and ended with neither of them working at Mowat Middle School, the school in question. Despite overwhelming support from most parents of these teachers' students,

the issue was politicized in the community at large, and Pipkin and Lent, with their English department colleagues, were pilloried at endless board meetings and around their town. In their case, their administrators consistently sided with the community, and, at the local level, the teachers repeatedly lost appeals and petitions. They were called all manner of names and, eventually, as they held their ground, they even received death threats. They finally took the issue into the courts, during which process the case was settled, and most of the restrictions to teachers' materials were removed.

In the meantime, the case garnered national attention, including a cover story in the *New York Times Magazine*, after which the town gained notoriety as "the town that banned Shakespeare" (p. 71). Shakespeare had indeed been banned after the superintendent, overwhelmed by trying to determine what texts would be appropriate, reduced the decision to a simple mathematical formula (factoring the number of profanities or "vulgar" or sexual references [p. 71] a book contained) in order to determine its value. That attempt to quantify literary merit resulted in a list of 64 books banned from the entire school district, including, among other well-known and highly canonical titles:

The Great Gatsby
Lord of the Flies
Animal Farm
Twelfth Night
The Crucible
Great Expectations
Hamlet
The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin
The Red Badge of Courage
Fahrenheit 451
The Glass Menagerie
The Call of the Wild
The Merchant of Venice
King Lear
Wuthering Heights
Of Mice and Men
A Raisin in the Sun
To Kill a Mockingbird (pp. 71-72)

National opinion favored the teachers; Pipkin, in fact, won a Courage Award in 1989 for her stalwart defense of herself and her profession. Negative

Ten Little Indians, by Sherman Alexie
The Fire Next Time, by James Baldwin
Woman Hollering Creek, by Sandra Cisneros
Mexican White Boy by Michael de la Peña
The Tempest, by William Shakespeare
Feminism is for Everybody, by bell hooks
The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fist Fight in Heaven, by Sherman Alexie
Zorro, by Isabel Allende
Black Mesa Poems, by Jimmy Santiago Baca
The House on Mango Street, by Sandra Cisneros
"Civil Disobedience" by Henry David Thoreau

Figure 1: A sampling of books to which students in Arizona now have limited access

national press attention did nothing to cool the teachers' detractors, however. Though the teachers were considered heroes by many outside their community (and many within as well), the community temperature was hot, and none of the teachers involved were still working at Mowat Middle School by the middle of the following school year. Most were working at other schools; Pipkin, the last teacher to leave Mowat, left the profession.³

Pipkin and Lent describe the worst case scenario from a teacher's perspective. Even though they proved ultimately successful in that they were supported by law and eventually won their point, the cost was high. Yet despite that cost, and the bitterness that remains evident as they recount their story, the value of the fight was greater. Pipkin shares a letter she received from a ninth grader who'd read about the story in the *Times*:

Please Mrs. Pipkin, keep fighting. Don't lose hope. You're doing so much good, so don't stop now. I know it's frightening and intimidating, but don't stop. If you give up, no one will be left. Fight for Cormier [the author of *The Chocolate War*, a flashpoint of the conflict], because he's still worth fighting for. If you lose, your students are being deprived of great literature. Keep strong and don't buckle under. Jerry Renault [protagonist of *The Chocolate War*] stood strong, and so can you. And if you do lose, at least you can say you did your best. I encourage all the teachers to stay strong. . . . You've made more of a difference than you know. (p. 66)

This letter itself is evidence of the value of difficult literature, literature in which bad things happen to good (and not-so-good) people, wherein good (and not-so-good) people say "bad" things and have "bad" thoughts. This girl, who read *The Chocolate War*, one of the most-often challenged books for young readers in English, learned from it to be strong and to fight for what she believed.

Hope through Dialogue

Pipkin and Lent's experience serves teachers well to understand the boundaries of the risk they undertake when they select challenging texts, but most debates about school materials do not elevate to such public forums or result in such acrimony. In some, maybe even most cases, schools and teachers simply avoid controversy or acquiesce immediately upon receiving a complaint. Yet I believe that we *can* teach texts

that excite and challenge our students, that we can help them learn to welcome controversy, and that we can do so with the support and cooperation of their parents, regardless of anyone's personal views.

Cooperation between teachers and parents must be cemented in a foundation of trust, which is certainly in short supply in Arizona right now, or in any situation that escalates the way the situation in Florida escalated. To achieve mutual trust, we must agree on two premises: first, that teachers and parents want the best possible education for children; and second, that teachers are experts in education, but parents are experts about their own children. If we can agree on these two premises, then everyone can come to a discussion with a warm heart and an open mind.

Communication is the key, and it is really up to the teacher to shoulder that responsibility. Attached to a class of 30 students are probably somewhere between 30 to 120 parental units—moms, dads, stepmoms, stepdads, grandparents, guardians—all of whom have other responsibilities on which they must focus. The teacher is the nexus between students, parents, and content; the teacher and her or his school are responsible for selecting and conveying that content. Teachers and schools are the agents of education, and education is the site of the controversy; thus, the proactive communication must obtain there. Martinson (2007) asserts that teachers and administrators are chiefly responsible for "establishing a genuine dialogue in which education takes center stage" (p. 188). He shares several examples in which complaints about content were settled amicably and successfully, in large part because open, genuine dialogue among the parties was present.

In order to establish and facilitate open, genuine dialogue, specific and clearly conveyed protocols for handling complaints must be in place at the outset. The cockamamie list of banned books in Florida is partially the result of an incomprehensible policy about what texts are appropriate, and Pipkin and Lent

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explain that when, in the midst of their court battle, they sent out a query to all districts in Florida regarding their policies, the confusion was obvious:

Sometimes even the school officials who were responsible for administering each district's policy had no clear idea of its provisions for selecting and reviewing instructional materials. In one large school district with separate language arts supervisors for elementary and secondary schools, we got two survey responses with exactly opposite items checked—and identical policies attached in support. (p. 62)

If administrators themselves don't understand policy, how can parents? How can we expect them to trust us when we are not able to give them reliable answers to their questions? How can we expect them to see us as experts?

So, obviously, step one is writing and adopting policies and protocols that are transparent and easily comprehensible. The first requirement is to know the law. In California, the California Safe Schools Coalition (it's worth noting that the CSSC is not a division of the California Department of Education) has published a guide that clearly explains parents' and schools' rights and responsibilities. There, parents can opt their children out of some selected content, which the guide delineates specifically, but otherwise, as the guide states: "parents do not have a right to prior written notice and opportunity to opt out of any part of public school curricula, under California law" (California Safe Schools Coalition, p. 3). The California state law is in keeping with the legal precedent discussed earlier—the right to a public education does not include a right to determine the content of that education. Distributing a guide like this, so that all parties understand their rights and responsibilities, should be a key component of any communication protocol.

The law sets this basis, but simply closing parents off because the law states that we can't have bad policy and ultimately bad education—and it invites the kind of conflict Pipkin and Lent describe. A school board meeting is perhaps the worst possible place to engage in fruitful dialogue, so the next reasonable step in keeping the lines of communication open and respecting parents as participants in their children's education, is to have a specific and clearly detailed process through which complaints must move. A clear, official process has three obvious benefits: it conveys that the school takes complaints seriously enough to have established a policy and process and thus gives parents

reassurance that they have a voice, while also giving the school and its representatives professional presence; it serves to control how and where complaints will be conveyed and directed and thus to limit all parties' exposure to hot tempers. Also, because the levels of escalation are clearly specified, and because the higher levels of escalation are large and bitter pills for all parties to swallow, complaints tend to be resolved before they escalate very far. In short, the process itself communicates a great deal, supporting Pavonetti's (2002) view that "the best protection against censorship is a proactive stance on the part of everyone from the school board to the classroom teacher" (p. 11).

Pavonetti (2002), describing a Master Class on censorship led by Ginny Moore Kruse, Director of the Cooperative Children's Book Center (CCBC), and Lois Lowry, author of the Newbery Award-winning book (and constant presence on the ALA Challenged Books list) *The Giver*, relays Kruse's construction of a "Ladder of Escalation":

1. Expression of concern
2. Oral complaint
3. Written complaint
4. Public attack
5. Censorship

This is not intended to be a protocol; it is instead Kruse's explanation of the path a text takes on the road to being banned. But I think it serves as a template for a worthy protocol—a protocol that is, because it follows this path, organic and reasonable. I would eliminate the first element (because that happens privately) and choose less-loaded language for the last two elements. The following, then, might be a good protocol for receiving and addressing parental complaints about content:

1. Informal expression of concern to teacher—a conference including teacher, student, and parent
If matter is not resolved:
2. Formal, written complaint to teacher and principal—a conference including teacher, principal, student, and parent
If matter is still not resolved:
3. Public forum—matter is raised and discussed at school board meeting
4. Decision—made following established board protocols for such decisions

A protocol like this enfranchises all interested parties—including the students themselves—and frames the debate. Many problems can be avoided when we convey our professionalism. When teachers have answers to parents' questions, take their concerns seriously, and address them conscientiously—when teachers, that is, convey real respect for parents, parents are far more likely to trust teachers' choices.

Fling Open the Classroom Door: Full Disclosure and Open Access

I've described a process for dealing successfully with complaints. Better even than that is, of course, to avoid them altogether even while we teach challenging texts. While we shouldn't shrink from the possibility that our reasoned, careful choices will cause protest, we might still be hopeful that parents will support our choices from the start. Again, communication with parents is key. Newsletters, weekly emails, occasional phone calls to convey praise rather than censure of their child or simply to update them on current or upcoming events in class: these are all common and valuable means to connect with parents. Of course, a class website is also becoming mandatory; we want parents to be able to get information when they want or need it, and a class website is a wonderfully effective, professional way to do just that. But as convenient as all that technology is, it doesn't replace personal contact for building rapport. As I said earlier, we need to invite parents into our classes more readily—and I mean that both literally and figuratively. Those phone calls are a good start. Though more time-consuming than an email blast or an update to the website, they pay much greater dividends. Teachers routinely call home to report a significant behavioral or academic problem, but few call to report good news. Most parents, no matter how busy and distracted, are very happy to get that call, and it will pay hearty dividends in the teacher-parent relationship, the parent-child relationship, and the teacher-student relationship.

Such basic means of communication are crucial to building rapport, and rapport with parents gives teachers space to use their best practices in the classroom. But we also need a good strategy for informing parents about content. When a teacher chooses a book like *The Giver* or *The Chocolate War*, she or he is

aware that parents might complain. How should she or he best attempt to stave it off?

There are conflicting ideas about this: some say that parents, whether or not the law requires it, should be notified, and possibly given alternatives, if their children are about to read a controversial book. Others say that because teachers are the arbiters of content, parents need not be notified and, in fact, the notification itself could breed trouble where none might have otherwise arisen. Kruse is in this second camp, and goes further, suggesting that signaling the choice of one controversial text could shape parents' estimation of the whole class: "If teachers send a letter home only when they anticipate problems, they are asking for trouble. Kruse affirmed that she believes all teachers want to teach the best books available: Why emphasize one book in the context of a whole year?" (Pavonetti, 2002, p. 14). This is an excellent point. In Pipkin's case, for example, she and her colleagues became entirely defined as teachers by the battle over a few of their educational choices; in fact, their offering of alternatives became part of the problem.

My advice? Pull back the curtain. Don't think of parents as potential enemies or even obstacles. Think of them as interested parties who might have valid concerns. I submit that it is part of our job as educators to address those concerns as honestly and thoroughly as we can. The teacher who warmly welcomes parents into the process might cease to be a competitor for a child's worldview and instead become a partner. It does mean some extra work for the teacher in the short term, but it can save a lot of time and angst later. My suggestion is that teachers send their reading list for the whole year (or semester) to parents, including for *every* book a very brief summary, a rationale for its selection, and—important—the planned teaching focus. By explaining the context one plans to create when teaching a particular text, and by teaching all the assigned texts as a group, one can assuage any concerns parents might have about any "hidden agenda." (I am assuming, of course, that we all agree

The teacher who warmly welcomes parents into the process might cease to be a competitor for a child's worldview and instead become a partner.

that we should not be teaching from our personal political ideologies. If my assumption is incorrect, then I am *asserting* that we should not.)

Include in the comprehensive reading list relevant information about an inexpensive edition (and/or audio and digital versions) that parents can purchase so that they can read along, as well as an invitation into the classroom for book discussions and/or reading discussion guides that parents can use to talk with their children about the books. Perhaps invite parents to lead a literature circle, if they are able to join the class. The reality is that few parents will be able to take a teacher up on this kind of offer, so there's no need to worry that one's class will be overrun with parents—but think of the learning and rapport-building opportunities that would present themselves if *all* parents did join the class for a day. Regardless, the offer itself is invaluable in establishing that oh-so-important rapport, and, when some parents are able to accept the invitation, teachers should be willing—eager, even—to incorporate the views of parents into literature discussions. We value the free exchange of ideas, after all.

It's crucial that even if a comprehensive reading list includes a variety of challenging, controversial texts, those texts are contextualized into the general course. Sending out information only for texts expected to be controversial pulls those texts out of the course context and thus hoists a bright red flag over the material, signaling to parents that they should be concerned, whether or not they otherwise would have been. The purpose of this plan is to try to prevent parental complaints by bringing parents as far into the process as possible. The intent is not to obfuscate the controversial material, but neither is it to highlight it as a potential problem. Include all texts, identify the planned teaching focus (so parents can understand each book's value in the course), and invite parents to participate in a variety of ways—giving them real control over their own level of involvement. By opening the curriculum and the classroom to her or his students' parents, a teacher can minimize any sense of disenfranchisement that is so often the root of most parental protests.

School librarians, who don't often have particular lesson plans they might share with parents and who serve the entire student body, face many of the same kinds of concerns and complaints that classroom

teachers do. It would be impractical—impracticable, really—for a school librarian to send home the kind of reading list I've described for teachers. But librarians usually maintain the library website, on which they could update parents and students about new arrivals, popular holdings, even holdings that might align with units in individual classes (all of these are already commonly included on school library sites). Though it would be quite the (unrealistic) undertaking to include a synopsis of every text in circulation, it would be reasonable to include synopses for new acquisitions, recommended reads, etc. I would also recommend that the school library include information for parents about how they might proceed if they have questions or concerns about items in circulation. The more information, the better.

What Do We Gain?

Sometimes it seems that our political culture is becoming more polarized with every election cycle, and we are growing more judgmental and suspicious of each other with each passing hour of the 24-hour news cycle. Yet—or maybe hence—with every generation, with every year, our collective pedagogy favors greater tolerance, diversity, and understanding among a wide range of individuals, communities, and cultures. Teachers work in the midst of this polarity, and it's not always a comfortable place to be. But it is our job to nurture an educated citizenry, and we must be the bridge between the competing sides of the “culture war.”

We cannot encourage our students to become curious, engaged citizens of their local, national, and global communities unless we offer them safe and structured opportunities to learn about the widest possible range of people and experiences. We cannot encourage our students to assert a voice to which others will listen respectfully unless we have encouraged them to understand why they believe what they do and to listen respectfully when others express differing beliefs. Caporino and Rudnitski (1999) remind us that the “aim of the English classroom is to invite informed dialogue and reflection on language and literature so that students and teachers examine the ways persons and groups build respect for differences or contribute to the forces of hate” (p. 12). If we don't select challenging texts and embrace the controversy they elicit, we cannot invite or encourage meaningful dialogue

and reflection. Without meaningful dialogue and reflection, we cannot educate. But to do so effectively and seamlessly, we must respect our students' parents as part of the equation for educating their own children, and we must invite and encourage meaningful dialogue and reflection between teachers and parents. If we earn—if we deserve—parents' trust, they will, in vast majority, give us the space we need to educate their children to become informed, thoughtful, confident citizens.

Endnote

1. Huppenthal does not give any other information about the article to which he's referring, so I cannot discuss the content of said article, or even if it actually exists, though I suspect it does.
2. At the time of the interview, Michelle Morris didn't know the word, either. She instead uses "racialize" because it's one with which she's familiar. Her own ignorance and choice to replace "racemize" with "racialize" has the inadvertent effect of accepting Huppenthal's argument.
3. In a much more recent case, the court decided *against* the teacher in question by dismissing her wrongful termination case against her former school district. In October 2010, The United States District Court for the Southern District of Ohio dismissed the suit brought by Shelley Evans-Marshall, who had been fired for teaching a lesson about the Most Frequently Challenged Books List and censorship. The Court's decision was based on the 2006 *Garcetti v. Ceballos* ruling, which held that a public employee has no First Amendment rights when speaking officially (Staino 2010). This recent case is unfortunate and does complicate the decision to teach challenged books, but it's important to note that the suit was between a teacher and the public school that fired her, whereas the parties in other school censorship cases are generally members of the community versus the teacher, librarian, or school district; the case was decided on the basis of that employee/employer relationship. Both cases here underscore how very important it is that teachers who undertake to teach controversial texts understand the extent to which they have the support of their schools.

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Resistance, Gender, and Postcolonial Identities in *Somebody's Daughter* and *Meaning of Consuelo*

Characters are involved in complex processes of identity and gender development in adolescent novels. A typical coming-of-age narrative will contain an “underlying premise of an essential self that will emerge to be discovered” (Mallan, 2009, p. 7). Our analysis of two novels about adolescent girls whose search for identities lead them in and out of mainland United States includes a consideration of post-colonial theories through which US patriarchy and colonialism are exposed through the characters’ identity development. By the end of *Somebody's Daughter* (Lee, 2005) and *Meaning of Consuelo* (Cofer, 2005), the US becomes a symbol for patriarchal religion and culture. Reading these novels through a post-colonial lens may help readers to appreciate the adolescent girls’ rejection of the patriarchy in their countries of birth and perhaps appreciate the complexities of adolescent immigrant identity.

These two young adult novels were selected for their underlying critique of patriarchy in Korea, Puerto Rico, and the US, and for the strong female characters who were born in places other than the US mainland. *Somebody's Daughter* is a novel about Sarah, a Korean American who was adopted by a US family as an infant. As a young adult, Sarah leaves the US for Korea in search of information about her birth mother. The novel is also about Kyong-Sook, Sarah’s Korean birth mother, who narrates her own life and the circumstances surrounding Sarah’s birth.

Meaning of Consuelo is a coming-of-age novel

about Consuelo, a Puerto Rican girl who must learn to cope with her schizophrenic sister and dysfunctional family. Consuelo leaves Puerto Rico for New York near the end of the novel to escape the negative influences of her family. Both novels are worthy of examination for their portrayal of adolescent girls’ telling struggle to define their identities among cultural and gender boundaries imposed on them by colonized versions of patriarchy. We suggest that an examination of how post-colonialism constructs gender, culture, and religion may provide students and teachers with a more worldly and holistic approach to understanding gender and identity in adolescent novels.

Before turning to a discussion of the novels, we describe the implications for analyzing gender and religion in *Somebody's Daughter* and *Meaning of Consuelo* through a post-colonial lens. Using the language of the colonists, the authors of these novels create narratives that engage in what Terdiman (1985) describes as “counter-discourse.” Counter-discourse, language that “writes back” to the colonists, becomes evident in the ways the characters narrate their identities (Tiffin, 1995, p. 96). Resistance through language and, as we argue here, symbolic gender rebellion must exist to move the characters forward in developing adult identities.

Post-colonial theories are frequently used to critique Western historicism and culture, specifically as an imposition on those cultures that demonstrate rebellion against Westernization (Ashcroft, 2000;

Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 1998). Feminist and post-colonial theories are connected by oppositional discourses “which attempt to redress an imbalance in society and culture” (Childs, Weber, & Williams, 2006, p. 126). Important especially for the two adolescent novels analyzed in this article are the intersections between colonist patriarchy and the main characters’ rejection of religious and gender boundaries.

In *Somebody’s Daughter* and *Meaning of Consuelo*, reflections of gender rebellion are negotiated within conditions of post-colonial discourse. In *Unsettling Narratives* (2007), Bradford writes, “The past enters the present in the form of relations of power, systems of government, modes of representation, and myths of national identity” (p. 4). The characters are positioned as offspring of these location conflicts. Cultural differences are always imbued with power and authority, and adolescent female characters must negotiate differences within their home and new cultures through a gendered lens. Characters in both novels experience identity conflict in their birth countries for different reasons. For example, Consuelo, in *Meaning of Consuelo*, must negotiate strict gender boundaries in 1950s Puerto Rican culture. Manufactured differences create tensions that intersect with race, class, gender, and sexuality as characters move in and out of colonized countries.

Gender and Postcolonial Identities

Somebody’s Daughter begins with the narrative of Sarah’s adoption as an infant, the story told to her by her adoptive family. Readers learn that Sarah spends her childhood and adolescence in Minnesota feeling out of place physically and psychologically. Sarah drops out of college in order to enroll in a language and cultural immersion program in Seoul, Korea. Learning a new language is difficult for Sarah; however, she uses the language skills she develops to search for information about her biological mother in her quest to (re)construct her Korean identity.

Sarah’s biological mother, Kyong Sook, narrates her own life story in alternating chapters, describing emotional conflicts and circumstances surrounding Sarah’s birth. Readers learn that Sarah’s biological father was an American working in the Peace Corp. When Kyong-Sook was a few weeks away from delivering the baby, Sarah’s father quickly left Korea (and a pregnant Kyong-Sook) because of violent protests

in early 1970s Korea. When the owner of the restaurant where Kyong-Sook worked was killed during the military takeover, Kyong-Sook was forced to return to her small hometown where her parents forced her to give up Sarah for adoption to avoid scarring the family name.

In Kyong-Sook’s narrative, the US becomes a contradiction in symbols as readers will recognize that the US’s peaceful “intrusion” of Peace Corps volunteers and armed forces violates Kyong-Sook’s small-town innocence. Kyong-Sook, who represents those Korean women left behind by US soldiers, relies on a counter-discourse, which Terdiman refers to as a “corrosive irony concerning the here-and-now” (p. 76). The US military occupations are implicated in the patriarchal order of both Korea and the US in the ways that they abuse and disrespect native Koreans.

In Korea, colonization takes on subtle forms through the occupation of the US military and Peace Corps. A hint of atrocities committed by the US military emerges in the stories told by Kyong-Sook and Sarah’s Korean American friend, Doug. The 1960s and 70s US military “camptowns,” serviced by Korean women, play out as a counter-narrative through Sarah’s new understanding of Korean-US relations (Moon, 1996, 1999). Cho (2006) explains the contradiction of Korean American experiences in this way: “On one side is the geopolitical narrative that the U.S. military has always been a benevolent protector in Korea. On the flip side is the story of how Korean Americans (most of whom arrived through a trajectory of U.S. military intervention) are well assimilated into the United States” (p. 311).

The political and sexual conditions surrounding Sarah’s and Doug’s biological parents inform Sarah’s identity and her rebellion against US constructions of Korea and Korea’s constructions of Korean Americans. Kyong-Sook and Doug’s mother are oppressed by different forms of power; however, they remind read-

Cultural differences are always imbued with power and authority, and adolescent female characters must negotiate differences within their home and new cultures through a gendered lens.

ers of the hidden history of Korean American gender relations. Dominant discourses never completely hide the past, and Kyong-Sook's personal experiences and Sarah's knowledge of the sexual abuse of women in US military camptowns counter US discourse of military benevolence.

In *Meaning of Consuelo*, Consuelo develops a close friendship with her homosexual cousin, Patricio,

who eventually leaves for New York to escape his homophobic family and neighborhood. The abuse of male homosexuals is juxtaposed with Consuelo's acceptance of Patricio's sexuality. Consuelo's gender identity is (re)constructed against the changing landscape of 1950s Puerto Rico, in which the US disrupts an agrarian Puerto Rico through the introduction of industrialization and modernization.

By Consuelo's definition, outsiders are those who refuse to accept Puerto Rican's strict gender guidelines that force women into submissive roles for the sake of *la familia*.

Although this US industrialization allows Consuelo's father to maintain steady employment, women's roles become unstable and shifting, violating boundaries of the patriarchal family and reinforcing a feminist counter-discourse that Consuelo creates throughout her narrative of adolescence.

Within the 1950s Puerto Rican framework, "women occupy a clear subordinate position to men, are limited to their roles as mothers, wives, and daughters, and are valued or judged by their moral behavior according to standards imposed on them by men" (Acosta-Belen, 1986, p. 127). Rules for moral behavior are strict, and women are not allowed to associate with those who would bring negative influences on home and family. Good Puerto Rican wives, for example, are not allowed to associate with homosexual men in public. Consuelo describes her first childhood memories of the neighborhood homosexual man as "outsider," or *El Fulano*, setting the scene for a plot in which Consuelo eventually constructs her own identity outside the norm of 1950s Puerto Rico. By Consuelo's definition, outsiders are those who refuse to accept Puerto Rican's strict gender guidelines that force women into submissive roles for the sake of

la familia.

Although she dismisses the US capitalistic intrusions into Puerto Rican culture in which Puerto Rican men are implicated, Consuelo eventually decides to move to New York City in order to remove herself from her family and community. Consuelo believes she must reject her family's acceptance of Puerto Rican patriarchy and the US colonists' form of capitalism in order to construct an identity that is uniquely hers. The irony of this move is that Consuelo cannot escape the capitalism and patriarchy of the US (Terdiman, 1985).

Both Sarah and Consuelo negotiate within and beyond national boundaries. They learn to "develop a tolerance for contradictions" (Cofer, 2005, p. 101) as they navigate the terrains of their birth countries. Sarah's connection to Korea is physical rather than cultural; she represents the unwelcome "colonizer" to other Koreans, who seem to view her Asian appearance as deceptive because she does not speak Korean nor is she familiar with Korean culture when she first arrives. Sarah's boyfriend, Doug, looks Caucasian but speaks fluent Korean; Doug had lived in Korea with his mother in a US military camptown until the third grade. Sarah and Doug are themselves contradictions, symbolic reminders of the ways the US has intruded into other cultures. The counter-discourses of femininity at work throughout this novel construct Sarah's character as feminine—attractive and deceptive at the same time, similar to the US military, which provided money and protection in exchange for sexual and economic power over Korean men and women. Sarah and Doug, although distanced by time and location, represent the counter-discourse of those who suffered from the injustices of US and Korean patriarchy.

Consuelo, on the other hand, is confronted by patriarchal discourse as it exists in her present. Although Consuelo is determined to cross gender boundaries, she first learns the language of dominance—a language that is not questioned (Terdiman, 1985). Consuelo narrates early experiences of female adolescence as a process of memorizing cultural restrictions for women. For example, Consuelo explains that after she begins menstruating, she inherited new duties as a "seniorita": "Then I was warned against the many things I could and should not do—an endless list of warnings" (Cofer, 2005, p. 50).

Women in *The Meaning of Consuelo* come to sym-

bolize the land and native Puerto Rico for Consuelo. The coqui frogs, for example, indigenous to Puerto Rico, could only be heard in the countryside where Consuelo's grandmother lived, because their song was drowned out in the cities by noises from manufacturing plants and factories. Like the voices of the frogs, the women and men who refuse to embrace Western capitalism are "lost in the noise of Western theorists as they talk *about* the colonized . . ." (Bradford, 2007, p. 8). Consuelo's father embraces the ideologies of those who arrive from the US mainland with their new technologies and goals of expansion. According to Choi (1998), "In the sacred mission of anti-colonial nationalism, the object of which is often to restore national masculinity, women of the colonized nation are often doubly oppressed" (p. 14). Consuelo associates men with US progress, but this progress destroyed the freedom and the beauty of land, nature, and home. In this association, Puerto Rican men are implicated in both the destruction of the land and in restrictions placed on women.

Unlike Consuelo in her native Puerto Rico, Sarah is the symbolic colonizer disguised as Korean native. Sarah's choices in *Somebody's Daughter* are restricted in Korea more by language and culture than by gender. For example, a Korean language classmate refers to her as a "Twinkie: Yellow on the outside, white on the inside" (Lee, 2005, p. 15). Sarah refers to herself as a "misfit, even in her native country" (p. 20). Sarah's identity is constructed physically by her Korean appearance in an Anglo world; in Korea, she renegotiates her gender and racial identity through her relationship with Doug. The silence surrounding the US camptowns in Korea is passed down as a "symbolic" trauma to children of the abused (Cho, 2006). The responsibility of US colonizers is highlighted when Doug and Sarah are almost arrested as outsiders during their visit to a US camptown. This public exposure of camptown life counters the historical silence that covers over the sexual and cultural colonialism.

Sarah eventually learns that her time in Korea is not so much a desire to find her birth mother, but a process she must experience in order to construct an identity beyond "adopted child." After visiting the US camptown, Sarah is able to comprehend the reality of Doug's childhood and the possibilities surrounding her birth. She admits that the "Korean princess" narratives she told herself were lies: ". . . what was underneath

was probably much much worse" (Lee, 2005, p. 112). Together, the narratives of Kyong-Sook, Sarah, and Doug contribute to post-colonial counter-discourse throughout the novel as a critique of contemporary Korea and the US military as they interfered in the lives of Korean women.

In *Meaning of Consuelo*, Consuelo's sexual identity is problematized by gender restrictions in her present and changing Puerto Rican landscape. Judith Butler (2003) suggests that "punishments for contesting the gender script" occur when gender performances become "out of turn" or established gender rules are violated (p. 426). Consuelo's revenge against her high school boyfriend temporarily "contests the script" of the female subordinate. Consuelo stands up to her European boyfriend, Wilhelm, who refuses to acknowledge her in public after she plans and initiates sex with him. She reconstructs her identity and sexual power when she "stalks" her ex-boyfriend to the point of embarrassment. Consuelo agrees to stop "stalking" her ex-boyfriend if he tells everyone that he was the sexual aggressor. As the fallen "Eve" who regains control, Consuelo eventually becomes the heroine at her school, receiving letters from other girls praising her for standing up to Wilhelm. Her "stalking" blatantly critiques rules of patriarchy; however, Consuelo maintains her power by pretending to follow the dominant discourse of Puerto Rican patriarchy as *La Sufrida*, the suffering woman.

Indigenous people developed strategies of resistance whose subversiveness often went unrecognized by the colonizers (Pratt, 1992). In this novel, Consuelo not only stands up to Puerto Rican society's double standard, but also subverts the authority of Wilhelm, a symbol for Western European patriarchy. Of course, the underlying message that Consuelo should be forced to defend her sexual behaviors is overshadowed by the simple explanation that patriarchy can be overcome by standing up to the male or simply leaving Puerto Rico for the US mainland.

Counter-discourses that portray women as both

In *Meaning of Consuelo*, Consuelo's sexual identity is problematized by gender restrictions in her present and changing Puerto Rican landscape.

victims and resisters compete for attention in the conflicts that occur throughout *Somebody's Daughter* and *Meaning of Consuelo*. Sarah's self-hatred of her Asian appearance reflects both American and Korean society's gaze on Korean Americans. Moon (1998) explains, "The power disparities between nations, or governments, have been transferred onto women's bodies, namely that the women of the weaker state

represent, through their prostituted bodies, the dominated and controlled position of the weaker state" (p. 141). Sarah's adoption by Caucasian parents saves her from constructions of the Korean American female as prostitute, at least in the US. However, the history and subjection of Korean Amer-

icans is complicated, especially when Sarah suddenly decides that her body and race are sexually attractive. This occurs when she initiates a sexual encounter with her Korean friend, Jun-Ho. Sarah explains, "There was something about being with someone of my own race—a mirror image of me . . . and it was rapidly being translated into sexual desire" (Lee, 2005, p. 145). This relationship is temporary, and it is only through this male gaze that Sarah begins to connect to the sexual attractiveness of her body. Her physical self-acceptance marks a change in identity development.

Narratives of imperialism also include religious domination in forms that extend beyond the first visits of missionaries. Pui-lan (2005) writes about the Western Christian colonialism that occurred through missionary work and theological scholarship, subordinating peoples to the idea of a "white Christian Europe" (p. 4). Some post-colonial theorists also include discussions of how the Christian West has constructed negative images of non-Christian "others" (Said, 1990). Although Sarah and Consuelo's family members find peace within the structure of organized religion, Sarah and Consuelo must eventually reject all means of Christianity in order to move beyond the boundaries of patriarchy. Colonized versions of Christianity mold the identities of Kyong-Sook, Sarah, and Consuelo in a variety of ways. Interpreting the

effects of colonial Christianity on the gender identity of female characters may move readers of these two novels toward a deeper understanding of these texts.

Postcolonial Religion and Adolescent Identity

Contributing to the characters' identity development are counter-discourses that demonstrate the complexity of gender and religion in post-colonial experiences. According to Roberta Trites (2000), "Adolescent novels that deal with religion as an institution demonstrate how discursive institutions are and how inseparable religion is from adolescents' affiliation with their parents' identity politics" (p. 18). Contradictions emerge in the unresolved identity crises of the female characters as they struggle to discover themselves in relation to who they are and what their religion may indicate as taught to them by societal mores, parents, and traditions; identity constructions are further juxtaposed with a profound sense of alienation or self-imposed diaspora compared to the characters' own realized voices.

In Kyong Sook's narrative of 1950s Korea, women convert to Christianity in order to receive a formal education; however, after the conversion process, Korean women were not fully accepted into the Western Christian community and were ostracized by non-Christian Koreans. This is demonstrated throughout the narratives of Kyong-Sook as she describes her aunt's life as a Christian, single woman, living in poverty.

Violence against women in the name of religion took place in many forms in colonialist history. For example, in Africa the indigenous people were reduced to "less than human," and women were often treated as mere sexual objects. As Boaduo and Gumbi (2010) write, "[T]he colonialist coloured people are the direct off springs of *the colonialists and the poor African women subjects they raped and impregnated during their trampling expedition* with no respect to culture, traditions, and customs of the people they met" (p. 45; our emphasis). When persons are dehumanized, objectified, or reified, authorities determine who belongs. The choices available to colonized peoples, if any, are limited by the authority of the patriarchy and the church. Kyong-Sook's story includes her present life in Korea along with narratives of gender discrimi-

Narratives of imperialism also include religious domination in forms that extend beyond the first visits of missionaries.

nation and abuse she experienced from Koreans and Americans. Sarah and Consuelo experience a trans-generational form of imperialist religion, and their eventual rejection of Western Christianity implicates organized systems of religion as responsible for gender and racial discrimination in the colonial project.

Although organized religion plays a part in the family rituals of Consuelo and Sarah, the religious experiences of Kyong-Sook are contrasted with Sarah and Consuelo's eventual disregard for organized religion. In fact, underlying experiences of Korean and US Christianity bind the narratives of Kyong-Sook and Sarah as they experience Christianity in different ways. Feminist theologian Rita Gross (1996) explains that Asian Christians practice a Christian culture that contains a "heritage of colonial domination" (p. 54). Such domination is reflected in *Somebody's Daughter* as the Christian missionaries use abusive persuasive tactics to convert Kyong-Sook's aunt.

However, conversion to Christianity was also an opportunity for women to escape an oppressive Korean family life. For example, in *Somebody's Daughter*, Kyong-Sook's mother rebels against the missionaries, only to enter into a marriage with a violent husband; on the other hand, Kyong-Sook's aunt, who embraces Christianity, eventually lives in peaceful (but financially poor) independence. Although Christianity saves Kyong-Sook's aunt from servitude as a Korean wife and mother, she must trade one form of servitude for another in her "marriage" to Christ. As Adams (2010) writes, "Objectification permits an oppressor to view another being as an object. The oppressor then violates this being as an object . . . by object-like treatment" (p. 73).

Kyong-Sook, Kyong-Sook's aunt, and Sarah are contextually divorced from defining their identities without the significant male (brother, husband, father, father-god); however, Sarah and Consuelo define their own identities by eventually rejecting both cultural and religious constraints. The main characters' religious and spiritual development also becomes problematic because the imposed Christian religious and cultural values are not inherently theirs; the values are imposed upon them oppressively from traditions that are not indigenous to their culturally religious identities. These cultural identities include Confucianism and Buddhism—almost dismissed—in Sarah's Ameri-

can/Korean dynamic and the Tainos in Consuelo's Puerto Rico.

Although Kyong-Sook and Sarah never find each other, the narrative suggests that they find peace within themselves, accepting their lives and places in the end. Perhaps the reader is asked to subscribe to the idea that Sarah is protected by her adopted family as they ignore her Korean heritage, which stands as the Other, the alienated. In *Meaning of Consuelo*, Consuelo is not merely the daughter of her father even as her mother demonstrates the appropriate place for women. "Mami, at times, spoke like the Pope himself" (Cofer, 2005, p. 10), while she herself suffered through the anguish of the infidelity of Papi. Sarah and Consuelo are marginalized by those that are supposed to protect and nurture them, yet the colonial mindset functions both as protection and a "mechanism of social ordering" (Wood, 1999, p. 1). This "protection" is exacerbated by the religious traditions to which the parents succumb.

The oldest etymological root of *religion*—with some expression given to possible variations, *religio*, *religiare* from the Latin—simply means to bind together. That which binds the community together is often the notion of the most sacred and religious systems developed around that concept. Sarah and Consuelo are nearly consumed by the colonial patriarchy that lives and breathes within their family dynamic—Sarah, because her Korean identity is lost both within her Minnesota Lutheran family and her exclusion in Korea; Consuelo, because she is trapped in her female role within the context of the 1950 marketization of Puerto Rico. Christianity in *Somebody's Daughter* is narrated as a discourse of patriarchal control, as when Sarah's adopted parents explain God's role in Sarah's adoption. A male minister from the family church tells eight-year-old Sarah that her birth parents are dead, and their death was "preordained." "God called your Korean parents home so that you could become the daughter of your mother and father," the minister tells

The main characters' religious and spiritual development also becomes problematic because the imposed Christian religious and cultural values are not inherently theirs

Sarah; Sarah concludes that “God is a murderer” (Lee, 2005, p. 1), and severs all connections with religion.

Religions fail to be credible in the cases of Sarah and Consuelo. Peter Berger (1990) writes,

The individual’s innermost being is considered to be the fact of his belonging to the collectivity—the clan, the tribe, the nation or what not. The identification of the individual with all others with whom he significantly interacts makes for a merging of individual being with others, both in happiness and in misfortune. It is carried in his blood unless he denies his own being. (p. 60)

During the journey for both Sarah and Consuelo, as they face processes of identity development, this banner of organized religion utterly fails, unless, of course, they acquiesce to those who hold the most powerful remnants of the colonialist patriarchy.

Kyong-Sook eventually embraces Christianity when, in mid-life, she falls in love and marries a

Christian minister. The discourse of Christianity as patriarchal and inspirational are at odds with each other, especially as Kyong-Sook narrates her mid-life conversion to Christianity. Kyong-Sook, happily married to a Christian minister, describes her physical feelings for her husband in this way: “Their bodies fit together as nicely as the yin-yang symbol on their country’s flag. She was disappointed on the nights

he didn’t touch her” (Lee, 2005, p. 207). Kyong-Sook finds solace in her religion and her marriage, but places her husband’s feelings and concerns above her own desires when she ends her search for Sarah.

Religion as a source of inspiration remains in the background for Sarah as she searches for the truth about her birth mother in Korea. Sarah must reject the patriarchal Christianity of the US in order to embrace the idea that her birth mother is alive. When the system does not answer the needs of some or, as in patriarchal and postcolonial traditions, is forced upon a people, those traditions continue and further marginalize or alienate women; they are not bound to the community of those who share in the notion of the

most sacred by their own dignified choice. In this context, we see Consuelo separate herself from her family and Catholicism in order to construct an identity that is her own. Although Consuelo prays to God to send a guardian angel to watch over her schizophrenic sister, she must reject the gender boundaries taught to her by her mother and other family members. Consuelo narrates, “I belong to myself. I was not like my mother. . . . She was ruled by ghosts and their dead words: *la decencia, el sacrificio, el deber de la mujer Buena, para la familia* It was time to learn a new language” (Cofer, 2005, pp. 131–132). Consuelo’s “new language” is a counter-discourse that readers must imagine when the novel ends with her departure to New York.

Sarah and Consuelo are treated in ways that fragment them as young women into pieces for consumption, labels, or categories by patriarchal, imperialistic, and colonial mindsets. In the context of the two novels, Kyong-Sook, Sarah, and Consuelo are objectified in their place. First, Kyong-Sook is the unmarried mother; later, she is known in her community as the childless wife of a minister. Sarah is stereotyped as the Korean girl who is “white” in both Korea and the United States. Consuelo is seen only as the female daughter, sister, and reified girlfriend. In order to develop their self-worth as individuals, the female characters must participate in adolescent sexual and religious rebellion, as is often the pattern in adolescent identity novels. This adolescent rebellion also counters the discourse of the patriarchal family.

Adolescent Identity and the Post-Colonial Family

In Pui-lan’s (2005) analysis of diasporic and borderland discourses, she recommends that feminists “interrogate how narratives of communal identities have been constructed leaving out women and others whose identities have been policed and or negated” (p. 47). As Consuelo leaves Puerto Rico, she acknowledges respect for the religions and rituals of the island, yet seems to relegate religion to her Puerto Rican identity. If religious tradition depends on “home” and “roots,” Consuelo must redefine her own sense of religion and spirituality in New York; however, the novel ends with Consuelo’s departure, leaving her new family identity to readers’ imaginations.

When the system does not answer the needs of some or, as in patriarchal and postcolonial traditions, is forced upon a people, those traditions continue and further marginalize or alienate women.

Even in an age of individualism, family and community are important; accordingly, these female-authored texts demonstrate post-colonial contradictions by resisting and, at times, aligning with dominant ideologies (Bradford, 2006). By the end of both novels, the patriarchal, heteronormative family loses some of its power in the counter-discourses of these identity narratives. In *Somebody's Daughter*, Sarah chooses to return home to her adopted family in Minnesota, ending the search for her birth mother, more comfortable with a reconstructed "Korean-American" identity. In *Meaning of Consuelo*, Consuelo's escape from her Puerto Rican nuclear family includes plans to live with her cousin's homophobic father and extended family in New York. Although the underlying colonialist discourse of Consuelo's decision to leave is slightly overshadowed by the narrative of sexual freedom and power that Consuelo had finally experienced in Puerto Rico, Consuelo's move to the land of the colonists suggests that patriarchy and heterosexism continue to be central to the adolescent female identity even as she may—we do not know—still be searching for her own identity. In leaving behind her family, Consuelo rejects the Catholic religion that seemed to provide both solace and limitation for her mother.

By the end of *Somebody's Daughter*, any feminist critique of family is subverted when Sarah returns to the US to integrate her new sense of self with her adopted family. Kyong-Sook also gives over to the patriarchal family model when she decides not to search for Sarah any longer. "She wasn't meant to find the answer," Kyong-Sook thought. "God had given her the answer" (Lee, 2005, p. 242). The underlying narrative is patriarchal in two ways—Kyong-Sook allows God to make this decision about giving up the search, and she gives in to her husband's feelings of betrayal when Kyong-Sook tells him about a daughter from a previous relationship. As the "good Korean wife," Kyong-Sook places her husband above her own desire to know her daughter. When Sarah returns to the US at the end of the novel, she watches as a new Korean baby is handed over to an adoptive mother. Sarah wonders if she should warn the baby what her life would be like, then hurries to embrace her Minnesotan family, "closing the distance between them" (Lee, 2005, p. 262). The subtext of the novel reinforces the underlying ideologies associated with the traditional

American family; at the same time, discourses of imperialism are swept away, relegated to Korean history. After all, adopting children from third world countries into their families is acceptable in the eyes of Christian America.

Ruether (2000) asserts that the contemporary family must be re-imagined as part of a "redemptive community" (p. 230).

The counter-discourse of Sarah's and Consuelo's identity development suggest that the contemporary definition of "family values" must somehow be deconstructed to avoid a future of men who colonize, control, or distort the meaning of "family." Neither of these novels provides images of possibilities for a reconstructed, spiritually nurturing family and community, perhaps because this is the future that must be imagined by contemporary adolescent readers.

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Issues of Personal and National Identity in Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*

When I was a high school English student, we read two novels by authors who were not white Westerners: Pearl S. Buck's *The Good Earth* and the seminal *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe. This was unfortunate, as several of my classmates were not white (and seldom saw themselves represented in our assigned readings), and all of us were interested in life outside our bucolic, insular Appalachian town. Increasingly, high school teachers find themselves seeking a more diverse offering for their students. Fortunately, *Purple Hibiscus* (Adichie, 2003) is a novel that brings with it a wealth of opportunity for teachers and students alike.

Purple Hibiscus, by third-generation Nigerian novelist Chimamanda Adichie, is (at its most basic level) a coming-of-age tale. This novel follows the paths of a pair of Nigerian siblings. Fifteen-year-old Kambili and her older brother Jaja must face political unrest, uncaring classmates, and a strict home life. They also must deal with a father whose severe abuse will leave lasting scars—both physical and emotional. When the siblings visit their aunt, a woman who is the polar opposite of their authority figure at home, they begin to ask hard questions about the correctness of how they have been raised; they avoid becoming small mirrors of their father, instead blossoming into their own individuality. Through political turmoil and their father's murder, Kambili and Jaja Achike leave childhood behind.

Adichie, born in Nigeria in 1977, has won several awards for her fiction, including the 2007 Orange Broadband Prize for Fiction and a MacArthur Founda-

tion Fellowship in 2008. As a third-generation Nigerian writer, Adichie was shaped by events she was not alive to witness. Ogaga Okuyade (2011) refers to such authors (Okey Ndibe, David Odhiambo, and Unoma Azuah among them) as “new wine in antiquated kegs . . . bequeath[ing] the badge of newness and ‘nowness’ to their arts,” before going on to assert that “it becomes glaring that literature cannot escape contemporary history which furnishes it with raw materials” (p. 138). Although the historical events (namely the Biafran conflict) explored in the novel have passed, their repercussions are still felt by Nigerians, both in Nigeria and abroad.

Purple Hibiscus explores the issues of ethnic tensions and political unrest in Nigeria as parallels for coming of age and issues of identity definition. The story, although set in Nigeria, is common to adolescents from other times and places—a perspective supported by the fact that it has been translated into languages as disparate as Lithuanian, Polish, Castilian, Turkish, and Malayalam. It is the story of discovering oneself amidst cruel peers and crueler parents in a seemingly brutal and uncaring world. The allegory between personal and national identity elevates this story from a typical narrative of adolescent angst into a thoughtful analysis of the formation of self; further, it does so in a way that dissipates some of the isolation that typically marks adolescence, allowing a reader to belong to a larger world.

Susan Z. Andrade (2011) refers to both of Adichie's novels (2003's *Purple Hibiscus* and 2006's *Half of a Yellow Sun*) as representing “a politics of the family

while quietly but clearly telling stories of the nation” (p. 91). Sophia O. Ogwude (2011) claims *Purple Hibiscus* follows the “well-worn theme” of “the colonial invasion of Africa in the late nineteenth century and the consequent cultural conflict between the colonising power and the colonised other” (p. 110), firmly locating it alongside works by Chinua Achebe, Christopher Okigbo, and John Munonye in which “religious fanaticism has been explored as ‘cultural hostility’ in the African novel” (p. 111). Onyemaechi Udumukwu (2011) considers Adichie to be a feminist writer whose works “are animated by attempts to engage traditional constructs of the woman”; in *Purple Hibiscus* particularly, “self-knowledge and self-expression [especially of women] become *sine qua non* for action” (p. 184).

While it is easy to read this tale as essentially feminist and the novel demands a post-colonial interpretation due to its post-colonial setting, it is important not to ignore the aspect of *bildungsroman* and the presence of Jaja. The nature of identity-seeking requires a somewhat psychoanalytic approach, at least insofar as the *bildungsroman* is concerned, and it is through this lens that adolescent readers will be able to gain the greatest appreciation for and dialogue with this book. Furthermore, the novel’s authority figures are usually looked at in the literature as either aids or impediments to Kambili. (Andrade [2011], for example, focuses on Eugene as an oppressor, while Okuyade [2011] looks to Ifeoma as the foundation for Kambili’s burgeoning “voice.”) However, they are also role models in the most real of senses, as their identities might become Kambili’s own (even as their allegorical identities might become Nigeria’s). This article seeks not to traverse the well-worn ground of post-colonialism for its own sake, but rather to use that aspect of the novel as a framework for the discussion of identity creation.

Nigeria’s Past

While Adichie’s second novel, *Half of a Yellow Sun*, has the Nigerian Civil War (also known as the Nigeria-Biafra War) as its direct setting, *Purple Hibiscus* addresses the situation in more indirect ways. Adichie uses the war as the allegorical, rather than the literal, antecedent for her novel. The war, a political coup aimed at altering the balance of power among several ethnic groups, is also a result of the British coloniza-

tion of Nigeria, for this colonization attempted to unite the disparate tribes into one nation.

The earliest Nigerian civilization is traced to the fifth century. The next several centuries saw the rise of several powerful kingdoms, each with separate governments and languages. British colonial rule began in Lagos in 1861. However, colonial Nigeria had been rife with problems, and “the fundamental cause had been the tribal hostility embedded in this enormous and artificial nation. For Nigeria had never been more than an amalgam of peoples welded together in the interests and for the benefit of a European power” (Forsyth, 1969, p. 11). After a century fraught with administrative difficulties, England granted full independence to Nigeria in 1960. In essence, England pulled out colonizing forces without leaving any real infrastructure behind; the administrative issues were left to be dealt with by ethnic groups as many and varied as the problems themselves. This created a perfect storm of conditions for political unrest and identity crises.

Most of the population of Nigeria following the departure of British forces was located in the Hausa and Fulani communities of the northern part of the country. However, the southern and eastern parts of the country were more industrialized and educated (having, in fact, one of the highest literacy rates in Africa at the time). However, the increasing political and economic power of the Igbo people threatened the other ethnic groups: “[A]s the power and influence of the Igbo grew, it seemed that they became more and more the objects of hate and distrust” (Schwab, 1971, p. 4). A political coup on January 15, 1966, led by several Igbo (including Major General Johnson T. U. Aguiyi), was intended to stem this tide of hate by forcing Nigerian nationalism; Aguiyi suspended the 1960 constitution and dissolved the federation of separate states. This action sparked three months of anti-Igbo riots, the assassination of Aguiyi on July 29, 1966, and the deaths of some 5000 Igbo in the north by late September of that year (p. 5). This, in turn, sparked the secession of Biafra as untold numbers of Igbo returned to the east. However, Nigeria feared losing control of lucrative oil fields in the Biafra region, leading to the Nigeria-Biafra War. After many deaths on both sides, Biafra forces surrendered. Biafra suffered more heavily than the other Nigerian forces, shrinking “to an estimated 1/10 of its original size and to a population of 3.2 million [from an estimated 14 million] during the

fighting” (p. 115). The end of the war was not the end of the problems, however. Post-Biafra Nigeria has also been riddled with difficulties, varying from extreme violence between religious groups to government corruption and an unstable economy.

Post-colonial Nigeria, emerging into its future, is like an adolescent child—navigating both the past and the possibilities of the future, attempting to choose its own path and determine the best course toward its national goals. Like adolescence, however, the path is unsteady, pitted with peril, and fraught with unseen contingencies. This is particularly difficult given that adolescence is a time marked by internal struggles of identity. The citizens of Nigeria are attempting to navigate through an abundance of history, ranging from the histories of individual tribes and religions to struggles suffered on a national level. In order to move forward, the citizenship must be able to forge a new identity. They must work together to build a new, postcolonial nation, uniting their disparate individual histories. The necessarily varied hopes of each of these groups create a multitude of potential futures; *Purple Hibiscus*’s authority figures represent the strongest or most likely of these, and the future that Kambili and Jaja will eventually choose must echo the eventual future of Nigeria.

The Construction of Identity

The children of *Purple Hibiscus*, Jaja and Kambili Achike, seek to carve out their own identities. This is also true of Nigeria, “a young country in several striking ways, and the most telling is the age of its people: well over half are less than thirty; an amazing forty-four percent are under fifteen years of age” (Hawley, 2009, p. 16). The youth of Nigeria are tasked with rebuilding the nation, depopulated after a destructive war. Similarly, as Kambili and Jaja’s family disintegrates, they must come into their own, a task metaphorically equal to the struggle of Nigeria to form its own identity in its post-colonial society; according to Madelaine Hron (2009), “the child’s quest for a sociocultural identity is inextricably linked to issues arising from postcolonialism and globalization” (p. 27). The many authority figures who provide models for the children represent the many facets of Nigeria’s identities—present, past, and possible futures.

Kambili and Jaja are allegories for burgeoning post-colonial Nigeria, which must also face an adolescent-like emergence into an identity separate from its colonial roots. The fact that both children are ethnically Igbo, a culture and ethnicity ripped apart by violence, indicates that the identity of Nigeria rests in how well its people can overcome the pain of their past. Children and adolescents do not have the ability to fully integrate all of their personality characteristics and influences into a cohesive whole; this is a skill inherent in the adult brain:

Cognitive-developmental advances promoting greater differentiation conspire with socialization pressures to develop different selves in different relational contexts. Cognitive advances also allow the adolescent to construct self-attributes that represent *abstractions* about the self, based upon the ability to integrate trait labels into higher-order generalizations. However, these abstract representations are highly compartmentalized or overdifferentiated, and therefore the adolescent can only think about each as isolated characteristics of the self.” (Harter, 1999, p. 66)

In each of the authority figures, in each of the potential futures for Nigeria, Kambili and Jaja are faced with aspects of themselves that are fragmentary and in conflict with one another. Discovering their selfhoods will require navigation through all of the pieces of their identities, including familial, cultural, and political influences. Emerging Nigeria faces the same difficult task. Realizing a cohesive sense of self is by no means certain for the children or for Nigeria.

Kambili and Jaja are bombarded by opposing forces: indigenous and colonial, Pagan and Christian, Nigerian and English, familial loyalty and individual identity. They, like “many groups effectively inhabit two worlds simultaneously, navigating between indigenous and dominant Western systems” (Meskell, 2005, p. 76). They also are trapped in that liminal space between child and adult, and their successful navigation of their models for adulthood—the authority figures—will determine how well the children are able to grow into their futures and, by extension, how Nigeria will do the same.

Realizing a cohesive sense of self is by no means certain for the children or for Nigeria.

Personal and Cultural Past

Any individual or nation attempting to navigate a new identity must first come to terms with its past. For nations, this means recognizing the roles that all cultural groups (as well as colonizing groups) have played

Eugene is the consummate colonizer, seeking to establish order as he sees it onto his family.

in developing a national culture. For children, this means evaluating experiences and attempting to make sense of situations that may be beyond their understanding. In *Purple Hibiscus*, Papa-Nnukwu (Kambili and Jaja's paternal grandfather) represents indigenous culture, specifically

that of Igboland. Papa-Nnukwu, as all of the Achikes, is ethnically Igbo; however, he is the only one who practices Igbo cultural traditions. It is this culture, combined with the colonizing culture, that has created the sibling futures of Nigeria that Eugene and Ifeoma, Papa-Nnukwu's children, represent: autocracy and democracy. Like indigenous culture giving way in the face of a colonizer, he is a father that must let his children become their own individuals—informed by, but not clones of, Papa-Nnukwu himself.

As a representative of colonization and autocracy, Eugene feels threatened by Papa-Nnukwu. For this reason, Kambili and Jaja are forbidden from visiting their grandfather without the express permission of Eugene, and then for only 15 minutes at a time. When they do visit, they are forbidden from eating or drinking in his home, lest they ingest something “unholy” or “idolatrous”—in other words, lest they imbibe thoughts or ideas contradictory to Eugene's own. Kambili and Jaja are left to grow up with a terribly imbalanced worldview, informed only by the limited and somewhat tyrannical way of life represented by their father; they have no comprehension of cultural heritage.

As the grandfather, Papa-Nnukwu should hold the role of the ultimate patriarch, but like Cronus dethroned by Zeus, Papa-Nnukwu is usurped by Eugene and relegated to having no authority. This is the fate of indigenous cultures under a colonizing power. Papa-Nnukwu is metonymic for a pure cultural past. This past cannot remain pure when colonizing forces

invade its sphere. Similarly, Nigeria and its representatives—Kambili and Jaja—must adapt and change, finding identity in the new world; the old world, the world of these children's parents and grandparents, is no more, and its rules cannot indiscriminately apply.

Papa-Nnukwu's death is a pivotal event, allowing both Kambili and Jaja to approach adulthood with a greater understanding of themselves and a wider appreciation for familial and cultural context. The clearest image of Papa-Nnukwu comes only after his death. As he lays stretched on his mat in Ifeoma's living room, Kambili “imagined [her] forebears a century ago, the ancestors Papa-Nnukwu prayed to, charging in to defend their hamlet, coming back with lolling heads on long sticks” (Adichie, p. 183). This culture clearly has no place in a modern world, where the violence between groups is not for mere tribal dominance or for defense but is state-sponsored.

Papa-Nnukwu is as much a product of this idea of primal justice as he is a product of ancestor worship. While Kambili was a child, she was bound only to the history and the culture that her father allowed her to see; she was the newly colonized land, the infant nation of emerging Nigeria, and her father shaped her entire outlook. However, as Kambili enters her adolescence and incipient womanhood, she begins to shape her own identity. She has begun to explore her history and that which has shaped her (Papa-Nnukwu and the Igbo culture, although indelibly changed by English colonization, have certainly shaped Kambili through their impact on Nigerian history)—yet, with Papa-Nnukwu's death, Kambili loses first-person contact with this history and must navigate only through her memory of it. This history, then, behaves toward futures in the same way that Papa-Nnukwu's grandfather behaves toward Kambili: they become frozen and static.

The Dissolution of Imperial Nigeria

When an indigenous culture passes, there must be another culture to fill the vacuum. Fittingly, Eugene Achike takes over the role of defining Nigeria, replacing the indigenous culture with the colonial culture that usurped it. Eugene is the consummate colonizer, seeking to establish order as he sees it onto his family. He embraces Western values, European religion, and consumerism; he also seeks to impose these same

values onto his wife and children.

Like any colonizing country treats the people under colonial rule, Eugene assumes that the needs of his children are the same as his own. He does not consider that their needs may be unique and uniquely suited to their circumstances. At the very least, Eugene assumes that his needs are of more pressing importance than anyone else's, particularly his children. Eugene controls the smallest details of their lives, scheduling them for every minute of every day; it is presupposed that Eugene will determine his children's future. Kambili "had never thought about the university where [she] would go or what [she] would study. When the time came, Papa would decide" (Adichie, p. 7).

Kambili blithely accepts that her father will control her; she has not yet made her run for independence, nor does she understand that her future is hers to decide. Eugene even interferes with Kambili's social life by making her run to the car following her last class, rather than lingering to socialize with the other students. On the one occasion Kambili takes a bit longer to reach the vehicle, "Papa slapped [her] left and right cheeks at the same time, so his huge palms left parallel marks on [her] face and ringing in [her] ears for days" (Adichie, p. 51). It is typical of colonizers to force their own culture onto the indigenous group. When the indigenous group resists, or simply has trouble adopting to the new culture, the response is often violent.

Eugene does, however, truly love his children, and truly believes that he is acting in their best interests. According to Ernest Gellner (1997), "High Culture is so to speak normative; it considers itself to be the model of human comportment, and it spurns Low Culture as a miserable distortion or aberration. It may treat Low Culture with indifference as well as contempt, or alternatively it may feel that, in a perfect world, Low Culture should be transformed in its own image" (p. 39).

Of course, "High Culture" is self-defined, and usually indicates an imperialist force exerting control over an indigenous population, but the concept also indicates more than a simple desire for territory or resources. The term "High Culture" also indicates that the colonizers believe they are bringing the light of civilization to conquered peoples. Eugene's colonialism has a more missionary spirit than a spirit of

conquest—he seeks to convert and enlighten rather than simply conquer, and he truly believes in the righteousness of his actions. This, however, does not stop Eugene from being a force of violence in the lives of his children. His tea, for example, a symbol both of colonialism and of his love for his children "was always too hot, always burned [Kambili's] tongue . . . [Kambili] knew that when the tea burned [her] tongue, it burned Papa's love into [her]" (Adichie, p. 8). Kambili has accepted Eugene's ostensible motivation; she believes that he is acting in her best in-

terests, even when his actions clearly show otherwise. As long as both Kambili and Jaja maintain this belief, Eugene's colonizing forces (and those of English colonialism in Nigeria) will remain in control.

Eugene lives his life with the arrogance of a man whose power is certain, unchallenged, and unending. His selfish arrogance is so extreme that Ifeoma considers him to be challenging the highest power that exists: "Eugene has to stop doing God's job," says Ifeoma; "God is big enough to do his own job" (Adichie, p. 95). Jaja does not perceive his father as Godlike, openly defying his father by refusing to attend church and defending his sister against unjust punishment. Jaja's defiance of his father, therefore, is an assault not merely on the power of his father but also on the power of the ruling class. It is the defiance of the subjugated classes under the powers of colonialism. This defiance also challenges the underlying beliefs of the ruling class—that is, that they have a divine right or duty to be masters of other races. Therefore, Eugene has a difficult time accepting Jaja's incipient adulthood and its concomitant self-rule, for Jaja's independence (whether of thought or deed) questions Eugene's divine right to rule. This is why "when Papa threw the missal at Jaja, it was not just the figurines that came tumbling down, it was everything" (p. 15). It was Eugene's right to rule; it was Eugene's unquestioned autonomy; it was the assumed inferiority of the subjugated that came crashing to the Earth.

Eugene is not merely a colonizing figure, but also the ultimate figure of authority; rebelling against his

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and unending.**

rule is unthinkable for Kambili, who had never known her own autonomy. Eugene acts almost in the capacity of a feudal king, whose law is absolute and whose reign, at least in Kambili's eyes, is both immutable and eternal. Kambili never considers that a change in regime will come. She never considers "the possibility that Papa would die, that Papa could die . . . he had seemed immortal" (Adichie, p. 287). When Eugene is killed, Kambili finds herself without a guiding force, notwithstanding the minor rebellions she entertained concerning Papa-Nnukwu. Even these rebellions were an attempt to grasp at an external leadership, for

Papa-Nnukwu himself represents a regime, although one that been thwarted by the forces of colonization that Eugene himself personifies. These forces are quite European in nature; "most of the wars of European colonial expansion, from 1500 to 1950, can be seen as wars of coercive regime change" (Orend, 2006, p. 190). Eugene's authority and social standing repre-

sent the regime change of imperialism; Eugene's murder at the hands of his wife represents another sudden regime change, this one the overthrow of colonizing powers. Eugene's death is, at heart, militaristic: the old guard falls to the new guard in a violent coup. Jaja and Kambili (and by extension, ascending Nigeria) will clean up after the old regime for years to come, even as they work to determine their own identities.

Nigeria's Political Potential

When discussing the potential identities of Nigeria, recognizing the cultural history and current regime are only part of the equation. Identities are also formed upon hopes and goals for the future and continue to be shaped as these potential futures come—or do not come—to pass. Two potential futures of Nigeria are embodied in Father Amadi and Auntie Ifeoma. Both of these characters are surrogate authority figures whose influence expands the farther Kambili and Jaja get from Eugene; however, both of these characters ultimately leave Nigeria, indicating that the futures they

represent cannot come to pass.

Father Amadi is a young pastor at the Catholic church in Nsukka, the university city where Kambili and Jaja visit extended family. Whereas Eugene is Nigeria—that is, representing the failed goals of colonizing Europe, Father Amadi is one of the imagined futures of Nigeria, representative of the ideal of Nigerian unification. More interested in people than power, he has successfully blended the colonizing culture with the indigenous one. The bulk of Nigerian Catholics reside in Igboland, and Father Amadi is the ideal Nigerian Catholic. His songs of praise are sung both in English and Igbo, and he is far less bound to European Catholic tradition than Eugene.

Although Kambili could sense that life with her father—symbolizing life in Nigeria under the current regime—was not the way life was supposed to be, devoid of both joy and spontaneity, she does not begin to understand this consciously until her stay in Nsukka, where Kambili meets Father Amadi. At first, Kambili is unable to socialize with Father Amadi; she has been raised in an environment that makes her place in the Church abundantly clear. But Father Amadi wishes to make Kambili a participant in her religion rather than a passive recipient. Through unceasing effort, Father Amadi is able to draw Kambili out of her shell.

Like the other church leaders, Father Amadi is a figure of authority, yet he is a figure that rules through love rather than coercion. In this respect, he represents the Nigeria that should exist—Nigeria as it would be if the leaders were more perfect and showed more humanitarianism to the people. Kambili, being a child (and perfectly representing the third-generation citizens of post-Biafra Nigeria who cannot conceive of different rule, having never known any other), has difficulty responding to Father Amadi; under his aegis at confession, she finds it difficult "to feel penitent now . . . [she felt] guilty instead because [she] could not focus on [her] sins, could not think of anything except how near he was" (Adichie, p. 175). Despite her confusion, Kambili senses that Father Amadi represents the way that life is supposed to be; true, she does not have conscious understanding of this, but instead is aware of a rather vague, unidentified dissatisfaction with her father's rule.

Kambili longs to find a place in Father Amadi's world. However, she finds herself unable to converse

When discussing the potential identities of Nigeria, recognizing the cultural history and current regime are only part of the equation.

freely with him. Kambili is so indoctrinated in her father's brand of Christianity (and way of life) that she cannot mold herself to Father Amadi's way of living. However, she can sense the beauty and acceptance of Father Amadi, and can by extension sense the pure perfection of the life that he represents—a society that embraces the colonial culture and the indigenous culture equally. It is a culture that embraces all people, rather than casting off those who do not fit the stringent rules it has arbitrarily chosen. Kambili so longs to belong to this world that she “was grateful that he had said [her] name, that he remembered [her] name” (Adichie, p. 164). The simple act of recognizing Kambili includes her in Nigeria's perfect future.

However, Father Amadi knows that his perfect, inclusive future is something that can exist only in hopeful dreams. The road to peace is difficult at best, and post-Biafra Nigeria could hardly be considered ideal conditions. Though he will be forced to leave for Europe, he intends, while he can, to include Kambili as much as she wishes to be included. His behavior is so marked that those around him believe him to be in love with her; Amadi himself tells Kambili that he “wanted to take [her]. And after that first day, [he] wanted to take [her] with [him] everyday” (Adichie, p. 280). Father Amadi likes Kambili as much as she likes him. He sees her as the future of Nigeria. It is Kambili who represents the direction in which the country will go; naturally, Father Amadi desires that Nigeria follow the perfect imagined future that he himself symbolizes.

Rather than staying in Nigeria where he represents a bygone hope, Father Amadi is forced to move to Europe. Despite his good intentions, he remains informed by the same colonizing forces as Eugene, so he also fails. Ironically, the colonizer must return to the land of the colonizers. Although he does not return to England, the country that colonized Nigeria, he does go to Germany, which also maintained African colonies. This move takes place at the same time as the death of Eugene. Both colonizers are lost at the same moment in history. This moment allegorically represents the end of the Biafran conflict. It also represents the moment when Nigeria had to stand on its own, emerging into its own identity as an adolescent emerging into incipient adulthood. This transition does not take place overnight, and is imperfect; Nigeria maintains loose bonds with England, and Kambili

is still a child who needs a father figure.

Ifeoma, Eugene's sister, is his opposite in nearly every way. She allows her children a great deal of freedom, in contrast to the tight rule Eugene maintains. Respectful of cultural tradition but not bound to it, and educated in Western thoughtforms, Ifeoma is representative of the democratic option for Nigeria's imagined future. It is a future where all people, regardless of ethnic group, religion, or gender, are allowed to have a voice. Although Ifeoma and Eugene share the same blood, they represent wildly divergent styles of rulership: Eugene, the somewhat tyrannical imperialism; Ifeoma, the modern Western democracy.

To Kambili, Ifeoma is larger than life. In truth, she is a large woman, and “the wrapper that stopped above her calves would stop above the ankles of an average-size woman” (Adichie, p. 278). In opposition to the quiet life that draws into itself and leaves empty spaces (the life embodied by Eugene and his family), Ifeoma expands, life and energy filling all available space. Additionally, Ifeoma does not hold power within the church, as did Eugene; rather, Ifeoma is a teacher who is concerned not with forcing her viewpoints onto others but instead with teaching others to become actively engaged in forging their own viewpoints.

The way that Ifeoma raises her children is diametrically opposed to the way that Eugene raises his. Eugene raises his children on the principle of fear. They are able to achieve only what Eugene wants them to achieve, and then they only achieve because they are afraid of the consequences of failure. Kambili and Jaja do not nurse any ambitions of their own, but are simply being made into machines. Ifeoma, on the other hand, allows her children to nurse ambitions and to make mistakes, for she believes that this is the only way that the children will grow. Her parenting philosophy is about “setting higher and higher jumps for them in the way she talked to them, in what she expected of them. She did it all the time believing they would scale the rod. And they did.

“It was different for Jaja and [Kambili]. [They] did not scale the rod because [they] believed [they]

The simple act of recognizing Kambili includes her in Nigeria's perfect future.

could, [they] scaled it because [they] were terrified that [they] couldn't" (Adichie, p. 226). Kambili and Jaja's reactions are typical for children in the type of household in which they live; "in their efforts to attempt to avoid further abuse and to please punitive parents who set harsh and often unattainable standards, many child victims of abuse strive to do better, to be perfect. However, such a strategy may backfire

While in Nsukka, Jaja feels for the first time the savor of personal autonomy.

as they develop over-idealized images that they cannot contain" (Harter, 1999, p. 275). Eugene forces a high level of performance from his children with threat and severe physical punishment. Ifeoma, however, simply encourages her children, allowing them to perform to the fullness of their particular abilities and to discover their specific strengths. Auntie Ifeoma represents the possible future of Nigerian democracy. In this future, no child is bound by socioeconomic measures or questions of race or religion, at least in theory. Ifeoma's is the future within which each Nigerian citizen has a voice as well as the freedoms that the polity of Western society considers a birthright.

Amaka, Ifeoma's daughter and Kambili's cousin, is an adolescent girl who embodies what Nigeria could become if it should follow a democratic path. Amaka listens to both Western and traditional Nigerian music, and she freely expresses her opinions. Sometimes this does lead to a sense of cruelty, as Amaka often ridicules Kambili for her reserve; Ifeoma does not ignore this behavior, but rather uses it as a teaching opportunity. On one such occasion, "Auntie Ifeoma's eyes hardened—she was not looking at Amaka, she was looking at [Kambili]. 'O *ginidi*, Kambili, have you no mouth? Talk back to her!" (Adichie, p. 170). Ifeoma, in keeping with democratic tradition, believes that a nation cannot be strong unless each member of the society fully embraces and uses his or her talents and skills. In order for this to happen, all members of the society must feel essential—they must feel as though their contributions are important. The way Ifeoma inspires and teaches her children embodies Western ideas of civic pride and civic participation.

Like the perfect post-colonial future that Father Amadi represents, Ifeoma's Western democracy has

no place in the emerging Nigeria. Democracy is an idea that is almost guaranteed to fail at this particular point in time. Kambili can sense this, and dreams "that the sole administrator was pouring hot water on Auntie Ifeoma's feet in the bathtub of [Kambili's] home in Enugu. Then Auntie Ifeoma jumped out of the bathtub and, in the manner of dreams, jumped into America. She did not look back as [Kambili] called her to stop" (Adichie, pp. 229–230). Ifeoma represents a future that is untenable. There remain too many power struggles and questions of identity for a truly democratic government to maintain political control; the populace is still deeply informed by militaristic tendencies—in other words, schoolyard politics. The emerging character of Nigeria remains too immature to handle the more adult role of democratic rule.

Defining Identity

Kambili and Jaja must choose from among the potential futures available to them; by choosing, they will solidify their burgeoning identities. Jaja is perplexed and a bit impressed by life in Nsukka, life in a democratic household. Ifeoma's style of parenting (and thus type of rulership) is represented by the flowers in her yard, which are the namesake of the novel: the purple hibiscus. Upon first sighting the flowers, Jaja is strangely drawn to them:

"That's a hibiscus, isn't it, Auntie?" Jaja asked, staring at a plant close to the barbed wire fence. "I didn't know there were purple hibiscuses."

Auntie Ifeoma laughed and touched the flower, colored a deep shade of purple that was almost blue. "Everybody has that reaction the first time." (Adichie, p. 128)

While in Nsukka, Jaja feels for the first time the savor of personal autonomy. In what nearly becomes a rite of passage, Jaja is able to express his own thoughts and make his own choices. He takes to this role as if he had never been oppressed, his shoulders broadening, his back straightening with his newfound freedom and adulthood. Even Kambili notices this; she "listened to him and marveled at the wonder in his voice, at how much lighter the brown of his pupils was" (Adichie, p. 126). Jaja becomes the representative of a free people, a people at liberty to make their own rules and imperatives as demanded by their situation. For the first time in his life, Jaja is free from colonial rule.

After Jaja visits Ifeoma and her family in the university city of Nsukka, he returns changed; he is no longer willing to quietly accept Eugene's rule. Jaja has seen in Ifeoma's family a completely different future than any offered to him by his father. Ifeoma rules with love and laughter, characteristics completely unknown in Eugene's household, and she allows each child to flourish according to his or her own abilities. This is a more democratic version of Nigeria's future. Adichie's choice to locate Ifeoma's family in Nsukka has more meaning than the simple coincidence that Ifeoma is an instructor in the university. Nsukka was one of the first cities of Biafra to fall in the war. Had Nsukka not fallen, Biafra might have been able to win its independence. There is no way to determine what would have happened had Biafra been free. Adichie exploits this uncertainty by the metaphoric fall of Nsukka as the nation faces increasing political unrest. Jaja's transformation while visiting Ifeoma represents not only his burgeoning independence, but also the danger inherent therein.

When Jaja returns home, he refuses to partake in Holy Communion. Eugene is shocked, claiming, "You cannot stop receiving the body of our Lord. It is death, you know that." Jaja responds, "Then I will die" (Adichie, p. 6). Eugene is speaking of the death of the soul (true to his messianic colonialism), but Jaja is not speaking of his soul. Jaja is speaking of his desire to be free from the despotic rule of his father. Kambili finds his new defiance "fragrant with the undertones of freedom, a different kind of freedom from the one the crowds waving green leaves chanted at Government Square after the coup" (p. 16). Ultimately, Ifeoma and her family flee from Nigeria, even as Nsukka fell during the Nigerian-Biafran War; the democratic ideal cannot be maintained in Nigeria, where the ground is barren to such ideals. So, too, do Jaja's hopes for his own independence fall. When his independence comes, it is not complete.

Jaja's defiance does not come without a price. Jaja is imprisoned for almost three years without being formally charged (thus taking away even his ability to defend himself); for "almost three years . . . Jaja's official status, all this time, has been Awaiting Trial" (Adichie, p. 300). Interestingly, this is the exact length of time of the Biafra conflict, which raged for 31 months, from May 1967 to January 1970. This is not a coincidence: both Biafra and Jaja are experi-

ments in freedom that ultimately fail. Confined to a small, brutal cell, allowed only the small privileges that his family's money can buy, Jaja withdraws into himself. The shoulders that began to broaden in Ifeoma's backyard slump under the weight of his imprisonment, and like the British, who won in the end, Eugene claims his son.

Although British rule was overturned, the mark that the colonizers left on Nigeria was indelible; the land will never be as it once was. Neither will Jaja; he will never live up to the potential that once lived inside him. That part of him that heretofore proclaimed leadership, the same part that enabled him to step forward and lie to protect his mother and his sister, is sacrificed (or, at the very least, seriously limited) for that same protection. Nigeria, especially Igboland, is scarred with the memory of violence and dissolution. It, like Jaja, is like a child reaching adulthood after a lifetime of abuse.

According to James Garbarino (2008), this reaction of withdrawal is not surprising, for "on evolutionary grounds today's children (and to some degree women) are less likely to experience a fight-or-flight response to traumatic situations, and more likely to experience 'emotional dissociation and freezing'" (p. 18). The trauma facing Jaja is not merely that of his father's abuse, but also that of his father's death and his own imprisonment. He cannot escape, and fighting his captors will earn him nothing. Jaja is, perhaps permanently, crippled; he may never reclaim the fullness of future that he began to experience with his aunt and her family. He also remains bound to the identity that his imprisonment has given him—he will never develop a unified, whole identity.

To Kambili, Jaja is a hero; he has sacrificed his freedom and his future in order to liberate his family from a man who could surely be considered a tyrant. However, Jaja himself does not appear to feel the same:

His eyes are too full of guilt to really see me, to see his reflection in my eyes, the reflection of my hero, the brother who tried always to protect me the best he could. He will never

Jaja's transformation while visiting Ifeoma represents not only his burgeoning independence, but also the danger inherent therein.

think that he did enough, and he will never understand that I do not think he should have done more. (Adichie, p. 305)

The guilt that Jaja feels is not for his action, for his only transgression has been dishonesty, and that in the pursuit of protection for his family. The guilt that Jaja feels is the guilt of not being able to protect his family more, of not being able to prevent the events that forced his mother's hand in murdering her husband, of not being able to prevent Kambili's hospital stay for injuries sustained when her father beat her, of not being able to prevent the miscarriage of an unborn sibling that resulted from Eugene's violence. His guilt is the guilt of a Holocaust survivor or an individual who does not stop the spread of a totalitarian regime; it is survivor's guilt—the guilt of a person who could not have prevented circumstance, but wishes that he had tried harder to find some way, any way, to prevent the calamities that have befallen his family and/or society.

Kambili and Jaja emerge into adulthood together, at the time of Eugene's murder. Wounded, self-sacrificing, and struggling to find and keep his voice, Jaja's decision to protect his mother elevates him to the role of patriarch. He enters into the role of father figure, and therefore becomes an allegory for Nigeria-that-must-be. Like Nigeria, Jaja suffers from the coup (through incarceration), and will have to struggle to find himself in the future. Jaja will forever be marked by the psychological torment of having been incarcerated, as well as literally and permanently deformed through the actions of his father. Even as Jaja spent years "awaiting trial," the nation of Nigeria is also waiting, waiting for a time when it can heal its own scars and move forward as a unified whole. Although there were glorious options for the future, the reality of Nigeria's political situation has made them unreachable. The immediate future is one of struggle, and the outcome is uncertain.

Nigeria's Undecided Future

Kambili loves the future version of Nigeria represented by Father Amadi, but this love is colored by her upbringing in a colonialist environment. Her love for him (in his role as a positive colonizer) is what enables Amadi to love Kambili back in a way that he cannot love anyone else. Kambili sees Father Amadi as a hopeful symbol of the union of imperialism and tradi-

tion, the utopist version of Nigeria that might have been possible had Biafra never seceded. However, this alone is not enough, because he is the colonized as well as the colonizer, and Nigeria is throwing off the yoke of colonization. He is a hope whose time has passed. Eugene and Father Amadi are locked into their roles and cannot adapt or change. Kambili is not locked into her role, however, and on the threshold of 18 and adulthood, her incipient future is still undecided. She is the undecided Nigeria, and the only father figure left to her—Jaja—becomes her model for the future.

Jaja is the last authority figure remaining to Kambili. Eugene is dead, Father Amadi is in Europe, and Auntie Ifeoma has moved to America. Although he is not responsible for the death of his father, Jaja has moved into the fatherhood role by taking responsibility for the act. He shoulders his burden with stoicism and without any false hopes for a utopian future. Similarly, Nigeria has to shoulder the burden of its future along with the pain of its bitter past. Although Jaja has achieved the independence he fought for, as Nigeria is finally united after the Nigeria-Biafran War, it is with a high price. His incarceration takes a toll on him, mentally and physically, and Nigeria must face a broken nation.

All of the father figures are essentially rendered null in the creation of Nigeria's future. The pure indigenous history is irrecoverable, and colonialism collapses under its own weight. Unification of the divergent Nigerian parties was a dream that died in the face of war. Democracy is equally unattainable, for the Nigerian soil is not hospitable to democratic ideals. The future is in the hands of the children, and squarely so. The fathers had their chance to create and change the world when they themselves were children. Now, Nigeria will emerge into a united concept of selfhood as the children do.

Purple Hibiscus in the Classroom

Although situated in a very specific place and time, to borrow Andrade's language, "all texts and especially, all works of literature, are involved in conversations with other texts—and that a productive analysis examines points of conversation as well as potential or visible differences" (p. 94). I would further argue that all texts are in dialogue with their readers, and those

readers do not need to maintain an Igbo, Nigerian, or even African pedigree in order to converse with *Purple Hibiscus*. In fact, the very differences between Western students and Adichie's characters allow for a lively discourse and multiple new learning opportunities.

Okuyade (2011) focuses discussion on *Purple Hibiscus* as a "female" *bildungsroman* (p. 145), but this is also Jaja's tale and Jaja's journey; he, too, grapples with identity and independence. The stylistic decision to tell of the journey through Kambili's eyes, far from isolating a male reader, actually helps draw him in; an adolescent male can see himself in Jaja from a comfortable distance without the unfamiliar emotional immediacy that Kambili presents. (While female students will find Kambili's intensity engaging, young male readers have a tendency to isolate themselves from this, at least in public.) Unlike *The Bell Jar* or *The Catcher in the Rye*, *Purple Hibiscus* is equally applicable and enjoyable for both genders, because adolescents of both genders are transitioning from a "need to be goaded to make decisions" to a "functional autonomy . . . capable of private thought" (Okuyade, p. 156), a journey experienced by both siblings.

Additionally, this novel reaches across national borders. It breaks down jingoistic national insularity by showing young readers a less caricaturized version of Africa, a version much more like them and their lives than they previously believed. Further, the novel can help adolescents understand much of the unrest in the world, from Libya to Egypt, and help them to imagine the experiences of people elsewhere in the world rather than relegating them to the status of "Other."

Purple Hibiscus is not a "Biafra" novel. It does not attempt to retell the horrors experienced during that conflict. Adichie, however, does not shy away from her identity as a Nigerian but rather uses the history of Biafra to describe a new Nigeria. She uses children—who, by definition, have yet to achieve a fully defined identity—to explore the options of a national identity for Nigeria. Jaja and Kambili negotiate their own fu-

tures, which, while certainly not free from problems, are allegorical to the current state of Nigerian politics even as they maintain hope for a better future.

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Looking into and beyond Time and Place:

The Timeless Potential of YA Lit in a Time of Limited Opportunity

Literature has the potential to allow students and teachers to explore, understand, critique, and emulate alternative ways of living and being reflected in times past, present, and future. Historical fiction exposes readers to stories that are simultaneously real and unreal. They are drawn from the past and shaped by writers living in present history that will soon pass; interpretations remain forever in flux. Yet, these stories “transcend setting in their persistent reminder that the human experience is timeless. That these writers write (and we readers read) these novels attests to the human spirit to question, to explore, to understand the connections that bind us—regardless of the time and place in which we live” (Glenn, 2005).

Literature set in contemporary times, as well as the future, affords readers and teachers opportunities to reflect upon current issues—personal, local, and global. It “helps shape our perceptions of people and places in the world. In discussions of literature we have an opportunity to explore the complexity of human difference and human relations, and the conclusions we reach matter. They matter because they tell us who we are and who we can become” (Pace & Townsend, 1999, p. 43).

Quite simply, literature matters. We worry, however, that the pervasive external forces that encourage unnecessary simplification and scripted approaches to reading instruction might limit—or eliminate—opportunities for using literature to its full potential. Teachers, particularly those newer to the profession, are increasingly working to navigate the tension between what they perceive they must do and what they know is best for their students. To provide a model

that pushes back against attempts at standardization and instead trusts students and teachers and their ability to think critically and creatively, we advocate an approach that contextualizes literature in a larger conversation and inspires complex and even contentious dialogue, discussion, and contemplation among students in our classroom communities. (Ironically, it is also likely to prepare them for state exams in more effective and motivating ways than test prep exercises can.)

Curricula centered on *essential questions*, “questions that are not answerable with finality in a brief sentence [and aim to] stimulate thought, to provoke inquiry, and to spark more questions—including thoughtful student questions—not just pat answers” (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005, p. 106), and/or *big ideas*, “themes, issues, and concepts that face teachers and students alike in the 21st century” (George, 2001, p. 81) have the potential to ensure that what matters most about literature makes its way into our classrooms. While this approach is not new, this article reminds us of what is possible in a time when teachers are often asked to achieve the impossible.

Given our passion for and advocacy of young adult literature (YA lit), in particular, we draw upon titles for adolescent readers that invite us to discuss why and how to use this literature in ways that foster rich contextualization, especially by posing questions and examining worthwhile ideas. We include references to historical, contemporary, and future-oriented YA fiction that has been well received by middle and high school students and teachers in various regions of the United States, as well as recently published titles that

are perhaps less familiar but equally compelling; these titles offer new ways of thinking about old texts and have the potential to become mainstays in the classroom.

In each section, we annotate multiple texts set in the past, present, and future. We also more deeply examine an additional title by a) demonstrating how essential questions (EQ) and/or big ideas (BI) might be used to guide curriculum planning and underpin instructional units centered on this title, and b) providing sample activities that encourage exploration of these EQs and/or BIs within the English classroom. To allow readers to see the potential for both frames—questions and big ideas—we model both in the discussion of the differing YA titles throughout.

Looking Back: Historical Fiction

Traditional textbooks as well as many historical primary source documents fail to capture the voices of young people who lived in the time period being represented. Historical fiction writer Christopher Collier (1987) suggests that “there is no better way to teach history than to embrace potential readers and fling them into the living past” (p. 5). Indeed, historical novels can bring history alive for children and adolescents (Johannessen, 2000; Lott & Wasta, 1999). Literature and literary materials “convey well the affective domain of human experience. The realism achieved through vivid portrayals in works of literature stirs the imagination of the young reader and helps develop a feeling for and an identification with the topic being studied” (Jarolimek, 1990, p. 198). By engaging with historical fiction, adolescent students are encouraged to be “better informed, make good decisions, and become responsible citizens, willing to intervene where necessary to promote human dignity and fairness” (Rice, 2006, p. 20).

Briefly Annotated Titles

Books set in the past generate a richer understanding of what has come before, invite readers to consider connections to their present, and encourage them to ponder new visions of the future. *Chains* (Anderson, 2008), for example, reeducates readers about the American past by highlighting quotations that demand careful consideration. When readers learn that Ben Franklin wrote, “Our slaves, sir, cost us money, and we buy them to make money by their labour. If they

are sick, they are not only unprofitable, but expensive” (*Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser* cited in *Chains*, p. 157), they might understand Franklin as more complex than the fearless inventor and patriot portrayed in their elementary school readers. At the same time, *Chains* promotes questioning of democracy and the democratic process—both at the time of our nation’s founding and today—and thus demands consideration of tomorrow. As readers, we were pressed to consider whether or not the founding fathers would have achieved much of anything had they worked under the scrutiny of the modern media. Could they have sequestered themselves and worked in secret, or would the American public, used to immediate access to information, demand a right to know what was transpiring as it transpired?

After Tupac and D Foster (Woodson, 2008) offers readers quiet, albeit rich, contemplation of issues of race and perception. Set in the recent past, one that grows more distant with each generation of student readers unfamiliar with Tupac and his music, the novel describes a friendship that develops between three teen girls as they share their passion for Tupac’s music and attempt to make sense of a world that often confounds them. The story offers a counter-narrative of the black experience (Brooks, 2009; Delgado, 2000; McNair, 2008), highlighting strong family connections, a safe and secure neighborhood, and intellectually curious young people, all of which undermine false assumptions that often accompany deficit-oriented portrayals of people of color in our contemporary world.

While much historical fiction centers on America’s past, several texts introduce readers to histories of people beyond our borders. *A Single Shard* (Park, 2001), set in twelfth-century Korea, depicts the life of a ten-year-old orphan apprenticed to a gifted potter who receives a commission from the royal palace. This story of courage, sacrifice, and selflessness is not only rich in history and culture, but also in its poten-

Books set in the past generate a richer understanding of what has come before, invite readers to consider connections to their present, and encourage them to ponder new visions of the future.

tial for encouraging readers to consider privilege and power, relative morality, and freedom and responsibility.

Looking Deeper: *Tree Girl*

Tree Girl (Mikaelsen, 2004) offers a particularly powerful teen voice that provides depth and reality to a

Unfortunately, several contemporary examples of tragedies similar to those described in *Tree Girl* exist today.

difficult historical event. Mikaelsen fictionalizes the lived experiences of a girl forced to flee her Mayan village in Guatemala upon the outbreak of war and travel to Mexico to find safety. Gabriela loves to climb trees, to perch upon limbs she fears might not hold her weight. This talent saves and condemns

her; she escapes death but is left to face life. The images she witnesses are hard to bear. Children are pulled from the arms of their mothers. Animals are used as target practice. Old women are forced to strip and behave like circus animals or be shot. Gabriela cannot reconcile this violence with what she knows of human nature. She wonders, “Surely humans could not be so cruel” (p. 134).

The novel, however, retains hope, as Gabriela fights back in ways both big and small. She endures an arduous trip down the tree, away from the village, and into a refugee camp. When she arrives, she finds hundreds of people living in squalor, with vacant eyes and seemingly few prospects of survival, much less a return to their former existence. With small steps, however, Gabriela improves the situation, refusing to believe that this is all that is left.

Big Ideas

BI: Historical fiction can educate and reeducate by complicating what we think we know.

To help students gain more complex understanding of the events that undergird the novel and this period in history, teachers might ask them to review US foreign policy around this event. As a result of the Freedom of Information Act, over 5,000 documents chronicling the involvement of the US government in the 1954 coup in Guatemala—the war that sends Gabriela from her

home—have been released (<http://www.foia.cia.gov/guatemala.asp>). Students might work in small groups to use these documents to build cases to support or condemn US involvement. In doing so, they will be asked to consider issues of morality, motive, and cause and effect.

To assess understanding and provide students a meaningful opportunity to express these understandings, teachers might ask them to defend their cases in the hosting of a mock trial or whole-class debate. Students might choose to examine whether or not the knowing participation of the US government in the Guatemalan coup of 1954 was justified. As members of each student group share their arguments, other students will benefit by gaining additional knowledge and experiencing the multiplicity of perspectives that exists in the context of complicated issues.

BI: Historical fiction can build connection to other people, times, and places and reinforce our shared existence as members of a human community.

Unfortunately, several contemporary examples of tragedies similar to those described in *Tree Girl* exist today. The examination of such events might provide connection to the novel by encouraging students to understand the reality of Gabriela’s world; the story is fiction, but the history is real—and there are others like her who suffer today. Teachers might focus on recent violence between Christians and Muslims in Nigeria, for example (http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/35759877/ns/world_news-africa/), fostering discussion of the underlying events, power relationships, politics, and philosophies that allow, even encourage, such happenings in our shared world.

Students might then apply these understandings and explore further the lives of those involved in such tragedies by engaging in a writing activity designed to encourage empathetic thinking:

1. Select a character from the novel, a person we have studied in our exploration of contemporary events, or a real or imagined person of your own creation about whom you want to know more.
2. Imagine life as this person by considering in draft writing how the character would respond to these questions (and any others you wish to generate):
 - When, where, and with whom do I live?
 - What are my fears? Regrets?

- What are my hopes? Passions?
 - How do I see myself? How do others see me?
 - What do I wish to change about my life? Do I have the power to enact this change?
3. Go deeper by placing your person in a scenario you think might prove intriguing. Imagine, for example, that your person suffers the loss of a loved one, is asked to commit a crime, or has the choice to leave home. As you draft, consider your person's physical, emotional, and psychological response.
 4. Revisit the writing generated thus far. While in character, use this information to engage in a whole-class discussion focused on the following quotation: "'To understand all is to forgive all' it has been said; and it is sometimes even something more. It is to sympathize, and even to love, where we cannot yet fully agree. And therefore, perhaps, even the feeblest little attempt to make human beings understand how and why their fellows feel as they feel and are as they are, is not quite nothing." (Olive Schreiner in *The Dawn of Civilisation*, p. 00)

Assuming the persona of a character who inhabits a land and culture unfamiliar to students requires care and sensitivity, particularly in the attempt to avoid privileging American culture in a way that unfairly critiques or condemns those in other communities. However, this process of encouraging an empathetic stance also fosters both recognition of cultural difference and respect for alternate ways of knowing and doing.

BI: Historical fiction can give emotional reality to names, dates, and other factual information, letting us imagine the voices of those who lived in other places and times, voices that have sometimes been silenced in official accounts of history, ideally inspiring us to honor these voices and generate a better future.

After reading *Tree Girl*, students might understandably feel helpless in their inability to elicit global change. With this helplessness often comes the development of a savior-oriented mindset grounded in the assumption that we, as westerners, have easy answers to complex problems. To help students better understand the difficult realities of social change, both globally and locally, and how perspectives are shaped by the lens through which we see, teachers might ask students to engage in participatory action research

(PAR) to heighten awareness of their own community and learn manageable ways to foster change and build hope (McLaren & Giarelli, 1995; Morrell, 2004).

After reading and discussing texts centered on social inequities in their city, eleventh-grade students in Los Angeles, for example, addressed their feelings of hopelessness by responding "from the position of agents of social change" to "engender feelings of possibility" (Duncan-Andrade, 2007, p. 28). They interviewed community members, generated observational notes, and collected video footage to document oppressive conditions identified in their community.

Data were compiled into a written report that was shared via presentations to constituent groups within the community. Students might choose to host a town hall meeting or screen a student-generated film to share their work.

Whatever the forum, PAR affords teachers a meaningful, practical model for encouraging students to be problem solvers who refuse to allow helplessness to paralyze them, teaching them to instead think beyond what others believe possible and to advance options for change.

Young adult texts set in the future (both futuristic and science fiction tales) provide readers distance and connection.

Looking Ahead: Future-Oriented Texts

Young adult texts set in the future (both futuristic and science fiction tales) provide readers distance and connection. As Donelson and Nilsen (2004) suggest, in future-oriented fiction, "Contemporary problems are projected hundreds or thousands of years into the future, and those new views of overpopulation, pollution, religious bickering, political machinations, and sexual disharmony often give readers a quite different perspective on our world and our problems today" (p. 213). This consideration of new and different perspectives might challenge readers to critique the social systems to which they claim (or inherit) membership. Books set in the future present the possibility of what may come while fostering reflection on how we might get there given our current and past realities, emphasizing the relationship between choices and the consequences that result.

Briefly Annotated Titles

Future-oriented fiction encourages readers to consider multiple visions of how life might look for themselves and the generations that follow. They are exposed to creative representations of time and place that challenge, extend, and redefine what they believe is possible. *The Declaration* (Malley, 2007), for example,

paints a society in which inhabitants have the option of extending life indefinitely by taking a drug called Longevity. Those who opt out of the medication are punished if they produce children, a responsibility that resides with the state. Any unauthorized children, or Surplus, are placed in training centers where they learn to serve those who choose to play by the rules. Readers are thrust into a community in

which the quality of life is diminished (albeit prolonged), power is held by those who run the pharmaceutical companies, and conformity is celebrated at the expense of free thinking.

Exodus (Bertagna, 2008) also invites readers to consider a world unlike their own, one in which the ice caps have melted and water has taken over the land, forcing citizens to flee their homes and seek safety on the sea. As 15-year-old Mara battles for basic resources, she witnesses the worst humankind has to offer—greed, selfishness, violent urges, and a deep-seated lack of empathy. As the physical earth suffers from the consequences of human excess, humans lose their humanity.

Little Brother (Doctorow, 2008) lures readers into a vision of the near future when technological innovation offers convenience and flexibility but also limits personal freedoms. The novel's tech-savvy teen protagonists find themselves near the site of a terrorist attack. Despite their innocence, they become fugitives against a seemingly democratic government that feels threatened by their knowledge and suspicious behavior. They suffer psychological torture and humiliation during an interrogation, lose personal privacy when

their computers and phones are tapped, and suffer the loss of their right to assemble in protest.

In addition to exposing readers to these alternate realities, future-oriented texts foster reflection on how we might achieve—or avoid—such visions of the future given our current and past realities. *The Declaration* reminds readers that our ability to think for ourselves, if we harness it, might be our greatest weapons against social strife resulting from the stratification of power. *Exodus* warns against global warming and suggests the need to treat our existing world with care. And *Little Brother* entreats us to think critically about the technological advances we often accept without question.

Looking Deeper: *Feed*

Feed (Anderson, 2004) provides rich opportunities to both expose readers to an alternate world and encourage them to evaluate what they witness in the context of their own current and potentially future realities. The satirical novel is set in a future in which television and computer connections are hardwired into the human brain upon birth, thus allowing corporate and media conglomerates access to an always-captive market. The novel's protagonist, Titus, is as inarticulate and naïve as his peers, never questioning the world into which he was born. When he travels to the Moon and meets Violet, a home-schooled teen who critiques and resists the networked world, he is challenged in ways unfamiliar and uncomfortable. Readers experience his confusion and frustration and are forced to consider the implications of a society overly dependent upon technology at the expense of independent thought and appreciation of small joys.

Big Ideas

BI: Future-oriented fiction provides distance that allows for honest critique. We are not reading about our existing world, so we can see more objectively.

To encourage rich textual analysis and allow for distanced critique of another world (such as immediate gratification at the expense of free thinking or a stifling of creativity and independence), teachers might invite students to record several short passages from the novel that contain a behavior, event, idea, etc. that they find troubling. Students might then reflect in writing upon these passages, considering in particular

Feed provides rich opportunities to both expose readers to an alternate world and encourage them to evaluate . . . their own current and potentially future realities.

what they find disturbing and why this might be so. A whole-class discussion of these passages and responses might then ensue, fostering critical thinking in and beyond the text.

BI: Future-oriented fiction embodies the potential “next iteration” of our society, giving us a glimpse into what might be, for better or worse.

The above activity will likely reveal just how easy it is for us to critique the fictional society described in *Feed*. To encourage students to turn the mirrors on their own world, teachers might have them engage in the following activity:

1. Over the next 24 hours, catalog your use of technology. Create a chart that demonstrates the technologies you use, how long you use them, and for what purpose(s).
2. Over the 24 hours following step one, attempt to avoid the use of technology altogether. Reflect in writing on the difficulties, benefits, surprises, etc. that resulted
3. Use these experiences and your written reflection to participate in a whole-class discussion centered on the following question, “Is our modern society helped or hindered by technology?”

BI: In future-oriented fiction, our present often becomes written as the past. We can evaluate how our choices in the here and now might come to fruition. There are consequences for our actions; we are accountable for the world we leave to the future.

To help readers give thought to how our actions reflect an investment in our collective futures, teachers might ask students to engage in non-selfish perspective-building activities. To focus on our individual freedoms and responsibilities, teachers might utilize the edited poetry collection, *What Have You Lost?* (Nye, 1999). The text includes over 130 poems for adolescent readers that address the issue of loss, focusing especially on the ways in which loss “startles us awake” and how “losing casts all kinds of shadows on what we thought we knew” (pp. xi–xii).

After reading and reflecting on several poems from the collection, teachers might ask students to draft their own poem in the attempt to answer the question, “What have you lost?” Upon sharing and discussing their work, members of the classroom community might then connect their personal expressions to the novel *Feed* by engaging in a small-group or

whole-class discussion centered on the following:

- In what ways does loss manifest itself in the novel?
- How does this loss mirror or run counter to your own expression of loss?
- How is loss universal?
- How is loss shaped by external forces acting upon us (geographic, financial, social, etc.), thus making the experience unique? Can I know your loss?
- Is loss inevitable?
- How did you feel upon completion of the novel?
- Is there any hope in the novel? How is it manifested?
- Why might it be important to find hope in this title?

To leave students feeling empowered and optimistic after reading a difficult and emotionally draining title like *Feed*, teachers might ask students to consider an alternative to loss, that of hope. After providing students with watercolor paint sets and clean sheets of paper, teachers might pose the seemingly simple, but essentially important, question, “What does hope look like?”

To move students from an individual to collective understanding of the responsibilities we all possess, teachers might ask students to consider their role in the global landscape by hosting a Mock United Nations Summit. Students might work in small groups to research various topics of global concern (hunger, poverty, environmental exploitation, race and gender inequity, child labor, sex slavery, etc.). They might then apply their understandings to the education of others by facilitating a public roundtable discussion involving teachers, administrators, parents/guardians, and community members. Ideally, these conversations would expose attendees to the complexity of our global relationships and provide increased awareness of how our actions have far-reaching effects well beyond our homes, communities, and borders.

In the Here and Now: Contemporary Fiction

Many adolescent readers are drawn to fiction that is set in the present. They can often identify with characters and events in contemporary fiction, as they and their experiences are easily recognizable and somehow familiar, despite the differences of place or culture or values that underpin the story. Through

contemporary fiction, we witness models for our own lives and live vicariously through others, learning from their mistakes without necessarily having to make them on our own. The recognizable realities of contemporary novels offer readers “a better chance to be happy” by helping them develop “realistic expectations” and “know both the bad and the good about the society in which they live” (Donelson & Nilsen, 2004, p. 117).

Briefly Annotated Titles

Miguel, the protagonist in *We Were Here* (de la Peña, 2009), has been placed in a group home as a result of a tragic event involving his family. His counselor requires him to keep a journal to work through the related guilt and frustration he feels. While in the group home, Miguel meets Rondell, a special needs teen with violent tendencies, and Mong, a young

man haunted by his past. Although they have just met and don't particularly like one another, the boys decide to break out of the home and set out along the California coast together. On their voyage, they encounter blatant racism, experience incredible scenes and acts of beauty, challenge their assumptions of one another and their growing friendships, and face the demons that

sent them out on this quest for identity. Miguel, in particular, examines his understandings of family, culture, race, geography, guilt, and acceptance. This story of struggle, survival, guilt, anger, and redemption offers readers insight into the human condition, forging a connection that highlights the commonalities that exist in spite of difference.

In *Sold* (2006), McCormick gives voice to 13-year-old Laksmi, a Nepalese girl sold into child prostitution by her greedy stepfather. Laksmi finds herself trapped in a brothel in Calcutta, India, forced to endure terrifying and humiliating acts to assure her survival. Despite the brutality and seeming emptiness of her existence, Laksmi holds to hope; she draws strength from friendship, the written word, and determined

resilience to stay true to herself at all costs. Readers will likely never endure the reality Laksmi suffers, but they can identify with the struggle to persevere in her courageous dedication to self-preservation.

Lucas (Brooks, 2003) centers on Caitlin, a 15-year-old who lives with her somewhat distanced father and increasingly rebellious brother in an outwardly idyllic town on a small British island. From the moment she sees the mysterious Lucas wandering along the road, seemingly emerging from nowhere, she knows life will never be the same. Lucas, a free-spirited gypsy teen, speaks with candor and encourages Caitlin to reconsider her understandings of family, community, and self. Due to his outsider status, not everyone in town welcomes and accepts Lucas's presence. Community members blame him for a brutal attack on one of the island girls, and when vigilante justice prevails, Caitlin is forced to face the truth of Lucas's societal critique. Readers are left contemplating the role of the individual in society, the power of conformity, and the very definition of what it means to live.

Looking Deeper: *The Absolutely True Story of a Part-Time Indian*

In his novel, *The Absolutely True Story of a Part-time Indian* (2007), Alexie describes life on the Spokane Indian Reservation through the humorous and troubling story of 14-year-old Arnold “Junior” Spirit. Reflecting upon his experiences at his reservation school, he realizes, “My school and my tribe are so poor and sad that we have to study from the same dang books our parents studied from. That is absolutely the saddest thing in the world” (p. 31). He angrily throws the textbook in protest, breaks the nose of his teacher, and is suspended from school. In an effort to improve his prospects, Arnold decides to attend the high school in Reardon, a white farm town 22 miles away from the “Rez.” This initiates his career as a “part-time Indian.” On the Rez, he is Junior, the funny-looking kid everyone likes to beat up and a traitor who attends the privileged white school. At Reardon, he is Arnold, the only Indian —with the exception of the mascot.

Essential Questions

EQ: How can realistic fiction allow readers to explore questions of self-identity?

Arnold faces challenges familiar to many teens. His situations may be more extreme than those of many

Through contemporary fiction, we . . . and live vicariously through others, learning from their mistakes without necessarily having to make them on our own.

kids (Black-Eye-of-the-Month Club), and some may be specific to American Indians (loss of native land and language), but most adolescent readers can learn a great deal about facing adversity from Arnold, who makes good, though sometimes difficult, decisions and usually chooses to look at the bright side of onerous situations. Arnold's success stems in large part from his self-awareness. Throughout the diary, Arnold engages in introspection and trusts his feelings to guide him. Several instructional activities can encourage students to follow Arnold's lead and think about their own lives and decision-making processes.

Reflective journals or diaries foster intrapersonal awareness, or the cognitive ability to understand our own minds and selves (Cappachione, 2008). Prompts such as the following could help readers better understand their personal identities:

- Who am I within my family? How do members of my family see me?
- Who am I within my social group? What roles do I assume in social situations? How do others view my social group?
- How did I become the person I am? What and/or who are the greatest influences?
- What dreams do I have? What challenges might I face as I pursue them?
- How are my experiences similar to or different from Arnold's? What can I learn from him?
- Do I agree with Arnold's claim that "life is a constant struggle between being an individual and being a member of a community" (p. 132)?

These written responses could scaffold study of the memoir or personal essay. A side-by-side examination of *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* and Alexie's memoir-style personal essay, "Indian Education" (2005), could help students explore the complex distinctions and overlaps that define truth and fiction. Students might then engage in an alternative (or complement) to the written memoir in the completion of a "Song of Myself" project. After reading Walt Whitman's poem, "Song of Myself" (2010), students create visual representations in response to the questions, "Who am I, and who do I want to become?" Containing words and images cut from magazines and newspapers, personal photographs, memorabilia, and drawings, collages depict how students perceive themselves in the past, present, and future.

Extending the lesson to include PowerPoint presentations, Web pages, and other mixed media allows students to create contemporary texts of their own.

EQ: How can contemporary fiction allow for exploration of personal health and welfare of adolescents and adults in contemporary society?

The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian (Alexie, 2007) can help teachers and students learn about personal, social, and health-related issues such as substance abuse and eating disorders. According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse (2009), in 2009, 20% of eighth graders reported using an illicit drug in their lifetime. Thirty-six percent of tenth graders and almost half of high school seniors reported using drugs at least once, while 30–35% had used them within the past year. Of high school students, 11% have been diagnosed with eating disorders, and one in five American women struggle with an eating disorder (National Association of Anorexia Nervosa and Associated Disorders, 2010). Clearly, substance abuse and eating disorders are not unique to Native Americans. As Arnold wisely notes, "There are all kinds of addicts, I guess. We all have pain. And we all look for ways to make the pain go away" (p. 107). Arnold's maturity relative to these self-abusive habits is important for readers to consider.

To help readers gain knowledge about these habits, teachers could set up inquiry stations containing Internet-connected computers (see sidebar, p. 00), a small library of informational texts, primary source documents, and personal narratives related to eating disorders and substance abuse. To create inquiry stations, English teachers might collaborate with health and science teachers, as well as school counselors and social workers who have specialized training in preventing self-destructive behaviors. As a follow-up or introduction to the inquiry project, teachers might draw, too, upon the expertise of the community—health department and law enforcement officials, psychologists, or health care professionals.

Several instructional activities can encourage students to follow Arnold's lead and think about their own lives and decision-making processes.

EQ: How might literature serve as a springboard for learning about different people and cultures?

There is no singular version of what it means to be a contemporary Native American. When Arnold's sister, Mary, marries a Flathead Indian and moves to another tribe's reservation in Montana, she writes to him about her new life. Non-Native American readers may be surprised to learn that there are major differences among tribes and tribal cultures. To help students learn more about the reservation Arnold describes, they might visit <http://www.spokanetribe.com/>. To extend student awareness of other Native communities, students might read more about the Nigigoonsiminikaaning (Red Gut) Reservation in Canada, a sovereign and alcohol-free nation (<http://www.nigigoonsiminikaaning.ca/languagecamp.php>). Students could explore both sites and attempt to understand the complexity of the similarities and differences between the Spokane and Nigigoonsiminikaaning communities. A field trip to a local museum could provide an active learning experience and allow teachers to draw upon the expertise of others (see National Museum of the American Indian at <http://www.nmai.si.edu>). Additionally, a speaker from a federally recognized Native American nation or tribe could provide students additional context regarding the beauty and difficulties of Arnold's life on and off the reservation.

EQ: Given the fact that contemporary fiction often explores issues of local and global concern, how might titles encourage readers to respond to social injustice that exists in our world today and spur productive action?

Alexie's novel has the potential to educate students about the realities of poverty and the relationship

between privilege and power. When Arnold arrives at his "white school" for the first time, he observes: "Reardon was the opposite of the rez. It was the opposite of my family. It was the opposite of me" (p. 56). To Arnold, the white kids in Reardon live a reality that is seemingly unavailable to him and his people. In consideration of this issue, students, working individually, in pairs, or in small teams, could explore the question, "Is the American Dream a myth, reality, or something else?" As photojournalists, they could create digital-photo persuasive essays that highlight inequity and social injustice in their and others' communities. Final projects could be shared with others in and out of the school by posting student discoveries on a class website.

Tapping into Literature's Potential

Literature has the power to

- expose readers to new people, places, and ways of thinking;
- complicate existing understandings of the multiple communities in which we live;
- foster connections across history, culture, beliefs, and values.

As teachers who embrace this vision of literature, we believe that we miss the full potential of story when we fall prey to external demands that focus on oversimplification or the elimination of complexity for the sake of test performance. Young adult literature set in any time—past, future, or present—can be used strategically to support student acquisition of content knowledge and much more. By allowing students to grapple with the big questions of life and living, we help them gain the reflective awareness, critical stance, and global perspective necessary to contribute meaningfully as members of a twenty-first century democracy.

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Internet Resources Related to Substance Abuse and Eating Disorders

<http://www.eatingdisorderinfo.org>

<http://www.sadd.org/stats.htm>

<http://www.nationaleatingdisorders.org/information-resources/general-information.php>

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/thin/program.html>

<http://www.cbsnews.com/video/watch/?id=6234234n>

pedagogy. She is the author of *Sarah Dessen: From Burritos to Box Office*, *Richard Peck: The Past Is Paramount* (with Don Gallo), and *Laurie Halse Anderson: Speaking in Tongues*. She has published peer-reviewed articles in *Research in the Teaching of English*, *English Education*, *The ALAN Review*, *English Journal*, *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*, *Equity and Excellence in Education*, *SIGNAL*, *Teacher Education Quarterly*, and *Peremena/Thinking Classroom*. She is Past-President of the Assembly on Literature for Adolescents of the National Council of Teachers of English (ALAN).

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Melinda and Merryweather High:

Parallel Identity Narratives in Laurie Halse Anderson's *Speak*

Above all, Laurie Halse Anderson's *Speak* (1999) highlights identity as a pivotal theme. But it is not only Melinda who searches for herself: Merryweather High School and several other characters get named, renamed, or nicknamed through the course of the novel. Though Anderson's novel may fit the model of the protagonist searching for his or her identity (and this certainly describes a majority of both children's and young adult novels), this conventionality goes beyond the protagonist. As Melinda figures out who and what she is, so, too, does the school; after a protracted battle, Merryweather High settles on its mascot—something that unites most of the student body and allows Melinda to feel part of something, anything, during the school year.

Published in 1999, *Speak* and its author have received widespread praise, and attention in scholarly journals has been more frequent, sophisticated, and theoretically informed. Authors such as Elaine O'Quinn and Janet Alsup use their own subject position, as teachers and as women who were once young girls, to see how *Speak* is a manual or guide for young women of today navigating their lives. Janet Alsup also claims that books like *Speak* must be taught to young people. For her, teaching *Speak* is not just about reaching out to women; it might also encourage a more "empathetic" student to reach out to those who are outcast or to take action when violence is observed (p. 168).

Mark Jackett (2007) uses *Speak* as a way to get high school freshman talking about unspeakable and uncomfortable topics such as sexual assault and underage drinking. Michael R. Anthony's master's

thesis from 2004 discusses *Speak* as part of a study on teen angst. Don Latham's article from 2006 uses the lens of Queer Studies to see how Melinda's story is a "coming out" story by looking at metaphoric and literalizations of her closet(s) and ways in which the novel reimagines heterosexist ideologies. Chris Magee (2009) reconsiders how the novel is more than just an "empowerment narrative," following several critics' attempts to read in *Speak* ideas from *Reviving Ophelia* (a link Anderson herself suggests in an *ALAN* piece [Anderson, 2000]).

Barbara Tannert-Smith reveals how *Speak* engages with other narratives of trauma, though her most compelling observation concerns the use of fairy tale language she observes in the novel (and how YA fiction often reproduces the fairy tale narrative even as it construes that narrative as modern or new). Lisa Detora (2006) presents a Marxist reading of *Speak* in her discussion of suburban consumerism in two young adult novels. And finally, Linda Oatman High (2010) illuminates images of hope in several of Anderson's novels and includes an interview with the author.

This chronicle lists items distinct from the many reviews of the novel and interviews with Anderson in periodicals as varied as the *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*, *School Library Journal*, and *Publisher's Weekly*. These authors' critical accounts have launched serious study of Anderson's first novel, which has been increasingly listed on high school and college syllabi. In this article, I hope to add to that discussion by delving into what I see as a dual and complementary search for identity.

The Broader Search for Identity

I enter into these critical conversations about *Speak* by demonstrating how the novel chronicles the theme of identity more broadly: *Speak* is not just Melinda's powerful story, but the story of a whole school. Of course, I do not mean to take away the voice of the rape victim who, at first silenced, triumphs by finding her voice and saying no when attacked again. Rather, I aim to show that the parallel narratives of the identity search of Melinda and Merryweather School contribute to the success of each. Indeed, the parallel identity search employed by Anderson contributes to the text's wholeness, its richness, and its successful use in the classroom.

These parallel searches for identity also emerge as deliberate from the point of view of the structure of the novel. Linking Melinda's identity issues to those of the school as a whole creates a tightly woven novel which is stylistically and thematically coherent, cyclical, and evenly written and balanced. While the academic year, a very common time frame and background setting for young adult texts, anchors the novel and gives it order, the effect on readers—who likely participate in or at least remember the routinized landscape of high school—is to feel a familiar, perhaps even uncanny, relationship to the material, a sense of déjà vu that is positive and uplifting.

Speak's confessional and conversational style grounds the novel and creates thematic unity. One byproduct of such a tight and succinct narrative is that the novel teaches really well and easily, though that is not my main point here. It could also explain readers' deep attraction and support for the novel: it does not try to trick the reader by being cute, self-conscious, or ironic. Though it may have flaws, the novel just seems to work because these various registers and plot patterns come together. The story succeeds, in large part, due to Anderson's skillful manipulation of its neat and organic unity and its tightly woven structure and balance.

Merryweather High as a Parallel Character

Merryweather High School becomes a character in the novel. By charting the stages and stagings of the school's identity, as Melinda presents it, we see how she, even at her most outcast, feels part of something,

part of a group, during this yearlong search. She identifies with the school. Once she finds her safe space, the closet, she begins to find her voice and shape her own identity at the school. She even develops a sense of posterity: the closet in some future time will aid and shelter another voiceless student. The school can help heal, in other words, but only when its mascot situation comes to a conclusion.

From the novel's very beginning, we see the convergence of these two identity narratives—Melinda's and the school's. Melinda begins her journey through ninth grade before school begins, before the first bell has even

sounded: the journey starts on the humiliating bus ride to school in which she is friendless and, even though she is picked up first and has the whole bus to navigate, knows she has no place to sit. So, too, will the school begin its battle to find out what noun will follow its name. In fact, as early as the bottom of the first page of the novel, Melinda reveals the problem with the school mascot. When she arrives on school grounds that first day of ninth grade, she writes of passing the janitors who are "painting over the sign in front of the high school" (p. 3), the one that had read Merryweather Trojans. She goes on to explain that the school board objected to them being the Trojans because "Merryweather High—Home of the Trojans—didn't send a strong enough abstinence message" (p. 4). This observation begins not only the novel but also Melinda's reporting on the yearlong struggle between the students and the school board/administration/PTA over the name of the mascot, which changes several times through the course of the year. At different points in the novel, they become the Devils, the Tigers, the Wombats, the Hornets, and back to Trojans.

The search for the school mascot involves the reader of the novel as well. *Speak* is cleverly divided into that realia of middle and high school life—four marking periods—complete with a replica of Melinda's report card at the end of each section. There are chapter-like divisions within the marking periods, but they are not numbered, only titled, and usually with a pun to showcase Melinda's humor. For instance, Melinda introduces the second marking period, and the second

***Speak* is not just Melinda's powerful story, but the story of a whole school.**

part of the novel, by invoking a pep rally cheer and simultaneously asking for audience participation: “GO _____ (FILL IN THE BLANK)!” (p. 49). This comment is important because the “fill in the blank” part is also in quotes, leading the reader to assume that after a short pause, that is literally the cheer that the students shout, modulated, perhaps, by the parenthesis and the capital letters.

She has been erased, but the whispering and pointing encourage her to exist, in fact demand that she has a named place, Melinda.

The “fill in the blank” moment by Anderson is clever: it simultaneously asks one to provide something in the presence of emptiness while noting that the very act of providing it is itself the joke and the answer. One could also literally speak out loud “GO FILL IN THE BLANK” while reading, thus making

it a kind of cheer in and of itself: the school becomes the “fill in the blanks.” The reader is not actually supposed to write anything in that space (early modern literary or postmodern texts even more intelligent and self-conscious than Anderson’s might employ this as a technique), but the blankness also does create a mental bridge to Melinda’s condition. As outcast, which she self-diagnoses as early as page four, she is blank, and she has been blanked, rendered invisible by the kids who populate her high school. This, too, starts on the first school bus ride to ninth grade and the first page of the novel, where people whisper and point at her all the while denying her any right to exist. She has been erased, but the whispering and pointing encourage her to exist, in fact demand that she has a named place, Melinda. In other words, they legitimize her even as they think they deny her (an) identity.

Melinda begins to find comfort in this forced invisibility, and she even begins to seek it out, although she can never really be invisible: it is what causes her to head to the hospital when she plays hooky from school. “The hospital is the perfect place to be invisible,” Melinda says (p. 111). Since she cannot be invisible, she opts to try for unseen and unheard. She plays at being sick throughout the novel, so it comes as no surprise that when she skips school and misses the mall stop on the bus because she fell asleep, she

turns to the one place where people are not playing at being sick, they really are sick. She is reassured by her own health and quickly tires of the hospital smell and ambiance: “I put the gown back. There is nothing wrong with me. These are really sick people, sick that you can see” (p. 113). Her muteness is not only a function of her literal inability to speak, but also of her need to blend in and not cause any more trouble, even among the staff at school.

She meets Mr. Neck, whom Melinda first calls a predator, the first day of school at an assembly when he has to tell her to sit. Later, as the teacher in her social studies class, he remembers the incident from earlier in the day and again directs where she will sit: “I’ve got my eye on you,” he says, “Front row” (p. 7). Melinda will also be under Mr. Neck’s observation at detention or MISS—Merryweather In-School Suspension. Before she is even named to him, he marks her as trouble, which she is not. Though she tries, Melinda is not anonymous and exists even as a freshman even on her first day.

The search for a mascot continues while Melinda both tries and does not try to fit in at school. After Halloween, the school board christens the school the Tigers, not liking the religious and behavioral implications of the Devils. Melinda then notes that a very successful PR campaign run by the Ecology Club, complete with posters of the endangered species, succeeds in removing Tigers as the official mascot. The school then has a democratic assembly to come up with a new mascot; this results in a schoolwide election to choose from the Bees, the Icebergs, the Hilltoppers, and the Wombats (p. 50). The Wombats receive the most votes (though only 53 out of 1,547 students vote [p. 69]). Principal Principal, Melinda’s nickname for the Principal whose name we never learn, decides to get rid of the Wombats and to do away with democracy altogether: they become the Merryweather Hornets by decree. Then the PTA starts a petition to get rid of the Hornets because of the “Hornet Hustle” (p. 141), a cheer the cheerleaders chant at sporting events that is deemed inappropriate and even gets broadcast on the local news, embarrassing the school. But the student council counter-petitions the PTA to remain the Hornets. In the counter-petition, the Honors society, on behalf of the student body, documents the “psychological harm” the students have suffered due to “this

year's lack of identity" (p. 141). They sound persuasive. But they also ring true, given what Melinda suffers as a result of the sexual assault.

Melinda takes great care in relating the struggles the school endures to select a mascot, to have an identity. While her constant reporting of this issue can be seen as just one of many dominant social narratives she observes all around her—and part of the beauty of this book is its pinpoint accuracy in relating such social narratives—it is easy to read in the counter-petition Melinda herself: she becomes the psychologically harmed student body suffering through ninth grade.

As smart as she is, Melinda does not see these parallels she creates. There is evidence to suggest she understands the tree metaphor that peppers the novel and her art project (and that serves as the cover art for Penguin's Platinum Edition of the novel), and she certainly understands the lesson her art teacher, Mr. Freeman, imparts to her about Cubism—or at least she applies it smartly to her own life, even as Mr. Freeman knows very little about her. But as the mascot issue is debated and resolved, Melinda gradually finds herself part of a network of other ninth graders, of other high school students, who feel this injustice deeply, more so than Melinda, and who also feel disenfranchised by the administration and the school board who have abandoned democratic ideals and activities (such as the election) in favor of what can only feel like tyranny to the young students. As the students rally around the school's lack of identity, Melinda will hesitatingly participate, while she also begins to find herself. Readers of the novel see the specific contours of this double identity search as we map Melinda's identity search onto the school's search.

Melinda reports on the events of the school's search for a mascot with her trademark irony and distance, yet her tone and language betray her: she cares and is as engrossed by this search for identity as any other student. "This is the only thing talked about at school," she reports, "especially during class" (p. 41). The students and Melinda do not seem to care about anything else as this discussion, the subsequent special forum, and the vote equalize the school. Though this struggle will have the greatest repercussions for the cheerleaders, of course, who have to keep trying to rhyme the new noun in new cheers, Melinda personalizes the school's search for a mascot, for a name.

The Quest to Belong

Though not an athlete or part of any after-school club or activity, Melinda enjoys this narrative of the school's identity search because she participates in the process, because it makes her feel part of something, anything. She attends the school forum to vote on the name, she regularly punctuates her narrative with updates on the name problem, and she finds in the school a version of her own search for an identity where nothing fits. Though she rather accidentally attends a basketball game when she stumbles upon the noise in the gym, she gets caught up in the display of camaraderie and the unaccustomed feeling of victory as the school wins by one point. Melinda comments on how infectious the feelings generated by the win are and how she became childlike in her shared glee. She says,

"The noise of the gym pulls me in . . . I get caught up in the excitement and clap like a girl" (pp. 130–131). This excitement enables her to momentarily consider David Petrakis's offer to hang out at his house after the game for pizza (with both his parents home, he makes clear). But she does not go and ends up walking home instead, having a dialogue between her two selves, called Melinda One and Melinda Two, about whether she should have gone and about whether or not David had ulterior motives in asking her. The feeling of belonging is fleeting. It could have continued at David's house, but Melinda opts to cut it off.

The idea of nothing fitting is both literal and metaphoric: Melinda remarks several times during the novel that she has outgrown her clothes. This leads her to go shopping at the discount department store where her mother works. She finds this humiliating because she can't afford the designer labels of the Marthas, and she doesn't have the sense of haute couture that Rachel/Rachelle adopts. She must also work there during school vacations, which marks Melinda as lower on the socioeconomic scale. With all that doesn't "fit," however, the symbolic search for the school's name does fit Melinda's search for herself

As the students rally around the school's lack of identity, Melinda will hesitatingly participate, while she also begins to find herself.

and her voice, and she notes each time a label or cause does not fit her. In the move from grades eight to nine, she has lost her clan, the Plain Janes, as each member (Rachel/Rachelle, Ivy, Nicole, and Jessica, who moved to Nevada and is never heard from again) gets reconstituted in the shuffle to high school. The girls recalibrate their social status after Melinda calls the police from Kyle Rodger's party. Her friends don't

Picasso's Cubist refraction comes to represent the many Melindas in the novel who all comprise just one.

know Andy raped her, and she winds up being ostracized, not fitting in anymore.

In an interview about the novel, Anderson comments on the notion of being clanless, on what it feels like to be Melinda.

Anderson says, "When you don't know who you are,

your clan provides an identity. When you don't have a clan, you're sunk" (Anderson, 2000, p. 26). Melinda continues to be an outcast (noted on page 4 of the novel), which both is and is not a legitimate category. Being outcast is a placeholder of nothing and no one, though it is a label, obviously.

Melinda is famous throughout the school, even though her old friends will not talk to her and food wrappers and food are thrown at her. Everyone else gets sorted into predictable high school categories. Melinda names them all: "We fall into clans: Jocks, Country Clubbers, Idiot Savants, Cheerleaders, Human Waste, Eurotrash, Future Fascists of America, Big Hair Chix, the Marthas, Suffering Artists, Thespians, Goths, Shredders" (p. 4). Clan activity is mostly observed in the cafeteria, where who you sit with and where you sit determine not only the conversation of others but also (re)defines the social structure, status, and network of your place within high school. And most clan members sit with each other, reinforcing their status as entities with little entry or movement possible (either in or out).

As ninth grade continues and Heather, Melinda's lunchtime seatmate and one-time friend, dumps her, Melinda begins to lunch in the Art Room as a way of avoiding the public humiliation of being clanless and friendless. Melinda is sunk, trying to revive her clan all novel long through her attempts to talk to Rachel/Rachelle and to connect with Ivy and Nicole in art

class and gym class, respectively. The clan does in fact get reconstituted, but it takes all year. It is significant that Nicole, who has become part of the jock clan, is one of the lacrosse-playing girls who open the door to the closet at the end of the novel when Andy attacks Melinda again.

The clan plays a critical role here, in that Nicole finds and rescues Melinda, Rachel/Rachelle is the first person Melinda tells about the rape (she writes it in a note to her in the library, partly to warn her about Andy who has in the meantime become Rachel's boyfriend), and art bonds Ivy and Melinda after they run into each other at the mall during spring break when they are both working on their assignment for Mr. Freeman. This movement of reconstitution and coming full circle does not seem forced in the novel at all, even though it may sound it. (It is a cliché of sorts to neatly wrap up several narrative strands that involve solving the problems of teen angst.) In fact, it is a natural progression of Melinda's growth and newborn (or newfound) identity and a productive, rather than trite, novelistic tactic.

A Girl by Any Other Name

So who is Melinda? Even Principal Principal, in the meeting with Melinda's parents, calls her Melissa (p. 114). Melinda is also called Mel by David Petrakis, Mellie by Anderson in her "Speaking Out" interview (p. 26), and Melinda One and Melinda Two in some of her own internal dialogues. Rather than view the latter example as any type of psychopathology, we see Melinda's dialogue with her two selves as a real expression of tension and concern about whether or not to go to David's house after the basketball game. When Melinda has this dialogue with her two selves at this moment in the novel, it comes across as in character and perfectly ordinary within the narrative. She is pulled in both directions, wanting to go and be social and wanting to retreat into herself.

Picasso's Cubist refraction comes to represent the many Melindas in the novel who all comprise just one. Even Melinda may be confused about who she is at points. Rachel/Rachelle has certainly grown up in the transition to high school: she is dating a senior, wears make up, and hangs out with the foreign exchange students (who noticeably increase her cool factor). Melinda, by contrast, still lives in a childishly

decorated room (a place Heather cannot wait to re-decorate) and recalls longingly the childhood memories when Rachel/Rachelle was just Rachel.

While playing hooky from school at the mall, Melinda further indicates that she just wants “to be in fifth grade again” (p. 99), presumably a time when things were simpler. A whole other part of her journey, though it is muted in the novel, chronicles that transition between middle/junior high and high school. In many ways, Melinda, though now technically sexually experienced, still childishly clings to her past and her innocence. This is in direct contrast to Rachel/Rachelle, to Mr. Neck, gym class, lab partners you may or may not trust, and the high school cafeteria, all of which require navigation and survival skills Melinda has not quite mastered yet.

Almost every character in the school suffers a nickname bestowed by Melinda, except a handful of teachers: Mrs. Keen, the biology teacher; Mr. Stetman, the Algebra teacher; and the gym teacher who wants Melinda to trade her successful foul-shooting secret to the boys’ team for an A in gym. In fact, Melinda’s use of nicknames gives rise to many of the comic moments in the novel. Kids and authority figures alike get named or renamed by Melinda, often because of a personal tic or characteristic, sometimes just because of their function. I have already mentioned the social studies teacher, Mr. Neck; English is taught by Hair-woman (who does have a transformation [haircut] at the end and should rightly earn a new nickname), and THE BEAST, or IT, Andy Evans. Principal Principal, Guidance Counselor, and Librarian are other adults who populate Melinda’s world and are defined by their roles. Rachel becomes Rachelle in an attempt to be cool and European (having moved on from the Plain Janes to the exchange students, she must Europeanize herself and thus transform her name and identity; she also speaks French or something Melinda thinks approximates it). Though Mr. Freeman does not technically have a nickname, his name itself hints at the role he plays in the novel by dictating his purpose. The comic effect of the Principal’s name being repeated twice each and every time he appears initially registers the lack of respect Melinda and the other kids have for him. He is also just another nameless figure of authority.

Melinda does not escape the (re)naming. She, too, has been renamed by herself, with help from others.

The novel opens with Melinda’s identity at once lost, by her own pronouncement: “I am Outcast” (p. 4), she says on the novel’s second page, with a capital O. The novel’s insistence upon and attention to naming and renaming equalizes the students, faculty, and the school itself because no one escapes. Anderson demonstrates how the search for name, for identity, is caught up in other searches. Everyone’s name seems to fit—either how they see themselves or how others see them—and the clan-like registry we observed earlier reinforces status and functionality.

Melinda’s own reading list—*The Scarlet Letter* and her extracurricular Halloween reading of Stoker’s *Dracula*, for instance—participates in the larger identity searches

as well and demonstrates, at least in part, the other names Melinda tries on. Links between Hawthorne’s branded Hester Prynne and Melinda seem altogether obvious, and this overt parallel may indeed be one of the novel’s flaws as we compare Hester’s stoicism and Melinda’s *Dracula*, too, though perhaps less so, is centrally concerned with identity, public shame, and accountability as it revolves around primal fear—the threat of the Other to the white, privileged, European male of the late Victorian period. Melinda’s reading registers her ability to see her own noticeable struggle in an established literary tradition, one that may legitimize her even as she is mostly silent in her commentary on these works.

Melinda’s naming of herself also helps to set the plot in motion. Children’s and young adult literature chronicle plenty of outcast protagonists who just do not seem to fit in with any crowd for superficial or documented reasons. Though there does not have to be a reason for Melinda to be an outcast in ninth grade, there is. She called the cops and broke up the party she and Rachel went to during the summer before ninth grade. She reports she did not intend to get people in trouble; she just did not know what to do after being raped.

That night, Melinda walked home to an empty

The novel’s insistence upon and attention to naming and renaming equalizes the students, faculty, and the school itself because no one escapes.

house. Indeed, one of the great mysteries of the novel concerns where her parents were that night. Melinda reports that both their cars were gone, leading the reader to believe that not only were they out of the house, but they went out separately. This is never referred to again, but it does clue the reader into the home dynamics of the Sordino family. Though not the perfect picture of a functional and loving family, the

As Melinda's sense of identity begins to emerge, she also gives her janitor's closet an identity that reflects her own.

Sordinos do not seem on the edge of divorce, even though Melinda speculates that they would be if she had not been born (p. 70). (This, of course, is a very common young adult response: to have a fantasy about your parents possibly divorcing or even that you are an orphan, which

Melinda also thinks [p. 147].) She does indicate she is just like them: she is “an ordinary drone dressed in secrets and lies” (p. 70).

So where were they that night? Melinda does not seem to question where they were, suggesting that she does not care and that perhaps this kind of behavior from them is normal or common. The absented parents are not even silent witnesses to their daughter's trauma, though they do buy her paints for Christmas, and Melinda remarks that they must have noticed her interest in drawing. Melinda is outcast at home as well; literally, she is as alone at home as she was the night of the rape.

In the bleachers at the pep rally, which Heather, the new girl, talks Melinda into attending early in the novel, Melinda is once again reminded of the collective anger of her schoolmates and the trouble she caused. Heather innocently introduces Melinda to other kids she of course already knows. When the girl sitting behind Melinda overhears her name, she begins to push and dig her knees into Melinda's back, telling her that her brother got arrested and lost his job because of what Melinda did. Though at this point in the novel the reader does not know the real reason Melinda called the cops, we trust and like her enough to give her the benefit of the doubt. The bleacher moment is significant because it clues Heather in to the kind of new friend she has in Melinda—one people hate and will ignore even as they pay attention to her.

We also recognize that whatever it was that happened will prove to be the novel's mystery, and we begin to key in on clues to enable its solving. Melinda also oddly agrees to go with Heather to the pep rally against her best judgment, perhaps harboring some kind of childish fantasy about collective school spirit and her role as a student with friends. This gets dashed repeatedly and almost immediately and serves to make the reader feel sorry for Melinda.

When Melinda first finds her janitor's closet—what will become her safe space until Andy Evans finds her and attacks her there—she also connects the physical space with the idea of identity and naming. She says, “The closet is abandoned—it has no purpose, no name. It is the perfect place for me” (p. 26). What is useless and functionless becomes the proper fit for her, in her estimation. Decaying, moldy, and smelly, untouched for years, this closet is where Melinda begins to find herself.

Strength and Hope in Identity

As Melinda's sense of identity begins to emerge, she also gives her janitor's closet an identity that reflects her own. She transforms the closet into a lighter and brighter space of hope, triumph, and resistance; ultimately, it will become the only place she can comfortably sleep. It will also become her own private art gallery as her projects occupy its shelves and her drawings line its walls, a reminder of her yearlong creativity, struggle, but ultimate productivity in art class. When Melinda is ready to say goodbye to ninth grade and move out from or out of her closet, she considers leaving it, now new and safe, to the next inhabitant. Minutes before Andy's second attack, which Melinda of course cannot foresee, she says “Who knows, some other kids may need a safe place to run to next year” (p. 192). Even on the brink of Andy's second attack as the closet is in danger of becoming unsafe, Melinda saves herself and the closet by saying no and fighting back. She is also protecting the innocence and purity of the closet, which is under attack just as Melinda is. The seeds of strength grow in the face of an identity to fight for.

Anderson's novel offers a spin on the common identity search in young adult and children's literature by chronicling a host of such searches that parallel and interact with Melinda's. Studying the multiple

identity searches in the novel reveals how tightly wound and symmetrically plotted the novel is. Though that might sound like a criticism, it is not: because of these cycles of narrative, the novel works well with students who perform close readings and key into these kinds of noticing patterns in literary texts. Given Melinda's own relationship to close reading, one would think she would have appreciated analyzing *Speak* in her own English class under the guidance of a reformed and transformed Hairwoman. It would probably fare better than "Poor Nathaniel" (p. 100), who gets beat up a bit in Melinda's class discussion of his *Scarlet Letter*.

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Call for Student Reviews for *Voices from the Middle*

Voices from the Middle is NCTE's journal for the Middle Level Section. The Student to Student feature runs in each of the year's four issues and contains five short book reviews written by students who have enjoyed a book and want to recommend it to others. This has been a popular and motivating element of *VM* since its inception.

Wendy Ranck-Buhr, principal at the San Diego Cooperative Charter School, serves as department editor for this feature. She invites teachers from across the nation and the world to submit their students' book reviews. We know from teacher feedback that these reviews motivate students to write with care, help readers pick out new books, and generally support our students as readers and writers.

Please send Student to Student submissions as Word files to vmstudenttostudent@gmail.com. Keep in mind that reviews should be 200 words (including bibliographic information—title, author, publisher, year of publication, number of pages, non-discounted price, and 13-digit ISBN number), the student's grade and school must be identified, and the book reviewed should not have appeared in *VM* within the last three years. (For an easy reference, check the annual indexes appearing in every May issue, both print and online.) You will be required to secure a parent's signature on a consent-to-publish form and fax or email that form to Dr. Ranck-Buhr.

We hope you will encourage your students to write reviews for consideration. Publication has made a difference in so many student lives!

Images and Limited Text in Narrative Writing:

Using David Small's Nonfiction Graphic Novel *Stitches* to Teach Memoir

"All I know is that he used a belt to do it," Myra (pseudonym) answered after our guidance counselor asked how her brother died. With a shared and sympathetic glance, we knew what she meant. Myra was a typical 14-year-old student before her brother committed suicide. She had a stable group of girlfriends, tried out for the dance team, and made good grades in her classes. For several months after her brother's death, though, Myra kept to herself, and often asked to visit our school's media center during homeroom. She found solace in reading graphic novels, though she was not especially interested in books prior to the tragedy. Now she was constantly reading, totally engaged in the texts, and every now and again, I caught her smiling before she turned a page. It seemed that these texts provided her with a bit of relief from the strife she suffered. Watching her grief begin to settle—even if just for a moment—helped me see just how powerful reading could be.

Reading: More Powerful Than I Knew

Getting adolescent students to become engaged enough to read a text in its entirety can be a daunting task for teachers (Lapp & Fisher, 2009). Many adolescent students are neither motivated nor engaged in reading, and thus fail to learn the content taught by their teachers. Readers who are engaged, on the other hand, show a great desire to learn content material and practice strategies to help them understand and interpret text (Guthrie & Alao, 1997). When students are engaged in reading, they are more likely to be

motivated and set goals, including "being committed to the subject matter, wanting to learn the content, believing in one's own ability, and wanting to share understandings from learning" (Guthrie & Alao, 1997, p. 438).

It is part of teachers' responsibilities to ensure their students have opportunities to become actively involved in classroom learning. Research has shown that graphic novels can be useful tools for engagement with adolescent students (Bucher & Manning, 2004; Frey & Fisher, 2004; Hughes, King, Perkins, & Fuke, 2011; Gorman & Eastman, 2010; Hall, 2011). In this article, I will explore how graphic novels can be useful in engaging high school students by specifically looking at author and illustrator David Small's autobiographical graphic novel *Stitches: A Memoir* (2009) and how his book can help get students more engaged in reading and writing. I will examine how reader response theory can be used with his novel and how secondary teachers can use his text as a scaffolding device to help students write memoirs.

Stitches, Not Your Average Autobiography

Biographies and autobiographies are commonly written in standard chapter book or textbook form. Often, readers will see a full-page photograph of the book's subject on the front cover of the text. On the inside of the book, the biography of that person is found through pages and pages of carefully written words. David Small's autobiography, *Stitches*, goes against the grain of the conventional form of biographies and autobiographies by using a graphic novel format. In-

stead of using pages full of written text, Small makes his agonizing childhood and adolescence authentic for his readers by using limited text and only gray tones in his illustrations. The gloomy and ominous pictures contribute successfully to the emotional impact of Small's woeful story, making it deeply poignant and tender for readers and exemplifying the idea that visual modes of communication have the power to enhance meaning that words cannot always achieve on their own (Hughes et al., 2011). There is truth in the cliché, *a picture's worth a thousand words*.

In his autobiographical account, Small has a distant relationship with both of his parents and seems to have no friends of his own. Although his family occasionally eats dinner together, there is no love, happiness, or laughter in their home. At age 11, friends of his parents notice a growth on his neck. His parents have it surgically removed soon after, but three years later, Small finds a letter revealing that the growth was cancerous and that his parents chose to keep it from him. When he was 15, Small's dad admitted that the cancer was caused by being overexposed to radiation—the result of multiple X-rays his father performed on him in their basement when Small was still a young child. Small must also cope with his mother having an affair with another woman, psychiatric therapy sessions, and daunting recurring dreams.

The themes that occur in this text are for mature adolescents; therefore, this book would best be suited for 16–17-year-old high school students. Although much of the content in this novel is heavy with grim emotions, the images and plotline captivate readers and keep them turning pages to see how Small overcomes his melancholic childhood. This novel is the crux of my article because it touches on tough subjects that are real for students like Myra. Small's synthesis of image and text work together well to create a resonating and engaging effect on readers. In addition, research on graphic novels reveals promising outcomes for adolescent students in secondary classrooms.

Unique Features of Graphic Novels

The Visual and Text Blend

Using graphic novels as supplementary texts in English language arts classrooms has had positive effects on reluctant and/or struggling readers, ELL students,

and adolescent students in general. Students gain refined skills at interpreting the author's message after being exposed to the blend of illustration and text together (Billman, 2002). As we have learned, such visual literacy is imperative for students to succeed (Seglem & Witte, 2009).

In their article on using visuals to teach metaphorical thinking in reading and writing, Krueger and Christel (2001) maintain

that students should examine visuals and be able to make critiques on these visuals to see how they affect meaning in a text (as cited by Gorman & Eastman, 2010). English teachers need to use imagery and visual metaphors together with literary texts and writing assignments

to steer students away from linear thinking and gear them toward symbolic and subjective thinking (Gorman & Eastman, 2010). This is vital because visual symbols require more complex thinking skills than the traditional left-to-right books students are most familiar with in school texts (Seglem & Witte, 2009). Being able to think symbolically and subjectively allows students to use higher-level thinking and critical analysis skills. By including graphic novels in their curriculum, teachers are enabling students to break out of the box of reading text as a routinely linear experience and into a way of learning that allows them to take ownership of how they read the text, making reading and the text more relatable to them as individuals.

Reading as an Individual Experience

Louise Rosenblatt strongly believed that literary encounters should be individualized lived experiences. In her book, *Literature as Exploration* (1995), she explored literature in the classroom and encouraged teachers to treat students not as pupils in a classroom but as individual human beings. In another article about reading multimodal texts, Serafini (2010) elaborates on this idea of students as individuals when he describes that individuals' perceptions of multimodal texts—or texts that incorporate a mixture of visual images, design elements, and written language among other semiotic devices—are wrought with prior knowl-

Being able to think symbolically and subjectively allows students to use higher-level thinking and critical analysis skills.

edge, personal experiences, and sociocultural and/or historical contexts. This means that every individual has unique personal experiences that influence his/her understanding and perceptions of images and language seen in multimodal texts like graphic novels. The images and text, the elements of design, and the structures of the images readers are exposed to in mul-

Every individual has unique personal experiences that influence his/her understanding and perceptions of images and language seen in multimodal texts like graphic novels.

timodal text are intended to carry out specific social actions and meanings (Serafini, 2010). To that end, Serafini encourages teachers to move outside of the literal meanings of images and texts by considering readers' various interpretations through perceptual, structural, and ideological frameworks.

Graphic novels support this idea of individualistic lived experiences, since students are able to read the story in a non-

fluid, nonlinear manner that is most comfortable for them. Being able to analyze these sequential, yet flexible blocks of information in graphic novels is essential for critical analyses (Hall, 2011). Students also individually interpret meaning from the illustrations and connect those interpretations with the text in their own ways. Rosenblatt (1995) once said that as teachers of literature, "our concern should be the relation between readers and text" (p. 268), since meaning is re-created from text when a student reads a literary piece.

Graphic Novels as Popular Culture

There is value in examining the relationship between reader and text in graphic novels since readers are responsible for not only interpreting the *language*, but also the *images* incorporated throughout the text. The trend toward a visual culture is on the rise with the expansion of television, film, and Internet (Hasset & Schieble, 2007) into portable devices—iPads, tablets, mobile phones. Research has found that a great deal of current literacy instruction is still accomplished through traditional texts and alphabetic

writing (Hasset & Schieble, 2007), but their exclusive use discounts new technologies and visual modes of communication; students are more accustomed to seeing the combination of text and visuals in their world (Hasset & Schieble, 2007). The comic-style approach present in graphic novels fits students' needs and interests, since it takes advantage of the union between text and image that students are used to seeing on television, advertisements, cell phones, and even in actual comics they read leisurely (Hall, 2011). Graphic novels are also appropriate for the needs of struggling readers and writers because of the limited text (Frey & Fisher, 2004). In their graphic novel read-alouds to urban high school students, Frey and Fisher (2004) found that the illustrations within the graphic novels enhanced the story's meaning for students, supplying support for the idea that the image-text blend can help with comprehension.

The main purpose of graphic novels is to advance students' visual literacy and "to engage them with artistically appealing and accessible material" (Hall, 2011, p. 40). Hall (2011) brings up the development of webcomics—graphic novel-type comics online—and how those can be useful materials in the classroom, since visual and verbal literacy become interactive. He cites *Teaching the Graphic Novel* author Stephen Tabachnick throughout his article and ends with a quote from him stating, ". . . graphic novels fit students' sensibilities at a deep cognitive level" (p. 43). Hall acknowledges that learning takes place when a student finds the content interesting and suggests "that is nowhere more apt to happen than with comics and graphic novels" (p. 43). Because they have a popular culture appeal, graphic novels "provide a unique way of enticing at-risk students into reading, writing, and developing multiliteracy skills" (Hughes et al., 2011, p. 602). Some researchers contend that adolescents intentionally seek out print media similar to the types of media they are used to seeing on television and in video games, making graphic novels an easy and popular choice for young adults (Bucher & Manning, 2004).

Because students should be encouraged to read what interests them, graphic novels should be in all schools and should be incorporated into the curriculum when appropriate (Bucher & Manning, 2004). Three factors are crucial when including graphic novels into the curriculum: 1) variety, 2) appropriate

content for the age of students, and 3) a good balance of text and art (Bucher & Manning, 2004). Researchers Bucher and Manning (2004) include many examples of graphic novels that they consider engaging for adolescents; they include Art Spiegelman's *Maus* collections as well as interpretations of classics such as David Wenzel's graphic novel version of Tolkien's *The Hobbit*. Their article suggests that graphic novels can work for other content areas outside of English language arts. With the growing amount of research supporting the sense that graphic novels are prevalent in popular culture, it seems natural for graphic novels to engage adolescent students in reading; after all, students engage with multimodal literacies on a daily basis, so its familiarity makes it more approachable and thus more likely to be read.

It is a fact that text and visual blends are widespread in students' lives outside of school. Perhaps using these familiar blends in the classroom will help engage students and improve their skills as readers and writers. In his article on reader response to literature, Marshall (2000) explains that researchers

have developed categories that can be used to analyze readers' responses. One category codes responses for quality of thinking and/or depth of response; by determining students' levels of performance, teachers can better understand the nature, content, or quality of literary response (Marshall, 2000). Teachers should keep in mind the text being read, the reader, and the context in which the reading takes place when looking at student responses to literature (Marshall, 2000).

Rosenblatt's (1995) idea about aesthetic versus efferent reading plays a role in how readers respond to graphic novels. Aesthetic reading focuses on the reading as a lived and personal experience, while efferent reading focuses on information and facts provided by the text. Both types of reading are necessary and are intertwined with one another (Rosenblatt, 1995), so I will address both aesthetic and efferent reading here. Additionally, because more recent research on reader response involves looking at the process of reader response itself (Marshall, 2000), the remainder of this article will attempt to convey various ways adolescent readers respond to *Stitches* and how their responses could affect the way they write memoirs.

Setting the Pedagogical Stage

Reader Response Theory

Readers' responses to literature are widely varied but can be categorized into the text being read, the reader who is completing the reading, or the context in which the reading is occurring (Marshall, 2000). In *Stitches*, Small's illustrations present readers with dark undertones, Hitchcock-like angles, and stenciled images of wiry-framed characters (see Fig. 1). Readers who come across this text could interpret the illustrations and the texts differently depending on their personal experiences. How the teacher chooses to present Small's novel can also affect students' responses to the book and, therefore, responses to the way their memoirs are written. For instance, an individual reading of the text may carry a different message to readers than a whole-class reading of the text. Similarly, reading the text in a classroom environment as opposed to taking the text home to read could also affect the text's meaning for students. Therefore, it is necessary for teachers to keep in mind the text, the reader, and the context of the reading when assessing students' literary responses.



Figure 1. Lonely image of Small immediately after discovering his growth was cancerous. Adapted from *Stitches: A Memoir* by David Small, p. 209. Copyright 2009 by W.W. Norton & Company. Reprinted with permission.

Writing Memoirs

Memoirs are part of the nonfiction genre of writing. For students, this writing can get personal and emotional, so it is imperative that teachers present memoirs and memoir writing in a safe, open, and comfortable environment. As adolescents begin to explore their identities, it is important that teachers of English language arts create an outlet for them to analyze and reflect on their past experiences. First-person, subjective accounts of personal lives and personal ideas can be empowering for both the writer and the reader and can help students be contemplative about their own identities (Bradley, 2007). Teachers should reassure students that writing memoirs does not inevitably mean exposing embarrassing or shameful truths to peers. Rather, memoirs are about creating narratives based on memories and honest perceptions of the world and not necessarily about creating definitive realities (Bradley, 2007).

In his novel *Stitches*, David Small presents his childhood through his own perspective; he acknowledges in his final pages that maturity, reflection, and research on his family's history slightly changed his perception of his mother, and consequently of his memoir. Teachers should make students aware that it is okay for their perceptions on their memories to change as they are writing or even as they grow older. By crafting a balance between a personal reflection of a memory and presenting facts and information from the memory, the aesthetic and efferent balance Rosenblatt (1995) refers to can be achieved.

Strategies to Teach *Stitches*

Because of the deep and complex issues Small writes about in his memoir, teachers must use some discretion for teaching and exposing this book to students. Though it is considered a young adult novel and has even been a finalist for the National Book Award Young Adult category, it is more appropriate for older students like juniors and/or seniors in high school. Visual literacy in this novel is compelling and important to its message. It is likely that older students may be more attuned to the purposive dark tones, close-ups, angled shots, shadows, and thin font Small incorporates throughout his text (see Figs 2 & 3) than would younger students. Older students may also have a better sense of visual knowledge, which gives

them greater potential “to gain a deeper sensitivity to the characters’ emotions and intentions, and greater insight into the issues and struggles portrayed” (Burke & Peterson, 2007, p. 74).

Stitches can be used in a number of ways when teaching high school students how to create narrative writing through memoirs. The following two lesson ideas assume that students have thoroughly read the novel. A review of the basic characteristics in a story (i.e. plot, setting, characters, and climax) may be necessary for students to understand how to create narrative memoirs.

Lesson 1: Gallery Walk Graphoirs

Instead of introducing the writing assignment by stressing the traditional introduction, body, and conclusion paragraphs, teachers can select various excerpts directly from the novel and showcase them around the classroom as a way to introduce graphic novel memoirs, or *graphoirs*. Selection of the excerpts should purposefully exemplify emotion. Students can then examine the text and images more closely to understand meaning in a more analytical manner.



Figure 2. Hard angles and empty, white space parallel Small's relationship with his mother. Adapted from *Stitches: A Memoir* by David Small, p. 15. Copyright 2009 by W.W. Norton & Company. Reprinted with permission.



Figure 3. Small's choice to turn his back to the door may reflect his frustration toward his environment. His dark undertones and wiry images will elicit different reader reactions. Adapted from *Stitches: A Memoir* by David Small, p. 61. Copyright 2009 by W.W. Norton & Company. Reprinted with permission.

The teacher might direct students to move around the room, as if they are looking at artifacts or paintings in a museum or art gallery. Students could also be asked to observe the excerpted images and write responses about their views of what is taking place in each excerpt.

If the teacher chooses to formally assess responses, it is imperative to take into account the reader, the text, and the context for the reading into consideration (Marshall, 2000). Readers' responses involve individuals' prior knowledge and personal experiences, which can certainly diversify student responses (Rosenblatt, 1995; Serafini, 2010). One student's interpretation of text and image may be completely different than another's. In Figure 3, for example, one student may find Small to be a creative young child with an unusual imagination, able to create games with himself by constructing hats and creating drawings. Perhaps that student is an only child who can relate to the image.

Another student may see Small as a lonely child without any sense of his world and nothing to draw about because he has no creative ideas. It is possible that student comes from a large family and has not had many experiences with being alone at that age. Applying reader response theory when assessing students' responses can benefit both teachers and students because responses are allowed to be subjective and flexible as long as meaning is derived from the text.

Once students have had the opportunity to look at and respond to the excerpts, the class can engage in a discussion about why Small chose to tell his story using images and limited text. The teacher can finish up the discussion by reiterating the idea that complex issues can sometimes be better expressed with fewer words and explanations and more visuals and illustrations. Classes can then generate a list of reasons why visuals and texts mixed together could be a valuable outlet to creating autobiographies. After compiling this list, students will be expected to create their own graphoirs by using three to five meaningful life events. They should stay true to graphic novel text and image blocks, creating their own images by hand in order to personalize their work.

Lesson 2: Scrapbook Memoirs

In this lesson, the teacher would again showcase excerpts from Small's text around the room so that students are able to view them closely. Instead of asking students to write a response to the excerpts, the teacher would ask students to generate a list of items that summarize David Small. Through careful analysis and exploration, students might come up with specific objects to represent Small's desire for freedom. For instance, in his memoir, Small describes a time where he removed his shoes and used his socks to slide up and down hallways to escape from limitations and taste freedom where he did not have to answer to his mother's rules (Small, 2009). Thus, shoes and socks might go on a student's list of meaningful items. After creating the list, students would then brainstorm objects that represent important moments in their own lives.

Students would then be asked to create representations of these objects to make a scrapbook memoir of three to five powerful life events. They would be able to use cutouts from magazines and newspapers, images from the Internet, and/or hand-drawn pictures

Graphoires and scrapbook memoirs can be used to get students engaged in the assignment before getting into formal writing.

to create their stories. For each object they recreate, students would be expected to write a personal narrative about what the object represents in their lives. Students could use report folders to bind their scrapbooks together or, if possible, the teacher could spiral-bind students' work

to keep as permanent scrapbooks. The teacher would assess the memoirs by taking into account the individual reader, the content of the life events chosen, and the context for each reader's scrapbook memoir.

Conclusion

Reading literature deals with experiences of human beings in personal and social relationships (Rosenblatt, 1995). It is imperative that educators are mindful of this fact. The tragic experience of my former student Myra helped me understand that literature, particularly graphic novels, can also help remedy hardships. At the end of the school year, when Myra was ready to open up again, I asked how she was doing. Her answer was simple, "I'm fine now. I can find him in the characters I read about, so I know he's okay." Her words illustrate the potential impact of reading and gives evidence to the fact that graphic novels can be powerful tools. The graphic novels in which Myra immersed herself ameliorated her mourning. I suspect David Small's *Stitches: A Memoir* may be useful for adolescent readers and, perhaps, even help some readers mend issues in their own lives.

In English language arts classes, students are expected to produce narratives in the form of memoirs and autobiographies (Common Core Appendix, 2011). To scaffold this writing technique, graphoires and scrapbook memoirs can be used to get students engaged in the assignment before getting into formal writing. Small's novel, *Stitches: A Memoir*, provides a great, personal example of how memoirs can be told creatively and deeply through images and limited text. This type of narrative writing would be especially beneficial for students who struggle with writing, because it would allow them to think of their ideas in a more concrete manner, since the images and objects

are tangible. The dissection of the concept of memoir and narrative writing can help students understand how serious life events can be transformed into effective, literary pieces. Reading Small's novel and taking part in the memoir lessons can help prepare secondary students for reading narrative memoirs like Pulitzer Prize-winning books *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee (1960) and *Angela's Ashes* by Frank McCourt (1999). By framing personal narrative and memoirs in a visual manner, teachers ease students' learning processes and tap into intelligences outside of written, textual language.

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Invitational History in Margarita Engle's *The Poet Slave of Cuba: A Biography of Juan Francisco Manzano*

Verse novels rooted in historical periods can help students understand the ethical behavior of characters as situated within location and time. Verse novels on challenging social issues, like child slavery, allow students to move beyond distant historical timelines and faraway geography lessons into the inner lives of the people involved in these circumstances. To illustrate this point, I explore the *invitations*, or ways in which authors use narrative to prompt the reader, and the *ethical visions*, or messages embedded in characters' conduct, using Margarita Engle's (2006) award-winning novel *The Poet Slave of Cuba: A Biography of Juan Francisco Manzano*.

Challenges of Sharing Multicultural Literature from Historical Periods

Although several educators have gotten on the multicultural literature bandwagon, fewer of them find it simple to incorporate such books into their curriculum (Kuo & Alsup, 2010). Scholars argue that readers of multicultural literature may resist the social norms that operate in texts when these conflict with their own cultural expectations (Galda & Beach, 2001). The many challenges posed by this curricular choice are exacerbated when a multicultural story takes place in another country and/or in a different historical period. Practitioners and scholars who have documented children's and young adults' responses to stories from diverse groups have expressed that what is most difficult when sharing such literature is to help students

understand people's ethical behavior and beliefs in light of the specific historical narratives (Louie, 2005; Nelson, 2005).

Ms. Nelson, a fourth-grade teacher in Indiana, addressed the difficulties of using literature to explore race relations between blacks and whites during the Antebellum period. During a discussion of *Christmas in the Big House, Christmas in the Quarter* (McKissack, 1994), her predominantly Caucasian students expressed that they would have helped the slaves and probably even challenged their parents' support of slavery—actions that would not have been sanctioned in that period. Similarly, Louie observed Ms. Sandy, a high school teacher in the Pacific Northwest, as she carried out a unit on the Chinese Cultural Revolution. During an exploration of *Let One Hundred Flowers Bloom* (Feng, 1995), her class of mainly Caucasian students condemned a female character for abandoning her husband and deciding to terminate a pregnancy—two conditions that could have made her an enemy of the Chinese regime.

Despite the teachers' efforts to inform students about each historical period (i.e., United States Antebellum and the Chinese Cultural Revolution) prior to reading, the students in both classrooms continued to evaluate the characters' actions through their own norms. The accounts from these classrooms reiterate the validity of Rosenblatt's (2004) claim that "the range of potential reactions and the gamut of degrees of intensity and articulateness depend on the interplay among the character of the signs on the page (text)

[and] what the individual reader brings to it” (p. 1377). These classroom chronicles demonstrate that well-intended and carefully planned efforts at preparing readers to enter a multicultural text do not guarantee comprehension of challenging issues situated in a specific time and place.

Story Context and Reader Understanding

Stories’ Invitations and Ethical Visions

Gregory’s (2009) assertion on how stories work to persuade readers to enter their world provides a useful framework here for understanding Engle’s verse novel. Gregory explains that although all stories have an ethical vision or “a particular configuration of rights and wrongs that any story puts in motion within a represented human context” (p. 37), only certain stories manage to entice the reader to accept the invitation or, as he puts it, to assent to the story’s cueing and prompting. In Gregory’s own words, for this to happen, there must be “an agreement on the auditor’s part not to reject the data of any story out of hand and not to start out truculent or combative” (p. 72). Allowing for such a dialogic stance can lead to “successful reading . . . in which the person who reads appropriates the characters in the text as voices of the self, at times displacing some aspect of his or her own consciousness” (Lysaker & Miller, in press). This is not to say that literature can lead to blind imitation.

Instead, Gregory (2009) posits that stories, including those in print, can provide readers with alternative ethical models on which to base their ethical decisions. After all, young adults are regularly bombarded by direct and indirect ethical influences from parents, caretakers, and their peer group; these influences already inform their ideas of available ethical models. But the formation of the self does not have to be constrained to the realm of the real and immediate, Gregory claims that stories, and I would add young adult literature, can serve as yet another source of ethical models for students. As Lysaker, Tonge, Gauson, and Miller (2011) explain, “the activity of reading involves the introduction of new voices—those of the text—in the conversation that is the ‘self.’ . . . which like other conversations, have the potential to transform” (p. 527). The transformational power of stories is further emphasized by Gregory (2009) who suggests:

The fact that stories *do* work—the fact that they cue our capacities for feeling, believing, and judging—inevitably raises questions about their potential influence on character, for what *is* character other than the particular configuration of our own ways of feeling, believing, and judging? (p. 23)

The historical fiction verse novel is a perfect example of a type of story that invites readers to consider complex historical circumstances.

The Rise of the Verse Novel

The past decade has witnessed the rising popularity of verse novels in the field of young adult literature. Some scholars (Groenke & Scherff, 2010) claim it is the verse novel’s postmodern qualities, such as its inclusion of various narrators, that is partly responsible for this phenomenon. Others attribute its attractiveness to the traditional first-person account and its focus on the characters’ feelings or emotions (Campbell, 2004). The visual layout of the verse novel, with its predominantly white space, has been deemed accountable for enticing reluctant readers (Sullivan, 2003) and creating a peculiar literary effect of pause and reflection in the reader (Shahan, 2009).

This brief overview of the verse novel’s popularity in the last decade provides a glimpse at the many reasons young adult readers assent to reading it. Margarita Engle’s (2006) *The Poet Slave of Cuba: A Biography of Juan Francisco Manzano* is a brilliant example of the power of the historical fiction verse novel. The invitations in her text bring readers to a deep understanding of the novel’s ethical models through the slave/slave-owner dynamic and consequently its larger ethical vision: the conditions of slavery and the consequences of resistance. Other verse novels by Engle that also achieve this invitational effect are included in Figure 1.

Additional Historical Fiction Verse Novels by Margarita Engle

Hurricane Dancers: The First Caribbean Pirate Shipwreck. (2011). New York, NY: Henry Holt.

The Surrender Tree: Poems of Cuba’s Struggle for Freedom. (2008). New York, NY: Square Fish.

Tropical Secrets: Holocaust Refugees in Cuba. (2009). New York, NY: Henry Holt and Company.

Figure 1.

Teaching *The Poet Slave of Cuba: A Biography of Juan Francisco Manzano*

Story Summary

Engle's book opens with a poem by a 6-year-old slave. Juan, just like his mother María del Pilar Manzano and his father Toribio de Castro, was born into slavery and works for Doña

Beatriz, an affluent slave owner. Doña Beatriz grows fond of Juan and grants freedom to his parents under one condition: Juan will belong to her until she dies. Years later, upon her death, Juan chooses to go live with his godmother, La Marquesa de Prado Ameno, instead of his family.

It is here where Juan's real torment will take place until his escape a decade later. The plot of the novel is narrated from the perspective of seven different people—one of Engle's many invitations to the reader.

Invitational Narrative Perspectives in Engle's Verses

First Owner

Juan's first owner, Doña Beatriz, marvels at the training she is able to offer her boy-slave. She calls him her pet, her own personal entertainer—a well-mannered boy that she can take to parties and theater performances. As a result of this unique dynamic, Juan is often delighted by the small things offered by his owner: the scents of the open courtyard, the architecture of the house, and closeness to his parents. More important, he enjoys being able to learn language during his contact with books and affluent people. Doña Beatriz's fondness for Juan is evident in how she makes him a preferred companion. It is also manifested in her use of the endearing term Juanito, or little Juan. But Juan's father is able to see beyond his son's childish naiveté and his growing fame. For him, the child whom people call the Golden Beak is nothing but a caged bird.

As this plethora of voices demonstrates, Juan's relationship to his first owner is seen quite differently by each actor; thus, the reader is invited to explore them all to reach a conjecture of his/her own. The

owner says she treats her boy-slave as her own child, Juan exclaims he enjoys the attention given to him if this means he gets to learn words, while for Toribio, the boy is merely being used by his owner and her acquaintances. Unfortunately, Juan's relatively easy life comes to an end five years later with his owner's death, when he chooses to go to his godmother's house.

Second Owner

Unlike his first owner, La Marquesa is not highly concerned with public functions, pleasing the nobles, or buying her way into heaven by granting freedom to a few slaves. La Marquesa's own son—Don Nicolás—describes her as someone “with a mind / that needs light” (Engle, 2006, p. 61). Toribio adds that she is vile, crazy, and cruel. Not surprisingly, Juan's adolescence becomes endless pandemonium under this new ownership. Soon enough, daily misery erases all traces of stature and grace from Juan's past, and brings forth the dire conditions of slavery. The boy once considered a genius is now being shunned and starved; he is transformed from “poodle” (Engle, 2006, p. 5) to “stray dog” (Engle, 2006, p. 45). His mother worries about rumors of insanity regarding Juan, La Marquesa, or both. Like María del Pilar and Don Nicolás, the reader feels powerless as Juan's degradation continues its steady pace. Much like Toribio, we hope that the gossip surrounding La Marquesa's nature is exaggerated speculation, but we soon find this is not the case. Juan is shackled, whipped, endangered by ferocious dogs, beaten, and the victim of many other punishments crafted by La Marquesa.

These first-person narratives achieve their purpose; the reader is horrified at Juan's suffering and humiliation. We experience Juan's torment as he wonders if he is really hearing voices from the dead corpses locked with him in the cellar, and we feel his anger as he paints the figure of a witch with his brushes. Amidst Juan's dehumanizing state, we rejoice when what remains of this poet produces a verse or a song.

Invitational Gaps in Engle's Verses

The appeal of Engle's invitations through the use of multiple voices and first-person accounts is heightened by the careful use of narrative gaps. These silences or questions entice the reader to return continu-

ously to its pages to see how this biographical piece turns out. Such intriguing puzzles include: the unique form of attachment that Doña Beatriz has to Juan, the ambiguity of Juan's choice not to join his parents, and the strength of the human spirit under horrific bodily and spiritual punishment.

The prolonged emotive fragments coupled with unforeseen changes in narration demand constant thought from the reader. First, the reader ponders what Juan's feelings are toward his owner. Does he really think she is his surrogate mother, or as he calls her "his sweet ghost-Mama" (Engle, 2006, p. 9)? Is this loyalty fueled by her kind treatment? Is it a result of his childish inexperience? Is it just a game? Second, the reader is dumbfounded to learn that Juan will not go to his parents after the death of Doña Beatriz. Like Toribio, we speculate if Juan has become spoiled as a result of living inside his owner's house and being taken to palaces. The reader's hopes for an answer intensify as we learn that years pass, punishment escalates, and Juan's real family skirmishes with illness and death. Why doesn't he just go to them? we find ourselves exclaiming. Is this the one beating or whipping that ends his life? His suffering? All of these gaps, these invitations to co-create meaning from the various verse fragments crafted by Engle, hook the reader to the text; we yearn to understand the many whys evoked by the characters' actions.

Conditions of Slavery as Ethical Visions in Engle's Verses

The multi-voiced nature of Engle's poetry allows readers access to a well-grounded historical understanding of the conditions of slavery, even for child slaves. The reader learns through Juan's daily suffering that the slightest hint of resistance can be daring. It was precisely the verses he wrote on leaves, the psalms he memorized, and his desire to nurture his artistic and philosophical hunger that triggered most punishments by La Marquesa. As she explains, "I'm not a fool, I can tell when a rhyme is meant / to mock me" (Engle, 2006, p. 80). Any form of empathy toward a slave, any move against the established order, would be extinguished. Juan's mother would soon learn this lesson. She would be punished, even as a freed slave, for confronting the man whose whip penetrated her son's flesh. Only subservient behavior would lead to an extended life because, as Juan states, "long

sharp blades [what slaves use to work the fields], [are] so useless / against guns" (Engle, 2006, p. 140). In Engle's novel, those who adhered to the slavery system quickly thwarted these forms of resistance; for the contemporary reader, these instances can provide a realistic view of the conditions of slavery.

Engle makes it quite clear that every actor in the slavery system had a particular role (i.e., owner, overseer, slave), one that was not without consequences to the human psyche. For instance, the overseer is the person in charge of delivering the owner's ruling; he is the one who administers the whips. As he tells us, "This is life, there are people with whips / and people with scars / from the lashes. / Which would you choose?" (Engle, 2006, p. 79). Engle later portrays him praying that his dreams are not tormented by Juan's blood. Likewise, the owners also suffer from this system. Doña Beatriz needs to deny her ancestry, her colored roots. Thus, she whitens her skin with a concoction before making public appearances; as Juan explains, "we no longer look the same dark owner and dark slaves" (Engle, 2006, p. 6). She also brings Juan along to public appearances, partly to exert her status and her difference from the darker boy. In the meantime, La Marquesa seems to yearn for Juan's reciprocity, his gratitude, but she is unable to identify the right way to earn it.

As the behavior of the overseer and the slave-owners suggests, no one was exempt from the conditions set by slavery. Through the ethical models provided in the voices and actions of each character in Engle's verse, readers can grasp the range of ethical choices available to people who lived in this particular historical period—one that they can only experience vicariously.

Universal Themes as Ethical Visions in Engle's Verses

Engle's realistic presentation of the slavery system in Cuba, along with its reverberations in the fiber of human consciousness, provide a springboard for students to understand how the system prevailed for

All of these gaps, these invitations to co-create meaning from the various verse fragments crafted by Engle, hook the reader to the text.

centuries and why it was not easy to eradicate. Her accurate portrayal of this challenging issue confirms Gregory's (2009) argument that stories "organize the data of chaotic experience, to refer beyond the data itself to larger meanings in the universe, and to *connect* that data to our own lives" (p. 14). In this manner, the

The life of the poet Juan Francisco Manzano, which is the basis of Engle's novel, is a premier example of the virtues that slavery could not undo.

novel provides educators with universal manifestations of slavery that can be used to address the conditions of slavery in their own country's history. A powerful message weaved into Engle's ethical vision is the notion that slaves were not always passive victims of this system. Instead, slaves found less obvious ways to resist and

improve themselves, especially by encouraging the human spirit through verse and song.

In a system that preserved knowledge and skill for the slave-owner, and everyone's actions were constantly being watched, slaves identified subtle strategies for using letters, symbols, and words to instill courage. As Seely (2004) explains, "historical fiction [and I would add the historical fiction verse novel] has the opportunity to examine a historical past imaginatively, at the level of an individual life, the actions that lead to change, that make history" (p. 23). The life of the poet Juan Francisco Manzano, which is the basis of Engle's novel, is a premier example of the virtues that slavery could not undo.

Future Directions

The ethical and invitational nature of this verse novel is evident, but its reverberations for educators and students deserve further exploration. After all, a considerable number of young adult novels published today include multiple voices, contradictory stances, and nontraditional narrative patterns (Koss, 2009). Future studies could document students' responses to this text and the accompanying illustrations by Sean Qualls, aspects that were not considered here. In addition, educators could explore the appropriateness of various reading strategies, such as how to take the perspective provided by a single character

or actor (e.g., slave) or how to draw connections between characters in the absence of dialogue. In the meantime, the historical notes, original poetry by Juan Francisco Manzano, and references included at the end of *The Poet Slave of Cuba* could serve as a well-grounded initial context for the educator who wishes to use this particular title.

I hope this exploration of the historical fiction verse novel as a preferred genre for achieving a deep understanding of ethical behavior as it is framed by the particularities of time and location encourages educators to share such texts in their classrooms. As I have tried to demonstrate, the verse novel as a genre, with its fragmented use of multiple voices and its thought-provoking first-person accounts, pushes readers to draw connections between voices and provides them with a multi-tiered presentation of characters' motives. It is precisely these qualities that continue to invite readers to delve into poetic historical journeys.

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Harvey Daniels—2012 CEL Exemplary Leader Award Recipient

Harvey “Smokey” Daniels is an extraordinary teacher leader whose writing, presentations, and professional development work define a model for teaching and leadership development based on research, best practice, common sense, trust, and respect. An author, editor, and consultant, he is a professor of Education at National Louis University in Chicago, Illinois (currently on leave). Smokey served as Co-director of the Illinois Writing Project for 26 years. A prolific writer, he has authored or coauthored 17 books, beginning with *Best Practice: Bringing Standards to Life in America’s Classrooms*, now in its fourth edition. In addition to books, he has contributed numerous articles and essays in professional journals. A common thread runs through his writings: literacy is accessible to all, and it should offer joy to all.

In 1989, Smokey founded a summer residential retreat, the Walloon Institute. During Walloon’s two decades, thousands of teachers from across the country were renewed and inspired, helping them to create classrooms that are experiential and active through increased levels of choice and responsibility, which in turn leads to higher student achievement. Smokey’s commitment to exceptional teaching led him to spearhead the creation of Best Practice High School in Chicago in 1966. In addition, his belief in the leadership capacity of committed teachers launched the Center for City Schools, a dozen interrelated projects that supported teachers and parents in restructuring schools around Chicago and the Midwest. In his numerous workshops and presentations, Smokey connects theory and practice in a way that embodies the kind of learning we envision for our students and ourselves. Smokey Daniels has initiated work that is visionary, and his impact on the profession is of lasting significance.

<p>Burnt by Heath Gibson Flux, 2012, 264 pp. \$9.95</p> <p>Woe Wee Tucker appears to be the stereotypical preacher's son who is growing up in the predictability of small town Alabama. However, William's life is complicated by a didactic father who hides in Biblical references; an alcoholic mother who buries herself in the bottle; and Steve, his younger brother, who is determined to come out at the Homecoming Dance. Then Samantha Johnson arrives from Iowa and becomes his black best friend, although he has difficulty buying into her social justice plans and subsequent actions. He is too busy trying to impress his childhood crush, popular and pretty Mandy.</p> <p>Will is a short guy, and his dreams of dating Mandy appear to be doomed until his volunteer firefighter escapades earn him praise and respect. Will the single spark that can cause a destructive blaze be able to help him find solutions to all these problems, especially who he really is?</p> <p>Judith A. Hayn Little Rock, AR</p>	<p>BZRK by Michael Grant Egmont, 2012, 386 pp., \$17.99</p> <p>Sadie and Noah are caught up in the fight to control the world. After being recruited for the freedom-fighter organization BZRK, these two must help battle against the Armstrong Fancy Gifts Corporation. The AFGC is using nanotechnology in attempts to unify the human race and bring peace and cooperation to all mankind. BZRK works against AFGC, using biots to fight the nanobots in order to preserve humans' "freedom to be miserable." Sadie and Noah must learn how to fight both in the "micro" – inside the human body—and in the "macro"—the real world.</p> <p>Grant weaves together elements of modern times and his own inventions to create a world in which humans battle for control on a microscopic level. What happens outside of the view of human eyes could change the fate of the entire world population. It rests on the shoulders of Sadie and Noah to decide.</p> <p>Zachary Oswanski Sylvania, OH</p>
<p>Catch & Release by Blythe Woolston Carolrhoda Books, 2012, 216 pp., \$13.99</p> <p>Polly Furnas's plan was college, career, and babies. That was all before MRSA, a lethal and drug-resistant strain that disfigured her face and took her eye. And as far as Polly's concerned, took her future, too. No friends visited her in the hospital, not even her boyfriend, Bridger. But Odd Estes did hang out with her; then again he was already there. MRSA stole his leg and his dreams of a football career. They had that in common, that and fishing.</p> <p>Once out of the hospital, Odd and Polly embark on a fly-fishing trip. The two MRSA-touched teens begin a road trip where they face their new futures, futures that are unfamiliar and uncertain. Through grappling with their alienation and fears, Polly and Odd start to realize who they really are. Their pain and discoveries create a compelling and beautiful tale of trials and triumph.</p> <p>Meghan Anderson Nashville, TN</p>	<p>Diary of a Wimpy Kid: Cabin Fever by Jeff Kinney Amulet Books, 2010, 217 pp., \$13.95</p> <p>Gregory Heffley strikes again in <i>Diary of a Wimpy Kid: Cabin Fever</i>. His latest money-making scheme goes awry and he's in big trouble. Only this time, he's innocent . . . kind of. The authorities are closing in when a blizzard hits and snows him in. While the blizzard promises temporary reprieve from life on the run, it also threatens something much worse—quality time with his family.</p> <p><i>Cabin Fever</i> successfully highlights the eccentricities of early adolescents without creating a caricature of a whiney tween. Jeff Kinney's witty prose and sidesplitting comics give life to his self-centered, imprudent, and completely relatable protagonist. <i>Cabin Fever</i> will keep readers on their toes, when they're not rolling on the floor laughing. A must-read for fans of Kinney's hapless hero.</p> <p>Molly Druce Nashville, TN</p>

<p><i>Dying to Know You</i> by Aidan Chambers Amulet Books, 2012, 288 pp., \$16.95</p> <p>Realistic Fiction/Friendship ISBN: 978-1-4197-0165-8</p> <p>Karl Williamson is in a predicament. His girlfriend, Fiorella, wants him to write her letters about himself, in order for her to get a better understanding of who he is. However, what she does not know is that Karl is dyslexic. On top of that, he also does not really know who he is, but he will do anything to impress his girlfriend. So he decides to enlist the help of her favorite author to help him write the letters, which the author agrees to.</p> <p><i>Dying to Know You</i> is a story about two people who form an unlikely friendship and learn a lot about each other and themselves along the way. Chambers tells an insightful and touching story about self-discovery, growth, love, and friendship through the eyes of a 75-year-old author who is helping a young boy in love.</p> <p>La'Toya Wade Nashville, TN</p>	<p><i>Every Me, Every You</i> by David Levithan Knopf Books for Young Readers, 2011, 245 pp., \$16.99 ISBN: 978-0-37586-098-0</p> <p>Realistic Fiction/Suicide/Mystery</p> <p>In the suburban area Evan lives in, news gets around quickly. When Ariel's problem goes public, he becomes the boy that is friends with the crazy girl. He was never very loud, but he locks himself in his mind. He shuts himself down. Then, when he starts receiving pictures of himself with Ariel he never knew existed, his wounds are reopened. Who is sending him these pictures? Why is this mystery man tormenting him? How do they know what had happened?</p> <p>Evan and his close friends work quietly to find out the mystery man's identity and end all of the pain they have caused. After breaking into Ariel's room and finding mysterious pictures, they question if they were even really close to Ariel. Did they really know her? This novel illustrates the multiple personalities we all have. No one can ever know the whole you; sometimes even you can't know every you.</p> <p>Henry Robinson, Baton Rouge, LA</p>
<p><i>Every Other Day</i> by Jennifer Lynn Barnes Egmont, 2012, 329 pp., \$17.99</p> <p>Fantasy/Supernatural ISBN: 978-1-60684-169-3</p> <p>In her novel <i>Every Other Day</i>, Jennifer Lynn Barnes builds a gripping story narrated by a sarcastic and gutsy protagonist that readers will enthusiastically cheer for. On some days, Kali D'Angelo is just a normal teenage girl. She goes to high school, takes exams, and deals with the snide remarks of popular people. Most important, she's human. But every other day, she's not. On these days, Kali is essentially indestructible, and she chooses to hunt and eliminate supernatural creatures in her spare time. One day though, Kali notices that one of the popular girls at school has been marked for death and realizes that she only has twenty-four hours to help her. As Kali races against time to save the girl, though, she uncovers a larger and much more sinister plot that just might destroy herself and everyone that she loves.</p> <p>Diana Liu Nashville, TN</p>	<p><i>Fish in the Sky</i> by Fridrik Erlings Candlewick Press, 2012, pp. 288, \$16.99</p> <p>Coming of Age/Family ISBN: 978-0-7636-5888-7</p> <p>Josh Stephenson is 13, and the world around him seems to be falling apart. He lives with his single mom and yearns for his dad's love, although Dad has a pregnant girlfriend living in the countryside. His 17-year-old cousin Trudy comes to stay and his bedroom is her corridor to the bathroom. Josh's obsession with a lovely classmate and his fear of showering after gym class lead him to fake an excuse for missing school; his adventures on his own adds to the reader's enjoyment and empathy.</p> <p>This is an appealing coming-of-age story that speaks to every teenage guy, plus a wealth of information for the teen girl seeking to understand those mysterious creatures. Erlings is a multi-talented Icelandic artist whose novel, recently translated into English, delineates with humor and poignancy that difficult journey from adolescence to manhood. Highly recommended for anyone 12 and up.</p> <p>Judith A. Hayn Little Rock, AR</p>

<p>Getting over Garrett Delaney by Abby McDonald Relationships/Self-Empowerment Candlewick, 2012, 336 pp., \$16.99 ISBN: 978-0-76365-507-5</p> <p>When Sadie and Garrett meet at a coffeehouse, she is sure she's met her soulmate. She changes her tastes and appearance to fit his tastes, and before she knows it, her identity is interwoven with his. Despite these efforts, Garrett regards her as his best friend while falling in love with others. During the two years of their friendship, Sadie has helped Garrett recover from more than one broken heart, but when he falls in love once again while at camp, Sadie is ready for change. With the help of her former friend and her new co-workers, she embarks on a recovery program to break her addiction to Garrett and reclaim her identity. The book is filled with many amusing passages while delivering a much-needed message about giving away too much of ourselves during romances. Like Sadie, readers may realize that they need not define themselves solely through a love relationship.</p> <p>Barbara A. Ward Pullman, WA</p>	<p>Graffiti Moon by Cath Crowley Romance/Art/Self-Expression Knopf Books for Young Readers, 2012, 272 pp., \$16.99 ISBN: 978-0-37586-953-2</p> <p>Senior year has ended, and Lucy and her friends spend the night in pursuit of Shadow, the elusive street artist she desperately wants to meet. After all, they have much in common since she, too, is a glassblowing artist. Inevitably, the girls pair off with some locals. Lucy ends up with Ed, who is nothing like Shadow. Or is he? Things are awkward at times, but the three couples also experience moments of closeness as well. The author alternates the story through the voices of Lucy and Ed as well as interspersing poetry from Ed's friend Leo. While teens often bond through music, these teens connect through images, colors, and poetry. The book's sometimes edgy tone hinting of underlying violence is leavened by its humor. Older teen readers will cherish these quirky characters for their independence and for the secrets they're hiding. One important night foreshadows possibilities for each character.</p> <p>Barbara A. Ward Pullman, WA</p>
<p>Guilty by Norah McClintock Realistic Fiction/Mystery Orca Book Publishers, 2012, 219 pp., \$12.95 ISBN 978-1-55469-989-6</p> <p>Finn may not have liked his stepmother, but that doesn't mean he likes watching her be shot in front of his house. His father reacts and kills the gunman, which launches Finn's journey through his past once he learns it was the same man who killed his biological mother when he was a child. At the same time, Lila, the daughter of the killer, learns that her newly-released-from-prison father is dead. She has barely had time to get to know him, and he is already gone. She tries to figure out the truth, leading Finn to question everything he knows.</p> <p>The pretense for the story implies excitement and intrigue, but while the characters do experience it, the reader does not. McClintock writes a tale that should be suspenseful but isn't, and while the novel is an enjoyable read, it does not fulfill its potential.</p> <p>Kate Mitchell Cape Elizabeth, ME</p>	<p>Hollyweird by Terri Clark Paranormal Flux Publishers, 2012. 240 pp., \$9.99 ISBN: 978-0-7387-1925-2</p> <p><i>Hollyweird</i> embodies the popularity of the paranormal fiction Terri Clark writes for teens. Constant struggles between good and evil are central to her work. Romance, intrigue, trickery, and mythology surround the main characters: Aly King, biff Des, pop culture idol Dakota Danvers (son of Lucifer), and Dakota's assistant Jameson (a fallen angel).</p> <p>Aly has won a trip to meet Dakota for a week of photo shoots and more She invites Des, but is encumbered by an older sister "chaperone" with her own agenda. Jameson's preordained responsibility and his last chance at redemption is to prevent Dakota Danvers from completing his evil scheme to free all of Hollywood's preternatural creatures in disguise. Frequent plot twists and a text-messaging God keep the adventure moving and make this a satisfying read for fans.</p> <p>Maggie Freeburn Denver, CO</p>

Hope and Tears: Ellis Island Voices by Gwenyth Swain
 Calkins Creek Books, 2012, 115 pp., \$ 17.95
 Immigration/Families
 ISBN: 978-1-59078-765-6

Ellis Island, a small island near New York City, served as an entry point into this nation for twelve million immigrants from 1892 to 1954. Relying on oral histories collected there, the author creates letters, diary entries, poems, monologues, and dialogues to channel the imagined voices of those who passed this way, beginning in 1500 with a Lenni Lenape boy and concluding in 2012 with a National Park Service employee. The six chapters detail the island's history and offer intriguing anecdotes about the contributions some immigrants made to their new home. For instance, an immigrant named Guastavino used 28,832 terra-cotta tiles to cover the ceiling of the Registry Room in 1918. When restoration work began decades later, only 17 tiles had to be replaced. Many of the stories are inspiring yet haunting, perfect for performances mingled with fear accompanying photographs show excitement over new beginnings mingled with fear of the unknown.

Barbara A. Ward
 Pullman, WA

I Am (not) the Walrus by Ed Briant
 Flux, 2012, 288 pp., \$ 9.95
 Adventure/Suspense/Realistic Fiction
 ISBN: 978-0-7387-3246-6

Set in the 1990s in Great Britain, Briant's new novel, *I Am (not) the Walrus*, has it all—adventurous characters, well-tuned humor, music for the rock soul, and mystery of the past.

Toby and Zack, two high school students, are about to hit it big with their first public appearance playing as a new cover band for The Beatles. While repairing an electric bass guitar, Toby recovers an old, faded note with a plea to return the stolen instrument to its owner. He realizes that the bass may be worth thousands of dollars if it is one of the Fenders that was in the hands of George Harrison. Bewildered by this discovery, Toby shares his concerns with his best friend and band mate, who suggests forgetting about the note and keeping the instrument. His new girlfriend, Michelle, however, convinces Toby to begin a search for the bass's owner.

Leylija Emiraliyeva-Pitre,
 Baton Rouge, LA

Hunger by Jackie Morse Kessler
 Graphia/Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2010, 174 pp., \$8.99
 Anorexia/Fiction/Fantasy
 ISBN: 978-0-547-34124-8

Lisabeth Lewis is Famine, one of the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse. Having just lost her best friend to terrible accusations, about to lose her boyfriend, struggling to ignore the Thin voice's whispering, and warring with her hunger daily, Lisabeth is startled to hear Death knocking on her door. What follows after her confused, drug-induced acceptance of his golden scales is a tale of great power and even greater courage.

Though Lisabeth's control teeters on a precipice, cloaked all in black while atop her horse, she relishes the immensity of her power as Famine. While Death walks Lisabeth through her journey, War and her vicious red steed lurk around every corner, rousing a battle from which neither the troubled teen, nor Famine, can turn away.

Jackie Morse Kessler weaves a story of despair, hope, and unbelievable power through a seventeen-year-old's painful journey with anorexia.

Kirstin Silit
 West Hartford, CT

Me, Earl, and the Dying Girl by Jesse Andrews
 Amulet Press, 2012, 295 pp., \$16.95 ISBN: 978-1-4197-0176-4
 Young Adult Fiction/Humor

Greg Gaines is many things: a "surprise Jew," a self-made filmmaker, and an honest friend who just wants to survive high school, but a novel writer he is not (or so he says). As he tries to avoid the awkwardness of high school and get by with being everyone's (and therefore, no one's) friend, he gets a little more attention than he wants when he starts to hang out with a girl who has cancer. It will take the honesty of his true friends, like Earl, and more discomfort than he could imagine to get him to appreciate what he has to offer.

Throughout the book, it's as if you're being tickled for a little too long: you laugh so hard you want to cry, even though it hurts a little. Andrews could not have done a better job making a charming, witty, self-deprecating commentary on the high-school human condition.

Claire Holman
 Fairfax, VA

<p><u>Miss Peregrine's Home for Peculiar Children</u> by Ransom Riggs Quirk Books, 2011, 352 pp., \$17.99</p> <p>A strange "accidental death" in the family and a strange message from his dead grandfather lead the 16-year-old Jacob to a mysterious island off the coast of Wales. When there, he attempts to find the orphanage his grandfather lived in during WWII after escaping Germany. He finds it, old and decrepit in the middle of a bog. When he goes inside, though, he steps into a portal, travelling back in time into a "loop" where the same day repeats over and over but the rest of the world goes on. There he meets the kids his Grandfather grew up with, only they are still no older than 18 or 19. He becomes enamored of the past, instead of the modern world. Follow Jacob as he attempts to find out the truth about these very peculiar children and his own grandfather.</p> <p>Henry Robinson, Baton Rouge, LA</p>	<p><u>Outlaw</u> by Stephen Davies Clarion Books, 2011, 289 pp., \$16.99</p> <p>Jake Knight has the heart of an adventurer, but he is trapped in a suffocating British boarding school while his father, the British Ambassador to Burkina Faso, and the rest of his family lead far more exciting lives in Africa. After getting caught sneaking out of school, Jake gets suspended and is on the first flight out to Ouagadougou, the capital of Burkina Faso, anxious to begin new adventures.</p> <p>Suddenly, Jake finds himself on more of an adventure than he bargained for when he is kidnapped and must fight for his life. Drawing on his own ingenuity and using every survival skill he has, Jake tries desperately to stay alive. He quickly realizes that his kidnappers aren't who they appear to be, but can he discover the truth before it's too late? Based on his own experiences living in Africa, Davies weaves a clever and suspenseful tale that will engage readers until the very end.</p> <p>Caroline Wilson Houston, TX</p>
<p><u>Personal Effects</u> by E. M. Kokie Candlewick, 2012, 352 pp., \$16.99</p> <p>Reeling from his older brother T.J.'s death during the Iraq war, seventeen-year-old Matt Foster happens upon passionate letters and photographs that offer clues to his brother's secret life. Matt becomes convinced that he must follow their lead to Wisconsin where he might make sense of T.J.'s death and meet a child possibly fathered by T.J. Borrowing a car from his best friend Shauna and putting their budding romantic relationship on hold, he leaves Pennsylvania looking for answers and to deliver an unopened letter from T.J. Once he reaches Madison, what he finds is not what he had imagined, and readers' hearts will ache for what might have been. This is an important story, another aspect of the consequences of war and of the military's "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy that encouraged dishonesty. Told with grace and empathy by a skillful novice author, this title lingers in a reader's mind and steeps us in loss mingled with possibilities.</p> <p>Barbara A. Ward Pullman, WA</p>	<p><u>Plunder</u> by Mary Anna Evans Poisoned Pen Press, 2012, 296 pp., \$14.95</p> <p>An oil spill is a disaster on its own. Throw in an archaeology project in danger, a double murder, and a greedy family, and things just become a mess. That is the allure of <i>Plunder</i>. The murder mystery is engaging and the greedy characters make for great entertainment. The author seems to be very knowledgeable about archaeology and the environment and incorporates these into the story well.</p> <p>As a native of Louisiana, seeing stereotypes of the state in books, movies, and television can get quite tiring. These seemed to pop up often in <i>Plunder</i>. The babysitter practiced voodoo and people daydreamed of Mardi Gras balls when it was still April; despite the media's portrayal, these things don't happen as often in real life as people expect them to. For those who don't mind this, though, or who love fiction about archaeology or the environment, <i>Plunder</i> is a good read.</p> <p>Kirkley Norton Baton Rouge, LA</p>

<p><i>Stand Up! How to Stay True to Yourself</i> by Christine Laouenan Amulet Books, 2012, 80 pp., \$12.95 ISBN: 978-1-4197-0198-6</p> <p>Self-help</p> <p><i>Stand Up! How to Stay True to Yourself</i> focuses on an issue with which many young adolescents struggle—standing up for themselves. It addresses the pressures of adolescence that come from parents, authority figures, friends, and even from one’s self. <i>Stand Up!</i> encourages its readers to establish and affirm their own beliefs, values, and individualities. While it may seem important to fit in, children should learn from a young age that it is more rewarding to be comfortable and confident in one’s own skin. <i>Stand Up!</i> emphasizes the importance of respecting one’s self while also maintaining respect for others; even while saying no, one should be patient, logical, and kind. In expressing their own emotions, adolescents should also be cognizant of the emotions of those around them. Overall, <i>Stand Up!</i> asserts that saying no is not synonymous with rejection, but rather it is significant in maintaining one’s independence and self-respect.</p> <p>Victoria Cortes Nashville, TN</p>	<p><i>Sweet, Hereafter</i> by Angela Johnson Simon & Schuster, 2010, 118 pp., \$16.99 ISBN: 978-1-4169-9865-5</p> <p>Identity/Tragedy/Romance</p> <p>A lost soul just trying to find her way, Shoogy can’t seem to figure out this thing called life or where she belongs in it. School definitely isn’t her thing, she just can’t make it work with her family, and the one thing she remembers a psychic telling her is that she was destined to come and go. In this world of uncertainty, the only thing that seems to be constant is her relationship with Curtis. Curtis and Shoogy might not be able to understand anything else, but they understand each other, and that is what gets them through this life haunted by war, prejudice, and trauma.</p> <p>Adversity wears many hats and can come in the form of the Iraqi war, or in the form of a tragic loss. But, the real question for Curtis, Shoogy, and every other young person, is: how will you live in spite of the adversity?</p> <p>Jeanel A. Davis Clemson, SC</p>
<p><i>The Anti-Prom</i> by Abby McDonald Candlewick Press, 2011, 280 pp., \$16.99 ISBN: 978-0-7634-4956-2</p> <p>Fiction/Teen</p> <p>“It was supposed to be freaking perfect.” Bliss thinks as she prepares for her high school prom. Prom night is filled with dresses, dancing, and dates; however, for Bliss Merino, Jolene Nelson, and Meg Rose Zuckerman, it becomes a night they will never forget. With a popular girl, an outcast, and a wallflower, the three girls team up to seek revenge on the boyfriend and best friend that have ruined this night for Bliss. After discovering a journal that belongs to the best friend, the three girls attempt to carry out their revenge, but their plan backfires. Despite spending an entire night together, the girls find themselves dealing with drama that could potentially lead to an end to their friendships. They discover how much they would be willing to sacrifice for someone they barely even know.</p> <p>Libby Byrnes Alpharetta, GA</p>	<p><i>The Catastrophic History of You & Me</i> by Jess Rothenberg Dial Books, 2012, 400 pp., \$17.99 ISBN: 978-0-8037-3720-4</p> <p>Romance/Fantasy</p> <p>Sometimes love hurts, but is it really possible to die from a broken heart? As Brie Eagan is about to discover, the answer is yes. When her boyfriend breaks up with her, her life ends with the literal splitting of her heart. Soon, she finds herself in heaven where she meets Patrick, a funny but mysterious boy who helps guide her through the five stages of grief. As she makes her way from denial to acceptance, Brie not only receives a crash course in all things related to the afterlife, but also lessons in life and love. In her novel, <i>The Catastrophic History of You & Me</i>, Jess Rothenberg weaves together a creative and funny story about a girl who must pick up the broken pieces of her heart and learn to love again.</p> <p>Diana Liu Nashville, TN</p>

Clip & File YA Book Reviews

<p><i>The Children and the Wolves</i> by Adam Rapp Candlewick Press, 2012, 160 pp., \$16.99</p> <p>In this psychological thriller, you experience an urban community through the eyes of three teenagers and the three-year-old they kidnap. Bounce is a smart, tough girl that won't stand down from a fight no matter how big, and has a good grip of what the world is, not what it is cracked up to be. She technically lives with her parents, but never sees them. Orange lives with his physically and arguably mentally disabled father. Wiggins lives with his marijuana- and heroin-addicted mother. The only intelligent teen out of the three is Bounce, making her the de facto leader of their trio. They decide one day to steal Frog, a three-year-old girl, and keep her in the unsanitary basement of an apartment building. Frog plays a game called The Children and the Wolves, which oddly mirrors the circumstances she and the trio go through. Follow the trio through murder, sexual deviance, and crime. Experience Wiggins's inner debate—to be a part of the life of crime and immorality he knows, or to do what he knows is right.</p> <p>Henry Robinson, Baton Rouge, LA</p>	<p><i>The Eleventh Plague</i> by Jeff Hirsch Scholastic Press, 2011, 278 pp., \$17.99</p> <p>Fifteen-year-old Stephen Quinn has grown up in a world without hope. Ravaged by war and disease, America has been transformed into a rugged wasteland filled with desperate, violent criminals. As Stephen and his father struggle to stay alive, they encounter a band of slave traders; in the ensuing tussle, Stephen's father is gravely wounded and Stephen is left to fend for himself. By some stroke of luck, Stephen runs into a group of survivors clinging to remnants of pre-war America. In their seemingly utopian society, Stephen has the opportunity to start afresh. Will Stephen's fear and skepticism prevent him from achieving happiness or will these traits save his life and the lives of everyone around him?</p> <p>Jeff Hirsch paints a chillingly convincing picture of post-apocalyptic life in America. Although the world Stephen fights against seems distant, his struggles—for survival as well as for love and happiness—seem surprisingly real.</p> <p>Alex Ivey Brentwood, TN</p>
<p><i>The Fault in Our Stars</i> by John Green Dutton Juvenile, 2012, 313 pp., \$17.99</p> <p>Hazel Grace Lancaster has terminal cancer. On top of her life-sustaining oxygen tank and doctor visits, she attends weekly Support Group meetings to help deal with her illness. It is at one of these meetings where she meets Augustus Waters, a cancer patient in remission. Using Augustus's leftover make-a-wish, the two set off for answers about Hazel's favorite book, finding companionship and love along the way.</p> <p>John Green tells the story of two teenagers with cancer struggling to find their place and purpose in the world. Holding little back in his depiction of this ailment, he allows for his characters to grow through their shared hardships and triumphs. Hazel and Augustus meet in Support Group, but they gain far more than support. They gain a sense of purpose and find out what it means to be not dying of cancer but living with it.</p> <p>Zachary Oswanski Sylvania, OH</p>	<p><i>The Knife and the Butterfly</i> by Ashley Hope Perez Carolrhoda Books, 2012, 264 pp., \$17.95</p> <p>After a violent confrontation with a rival gang, Azael wakes up in a juvenile detention center, an environment that he knows well. The familiarity of these surroundings, however, belies something much stranger and more profound than Azael could begin to expect from this experience—he isn't allowed to call anyone, hasn't met with a lawyer, and is made to observe a fellow inmate, Lexi, through one-way glass for hours at a time. Azael's caseworker, Gabe, cryptically insists that there isn't much time left for Azael to accomplish what he is supposed to do through these observations. As Azael pieces Lexi's life together, he is struck by how familiar they both are with loss—home, family, friends, safety, and stability. Is this what Gabe wants him to figure out, or is there something else?</p> <p>Perez gives the reader sympathetic yet critical insight into the world of gangs in Houston, Texas, and is careful to show the narratives of loss that drive so many young people to join them.</p> <p>Jesse Gray Nashville, TN</p>

<p><i>The Prisoner of Snowflake Falls</i> by John Lekich Young Adult Fiction/Humor Orca Book Publishers, 2012, 266 pp., \$12.95 ISBN: 978-1-55469-978-0</p> <p>What would you do if thieves had raised you and you were homeless at age fifteen? Henry Holloway treats his “benefactors” as if he were a guest in their homes, and he loves his life and his privacy. With his mom gone to try and make an honest living, and his uncle’s dishonest teachings leading to the opposite, he’s happy to make ends meet on his own. This all comes to an end when he eventually gets caught, and has to make ends meet in a new town: Snowflake Falls. Henry learns through experience that gaining people’s trust makes you rise to their expectations, and helps those around you find happiness in unlikely places.</p> <p>Lekich could not paint a more charming picture of likeable thieves. You’ll find yourself rooting for the unluckiest of heroes and wanting to watch them until the very end.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Claire Holman Fairfax, VA</p>	<p><i>Travel Team: Forced Out</i> by Gene Fehler Sports Lerner Publishing Group, 2012, 115 pp., \$7.95 ISBN: 978-0-7613-8533-2</p> <p>Competition is the byword for the story of <i>Forced Out</i>. Zack Waddell is the starting second basemen for the ninth-ranked baseball team in the country for its age group. His cerebral approach to the game has made him a team leader and has aided in the formation of team chemistry. But with Dustin Conover, the son of a rich tycoon who has agreed to fund a team trip, joining the team, the team’s chances to win the tournament are put in jeopardy, as are friendships.</p> <p>The book does demonstrate an excellent knowledge of the game of baseball and its intricacies. Fehler attempts to delve into the complex arena of teen friendships within the realm of sports, specifically baseball. This context provides a venue by which the reader can see sacrifice and selflessness in action, as he/she also reads about the action of the game.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Alec Woodhull Nashville, TN</p>
<p><i>We’ve Got a Job: The 1963 Birmingham Children’s March</i> Nonfiction/ Civil Rights by Cynthia Levinson Peachtree, 2012, 176 pp., \$19.95 ISBN: 978-1-56145-627-7</p> <p>This book describes the pivotal role of youth in keeping the 1963 campaign for civil rights alive through the voices of four participants: Audrey Hendricks, 9; Wash Booker, 14; Arnetta Streeter, 16; and James Stewart, 15. While readers will find the names of well-known civil rights leaders in the book’s 15 chapters, the children and teens are the stars here, brave enough to face violence on the streets of Birmingham and to volunteer to be arrested. Because so many young protesters were arrested as they marched through the city’s streets, its jails overflowed, and law enforcement officials couldn’t keep up with the mass onslaught. Accompanied by large archival photographs, the book features honest and raw narratives recalling the hope and determination of those times, a vivid reminder of the impact on change even the youngest may have. There is much food for thought here about events from almost 50 years ago.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Barbara A. Ward Pullman, WA</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 To submit a review for possible publication or to become a reviewer, contact Melanie Hundley at melanie.hundley@vanderbilt.edu.</p>

From a Whisper to a Shout:

Emergent Voice in Latino/Latina Literature

In schools across the country, the literary landscape in English/Language Arts (ELA) classrooms continues to be a whitewash; those of color are often still missing from the palette (Medina, 2004). This invisibility of people of color, Latinos/Latinas in particular, sends very powerful ideological messages to all of our students about the value (or lack thereof) of Latinos/as in our society (Medina, 2004). According to Rojas (2010), “Few educators and scholars attempt to develop a curriculum that is respectful of the varied traditions of U.S. Latino literatures” (p. 266), yet for the self-image of students of color, it is essential that they be represented in all forms of text. Additionally, Ford, Tyson, Howard, and Harris III (2000) stated that, “Many educators . . . have recognized the importance of books as critical sources of self-understanding and social understanding. Books have the potential and the power to help children to learn about themselves and others” (p. 235). Whether it be the fight for social justice (Acosta, 2007; Chapman, Hobbel, & Alvarado, 2011; Greenslate, 2007) or democracy (Mantle-Bromley & Foster, 2005), exploring racial inequity (Hinton, 2004), or finding one’s identity (Crawford-Garrett, 2009; Keis, 2006), the study of Young Adult (YA) literature can help students discover their own voices while reading novels in the classroom.

It is essential that in the 21st century, Latino/a students become vocal advocates for themselves in their fight against social injustice (e.g., racism, classism). Although “[t]here is no easy answer and by no means any quick fix to the plague of cultural inequality that exists in our country” (Woods, 2008/2009, p. 17), reading the appropriate YA novel can be of

great assistance. When actively engaging students with classroom texts, ELA teachers have the ability to prepare students with the necessary skills (e.g., to view the world critically) to help them become strong individuals who will stand up and fight against perceived injustices. Since there are “a multitude of inequities and biases that impinge on the lives, hopes, and dreams of [Latino/a] students” (Acosta, 2007, p. 36), it is essential that Latino/a youth begin to question the world around them in a critical fashion in order to become empowered to fight social inequities (Rodriguez, 2000) due to race, class, and gender. In order to accomplish this goal, ELA teachers must choose texts that reflect their students’ lives, communities, and shared history (Acosta, 2007). In particular, it is important to present novels that have protagonists who find their own voices while overcoming personal obstacles since, according to Roberts and Crawford (2008), storybook characters can be models for children.

Sperling and Appleman (2011) state that, “voice is an engaging metaphor for human agency and identity” (p. 70), and by overcoming great adversity and uncertainty in their lives, fictional characters find their own sense of power. In this textual analysis, I will discuss three YA novels that I teach in Latino/Latina Literature (a grade 10–12 English elective) in which the protagonists discover their voices through the course of the story. Voice, as it is used in this analysis, refers to the agency that characters find as they overcome various obstacles. I will be focusing on *CrashBoom-Love* (Herrera, 1999), *Buried Onions* (Soto, 1997), and *Finding Miracles* (Alvarez, 2006). I will discuss how

each protagonist's voice emerges when presented with internal and external challenges and how the emergence of voice helps the protagonists gain a better understanding of themselves.

Theoretical Framework

This paper is presented from a critical literacy theoretical lens, which "is a process of analyzing a text for representation of power, gender, bias, race, or social class" (Sanders, Foyil, & Graff, 2010). Influenced by the work of Paulo Freire, critical literacy calls for a change in the way we think, rather than the use of specific teaching techniques in the classroom (McDaniel, 2004). In schools today, "Critical literacy is not simply being critical of texts; it is the practice of evaluating information, insights, and perspectives through an analysis of power, culture, class, and gender" (Lapp & Fisher, 2010). According to McDaniel (2004), "Critical literacy transcends conventional notions of reading and writing to incorporate critical thinking, questioning, and transformation of self or one's world" (p. 474), and by thinking critically, students learn to question the world in which we live and work toward making changes they deem important.

Critical literacy theory also stresses the necessity for readers to analyze texts in order to enable them to question and challenge their position (or "status quo") in society (McLaren, 1988; McLaren & Farahmandpur, 2001). Therefore, it is my goal that students begin to interpret texts via a critical literacy lens, just as I am doing in this textual analysis. When students learn to look at literature with a critical eye, it gives them strength and power; if Latino/a students are to be able to shift the power relations of race and class in schooling, as well as in their adult lives in this country, they need to be able to "detect bias and . . . think more critically about hidden messages in what they read" (Ford et al., 2000, p. 237).

Literature Review

Sperling and Appleman (2011) have stated that "the concept of voice is both ancient and contemporary . . . [and] although the concept of voice has guided both research and teaching in the study of literacy, theorists invoke the concept in different ways" (p. 70). Across academic literature, *voice* has many different definitions and functions and is often undefined. It

has been referred to as everything from the use of the spoken word to an author's narrative style in a text. It "is used frequently and freely both to stand for and to accompany such language and literacy concepts as writing style, authorship, language register, rhetorical stance, written and spoken prosody, the self in text and in discourse" (Sperling & Appleman, 2011, p. 70). Voice, as it is used in this analysis, is a method of describing one's agency and identity in the world around us (Sperling & Appleman, 2011); therefore, it can be used to describe strength, recognition, and presence (Macias, 2005). Voice is something

. . . that can be given and taken away by teachers or others in students' lives. As writers and readers, students can lose or find their voices. As writers and readers, students hear and are influenced by others' voices—social, cultural, political, and personal—and these voices may be concordant or conflicting. (Sperling & Appleman, 2011, p. 71)

Although the use of voice has been widely studied and assessed in academic circles, the study of the emergence of Latino/Latina agency in YA literature is still greatly underrepresented.

Although it is predicted that Latinos/as will comprise one-fifth of the US population by 2050 (Cart, 1996), it continues to be quite difficult for Latino/a-themed texts to break into mainstream US classrooms (Medina, 2004), which still maintain the traditional, White, Eurocentric literary canon. I believe that multicultural literature is beneficial to all students, not just Latino/as; we all benefit from being able to step into other people's shoes and walk around in them for a little while, or as stated by Woods (2008/2009), to "envision one's self within [another] culture" (p. 18).

In my Latino/Latina Literature course, my primary intent is to help students discover their individual and collective voices (agency) and be able to confront the inequities in our society due to widespread racism and discrimination. I believe that I am obligated to uncover the "ugly side of our history" by reading texts—both print and nonprint, fiction and nonfiction—to help students see racism and discrimination in American society. In other words, it is my responsibility to "stress the need for Latino students

My primary intent is to help students discover their individual and collective voices (agency).

to understand the existence of bias and the manner in which it affects their life and the world” (Darder, 1995, p. 340). In that way, a student can begin to find a voice, both in and out of the classroom, as well as learn the importance of speaking up. As stated by

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learn to discover their own confident and determined voices as well.

The Novels

CrashBoomLove (2003), written in verse by Juan Felipe Herrera, is the story of César Garcia, a teenage boy who struggles with his family breaking apart. After his father leaves, César becomes despondent and follows his “friends” down the path of drugs and violence, both in and out of school. Written in the form of a narrative poem, this story shows how César and his mother discover their voices and learn to become advocates for themselves. Overall, students appreciate the flow of the story and its creative, poetic format.

Buried Onions (1997) is a piece written by Gary Soto, an author who is known for his children’s books as well as his work for adults (Medina, 2006). In this novel, Eddie is a 19-year-old from Fresno who struggles to find his way in life while avoiding the drugs and violence that plague his neighborhood. This novel, one of my students’ favorites, is written in a descriptive way that engages the audience but does not stereotype the lives of Mexican Americans.

The last novel that I will discuss is *Finding Miracles* (2006), written by Julia Alvarez, the well-established feminist Latina author (Medina, 2006). This novel tells the story of Milagros (or Milly, as she is also called), a girl adopted from a small, unnamed, war-torn country soon after her birth. After she meets a new classmate named Pablo, who happens to come from Milly’s home country, she goes on a journey

DeBlase (2003), “Transactions with literacy engage individuals not as passive recipients of culture but as coproducers of culture” (p. 625), and by my students seeing Latino/a characters overcoming obstacles and finding their voices in relevant and engaging texts, my hope is that they will

to “el paisito” to find her true self. Although Rojas (2010) found that Alvarez is one of the few authors so frequently identified in Latino/a literature that she could be considered overexposed, I think that this novel does a wonderful job of showing the emergence of voice and merits discussion in an analysis such as this.

CrashBoomLove

Protagonist César Garcia is a sophomore in high school. César says that, “Don’t know how it all started. The frozen feeling, / this fender inside wanting to crash against everything” (p. 2), but it appears that it all began when his father left him and his mother, Mama Lucy, for his new family in Denver. César feels abandoned and starts acting out at school, which gets the attention of Mr. Santos, the school’s vice principal, and Mr. Stanton, the school police officer. After getting beaten up by Jaíbo, a new student at school, César begins sniffing glue, drinking, and doing drugs with his friends Sammy and Carlos.

César is greatly influenced by Sammy and Carlos, and he doesn’t make many decisions without their negative influence. He allows himself to be manipulated by his “friends” and has little, if any, voice as a consequence. They mock César, call him “Sissy,” and pressure him to fight his classmates; each time, he follows their lead. Soon after getting beaten up by Jaíbo, Sammy says to César, “What are you going to do about Jaíbo *chavala*? / Are you going to let him beat you up? / In front of everybody hollering ‘You wuss!’ / They are laughing at you *chavala*, can you hear them?” (p. 46).

The next day, after sniffing a marker with Carlos in class, César goes straight into the hall and attacks Jaíbo. He is caught immediately by Mr. Stanton and suspended for three weeks. If found causing any more problems, César will be sent to Sunway Continuation, the alternative high school. César eventually gets sent to Sunway for throwing rocks and assaulting another student, where he joins Sammy and Carlos, who have been there for a semester already. This is where César begins to discover his own voice and stops allowing himself to be silenced by the influence of others.

Ms. Steiger, César’s new teacher at Sunway, helps him in ways that he never thought possible. She forces César to make himself stand on his own two feet. Ms. Steiger asks her students, old and new,

to form a circle by holding hands tightly, and says to César that, “If you want to get inside / the circle you have to break in, do not expect / people to let you in nice and easy. You’ve got / to push and make yourself known. / Come on / César, try” (p. 93). Breaking into the circle of students is César’s first step toward finding his inner strength, his sense of agency and identity (Sperling & Appleman, 2011). César struggles “to find [himself] within the group, to be accepted . . . but also to [be able to] assert [his] own individuality” (MacBeath, 2006, p. 200).

He is soon introduced to classical music by Ms. Steiger, and he begins to find a great appreciation for it. César is asked to join the school choir, and after some thought, says, “Maybe I’ll join the choir. I’ll stand up / alone. My hair shooting up each syllable / until my voice spins / out of my mouth / like a comet, like a blue green fire / I have never heard sing” (p. 103). César becomes less concerned with what others think, which ultimately allows his voice (in both a physical and metaphorical sense) to grow and flourish.

The ultimate turn for César is when he is in a major car accident with Sammy. Sammy dies and César is left in a coma, on a respirator, and with a badly broken leg. While lying in the hospital bed, César asserts his voice and shouts, “I am here! / I am alive! / I want to shout / through the tape across my mouth / . . . Will I live? Will I survive? / Will everything be different? / . . . Who / will I be?” (p. 132). Instead of rolling over and dying, César shows his inner strength and fights to survive and take control of his life.

While healing for seven weeks, César reflects on who he is and who he is becoming (MacBeath, 2006), and a newfound voice emerges; César returns to Sunway Continuation with new strength and an inner peace. He shows this when, soon after his return, a classmate confronts and threatens him and calls him “Sissyer.” César responds by saying, “My name is César – / César Garcia. OK? Start with that” (p. 137). César knows who he is now and will not let anyone belittle him ever again. He begins to journal extensively in class and writes about “being buried / alive in a coma, . . . about coming back, / steel rods in my right leg, I write about / absence, about my father who never calls, / my father who has left me” (p. 142). Through the process of journaling, César continues to

discover his own voice while analyzing why he has the strong feelings that he does.

César’s mother, “Mama Lucy,” also finds her voice in the process of César’s recovery. She begins to take English-speaking lessons, and she tells César that he must pay a visit to his old high school and that he must speak up for himself. Mama Lucy “[becomes] more aware and [gains] a sense of [her] capacity to control [her] own [life]” (Keis, 2006, p. 14). César watches how his mother confronts Mr. Stanton and Mr. Santos about how he was singled out at school, why he was searched, why she was never called about

any concerns with César, etc. It is a defining moment when César and his mother both reclaim their power.

The story ends with César singing a solo in his graduation ceremony from Sunway, and he thinks to himself, “I am standing tall with my *voice* growing / out of me, a flame, a spark, a corn plant in green gold. / the twists and turns, the fights and screams, / the nights alone and the days lost in sad dreams. / I am singing out” (p. 155) (italics added by author). By César singing at graduation, he himself identifies that he has begun to overcome his feelings of sadness and depression; has found his inner strength and finds his voice emerging, both literally and metaphorically. He stands up, in front of others, and testifies to his emerging, newfound agency. César will never be the same person again.

Buried Onions

In *Buried Onions* (1997), Eddie, born and raised in Fresno, California, is a recent high school graduate. He begins taking air-conditioning classes at the local community college . . . that is, until his cousin, Jesus, is mysteriously stabbed to death in a nightclub restroom. Eddie becomes greatly depressed and despondent and jokingly attributes all of life’s problems (for him and those in his poor community) to the onions buried deep beneath Fresno. Eddie describes how the “black asphalt would shimmer with vapors . . . which were not released by the sun’s heat but by a huge onion buried under the city. This onion made us cry

**It is a defining moment
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mother both reclaim their
power.**

... that remarkable bulb of sadness” (p. 2). The onions are the cause of everyone’s pain, and from the beginning of the story, Eddie’s “voice is inevitably shaped, informed, and mediated by social and cultural factors” (Sperling & Appleman, 2011, p. 73) in which he lives, such as poverty, violence, crime, and hopelessness. Eddie’s voice is silenced due to his anger and frustration over his environment; his voice is further stifled by his inaction. Although Eddie complains continuously about his position in life (both financial and social), he does little, if anything,

Due to his silence and inability to make choices to improve his life, his agency cannot yet begin to emerge.

to make changes for the better.

Eddie seems to be “plagued by a series of ill-fated incidents” (Franzak & Noll, 2006) over the period of a few months. Mr. Stiles, a man who Eddie does yard work for, has his truck stolen right in front of Eddie’s apartment. Instead of talking to Mr. Stiles directly, Eddie “hurried back to [his] own apartment, where [he] hid in the doorway and [his] own cavernous shadows” (p. 31). For his own reasons (e.g., lack of faith in the police, embarrassment, shame), Eddie keeps silent and wallows in his misfortune. Once again, Eddie allows his power to be taken from him. Due to his silence and inability to make choices to improve his life, his agency cannot yet begin to emerge; instead of (re)claiming his voice, he chooses to hide.

Trying to balance avoiding Angel, a local gang member, and getting his life on track, Eddie is going absolutely nowhere. On advice from a mentor, Eddie eventually decides to visit the local naval recruiting center as a way to leave Fresno for good, but that visit is not what helps Eddie find his agency. Ultimately, Eddie discovers his voice by deciding to speak with his fists. After wallowing in his misfortune and running from gangsters, Eddie decides that now is the time to take a stand. He makes a statement, and a strong one at that, by violently attacking Angel—attack before being attacked. Battered and bruised from the fight, Eddie makes the choice to move forward with his life and escape from his barrio. Two days later, “with a cardboard carton of clothes and a half-empty cereal box in [his] arms, [he] walked the three

miles to [his] *nina’s* house” (p. 142) on his way to Lemoore Naval Air Station and his impending future.

Eddie spends a great deal of his post-high school life running (from pain, from misfortune, from people) and hiding (literally and figuratively) from the troubles that surround him. He finds his voice, his agency (Sperling & Appleman, 2011), almost reluctantly; Eddie becomes embroiled in a violent predicament and, feeling hopeless and frustrated, is forced to take stock of his life. He discovers his own voice in the last scene of the story when he “[sees his] palms bloodred from all the city wars—those in the past, those now, and those to come” (p. 146), and realizes that he is in control of his own destiny (Keis, 2006). It is then that his “eyes filled and then closed on the last of childhood tears” (p. 146). He finds the strength to stop running away from his problems and begins looking toward new hopes and possibilities.

Finding Miracles

Finding Miracles is the story of Milly Kaufman, a 15-year-old high school freshman who lives with her family in a small town in Vermont. Milly was adopted at the age of one in her unnamed home country (which will be referred to as “el paisito” from here forward, as it often is in the novel) while her parents were serving in the Peace Corps. Milly knows that she is adopted, and whenever she thinks about it, her hands begin to itch. Compared to the rest of her family, Milly’s

... eyes are the only unusual thing about me—they’re this golden color with brown speckles in them like pieces of amber with fossils inside. The point is: I totally pass as 100 percent American, and as un-PC as this is going to sound, I’m really glad. (p. 12)

Milly does not want people asking about her background; she just wants to fit in and fly under the radar, so to speak. She is shy as well as afraid of what her classmates might think about her if they knew that she was different from them.

This all changes when Pablo Bolívar and his family move into town from “el paisito.” Pablo immediately recognizes Milly’s distinctive eyes from the town of Los Luceros in “el paisito,” so Milly avoids him like the plague for about two months. Pablo is the one person who can expose Milly’s secret, which she has kept from everyone except for her best friend, Em.

Unfortunately, Milly's father hires Pablo's father for carpentry work, and the two families start spending an increasing amount of time together. Milly begins to learn about how the US "had helped some general to take over or start a civil war or something" (p. 49), and there is now a revolution party in "el paisito" trying to remove the dictator from power.

Milly's only records of her past are kept in her parents' bedroom in The Box, as she calls it. She decides to open The Box one evening with Em's support, and inside finds an old coin, a locket of hair, some pictures of Milly and a nun at the orphanage where she was found, and a slip of paper with her name, Milagros, on it. She is pressured by her friend, Jake, into running for class senator at the same time that "el paisito" is having its country's elections. The Liberation party wins, and Milly feels a great sense of relief. The next day, as her hands itch immensely, Milly approaches the podium for her speech; standing up there in front of her peers, something just clicks inside of her. When she looks down at her notes:

the words began swimming around the piece of paper. In a panic, I glanced up and my eyes found Pablo. He was beaming me his intense look as if he was drawing out some native courage I didn't quite believe I had. (p. 118)

Milly adlibs her speech, mentions the successful victory of the Liberation Party in "el paisito," the importance of voting in free elections, admits that she was adopted from "el paisito," and finishes just when her "courage gave out" (p. 119). Not only does Milly win the election thanks to her powerful and honest speech, but she also discovers that "Schools are places in which voices carry, and carry in differing bandwidths. There are voices which demand to be listened to by virtue of their status. Some are strident voices while others speak softly but with inherent authority" (MacBeath, 2006, p. 203). Milly's behavior changes, much as César's does in *CrashBoomLove* (2003), as they both find the courage to be their true selves in front of others. Standing before a crowd, almost as a testament to their change of character, they put into words their newfound agency and express their personal thoughts, no matter what others might think or say about them.

Very soon after the election, Milly is invited by Mrs. Bolívar to visit "el paisito" that coming summer. Milly's voice continues to develop and grow during

that trip, as she attempts to retrace her family history. Her old orphanage had burnt down years earlier, but when Pablo's family returns to the town of Los Luceros for a funeral, she meets Doña Gloria, the town elder and history keeper. Doña Gloria informs Milly about three couples who could have possibly been her parents, but there is no way of knowing for sure. She tells Milly that it is her job to "'bring harvest of what we have planted!' Just hearing her say that made [her] feel trembly all over.

Not only [her] hands were tingling now. It was as if Doña Gloria were lighting [a] flame inside [her]" (p. 224).

After Milly's family joins her in "el paisito," she proclaims that she is now going to be referring to herself by her birth name, Milagros, as well as Milly. Milly finds her voice in her home country and takes courage from the freedom fighters around her. She is Los Luceros, and she always will be. Milly goes from being ashamed of who she really is to embracing the truth of where she comes from. Even though she is still unsure of her past, she knows her family—in Vermont and in "el paisito"—are both her present and her future. Milly better understands herself and has discovered her voice; she is not afraid to speak out any longer. Unwilling to go on hiding and trying to fit in (Zambo, 2011), she has become her own confident person.

Milly goes from being ashamed of who she really is to embracing the truth of where she comes from.

Conclusion

The emergence of a Latino/a character's voice, as defined by both identity and agency, is presented in the three books that I have discussed in this textual analysis. Ford et al. (2000) asserted that, "The images children glean from books have a powerful impact on their sense of self and their view of others" (p. 236). For successful teaching and learning in our schools, it is vital that ELA teachers understand the needs of our ever-increasing multicultural population (Ford & Dillard, 1996) and provide novels that present protagonists who discover their voices. Specifically, for Latino/a students, this is essential because it enables

“our students to develop consciousness that will allow them to be critical of the constraints in their lives, in order to develop projects that address these issues and offer real change in our community” (Acosta, 2007, p. 41).

Latino/a students will continue to have difficulty finding their own voices if they do not see themselves

in the texts that they read in class. Since “[f]ew educators and scholars attempt to develop a curriculum that is respectful of the varied traditions of U.S. Latino literatures” (Rojas, 2010, p. 266), ELA teachers have the obligation to continue to expand their text selection to include more than the same few Latino/a voices; these additions to the curriculum can help Latino/a students feel

a greater sense of presence and importance.

While some Latino/a texts portray struggles with issues of identity (Clark & Hiraldo, 2004), such as in *Finding Miracles* (2004), others deal with more gritty stories of violence (Franzak & Noll, 2006) and the struggle for survival, as in *Buried Onions* (1997) and *CrashBoomLove* (2003). It is essential that those, and the other myriad voices in Latino/a YA literature, be heard in all ELA classrooms. According to Godina and McCoy (2000), “exemplary multicultural texts are relevant for all students in the classroom, and not necessarily directed toward a particular category of difference being portrayed in the text” (p. 176). Although Latino/a literature offers a great deal to all students, no matter the race or color, its presence in today’s schools is still minimal (Medina, 2004). If we are to stop the silencing of Latino/a voices, this must be changed in ELA classes across the country. By seeing these main characters find their own agency and inner strength, it will help Latino/a youth realize that their voices can grow from a whisper to a shout, both inside and outside of the classroom.

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Drawing on My Past to Write

I always put a lot of myself into my writing. It's like I open up a vein to my soul and mix what pours out with the ink I write. It's what feels right to me—writing from deep places of myself, putting my truest emotions onto the page. I intentionally draw on my abuse and trauma experience when I write, putting fragments into every novel.

Part of that is just the way I am. I like honestly and emotional truths. I have trouble lying, don't like superficiality, and I hate secrets. Secrets remind me of the incest and the ritual abuse that I was forced to keep quiet about by my abusers (my parents belonged to cults). And part of it is just that writing has always been my safest, most comfortable way of “speaking” and reaching other people.

When I was being abused, my abusers told me repeatedly that they'd kill me if I talked. I saw them murder people; I knew they could kill me if they wanted to, so I was too terrified to speak or even think about what they did. They also repeatedly told me that no one would believe me if I talked, and they intentionally created some abuse scenarios to discredit me

or any other child who might talk (such as creating a mock spaceship and having some abusers dress up as aliens, using drugs to knock us kids out before bringing us into the mock spaceship to rape and torture us). Had I not seen through the layers of deceit and trickery, it's likely no one would have believed me if I had talked. Even without those layers, the torture was so extreme that some people would still want to deny it.

Because of the torture, threats, and mind control, I found talking to people frightening and hard, and I was very careful about what I actually said. I was shy, introverted, and scared, and my words, when I did speak, were always too quiet or too rushed to hear. But when I wrote (or created art), I felt I could say most anything I needed to because, in my mind, it wasn't actually “talking,” so I wasn't breaking their rules. When I wrote, I could access parts of myself that I shoved down the rest of the time, and I could tap into my deepest emotions and thoughts that I tried to hide even from myself. I knew enough to not write too openly about the torture, but I could say so much more through writing and

art than I could aloud. I could also dream, hope, and imagine a kinder life through my writing, just as I could through reading novels. Both reading and writing were a refuge for me, a way to escape some of the torture and abuse I was living through, and a way to try to make my world better.

I'm not so introverted or scared anymore—I've found safety and friends who love me for who I am—but I still prefer writing (email! Twitter!) to speaking aloud to a large group of people (though I love talking one-on-one with people). My characters usually have some of that shyness or ease with writing or art, too, such as Kendra (from *Scars*) using art to access her memories and emotions; Caitlyn (from *Hunted*) using blogging to try to create positive social change and help Normals see that Paras shouldn't be persecuted, and Sarah (from *Stained* [tentative title], forthcoming from Harcourt in 2013) writing comic book heroes to try to feel stronger and safer.

I know intense ongoing pain, fear, self-doubt, and being an outsider; I have lived those emotions and experiences most of my life, and I put those things into

my books while writing from an honest emotional place. I think that resonates with teens; they're living intense emotion now. I also talk about issues that not everyone talks about openly; I think that's important. I remember how very alone I felt, and how it made the emotional pain so much worse. We need to know that we're not the only one who's experienced something, especially when it's traumatic (such as abuse), not talked about (such as self-harm), or there's prejudice and hatred about it (such as being queer). And I intentionally put hope and healing into my books.

The characters in my books have a lot of my emotional truths and some of my experiences influencing them. In *Scars*, Kendra is a sexual abuse survivor, queer, and uses self-harm the way I did and for the reasons I did. She also uses art to heal and tell, and to explore her soul and her trauma, and she has a wonderful, supportive therapist just as I have. It's even my own scarred arm on the cover of *SCARS*; I am so grateful that my publisher used the photo. I think it adds to the realism, and helps teens know right away what the book is about—and it also, for me, made the book even more my own, even while remaining fiction.

In *Hunted*, Caitlyn has her life threatened, experiences torture, faces oppression, and decides to be who she really is even though it means increased danger to herself, just the way I did. Caitlyn is also

bombarded with other people's thoughts and emotions, and while I don't have telepathy like Caitlyn does, I am often hyper-aware of others' emotions. In *Stained*, Sarah is kidnapped, repeatedly raped, imprisoned, sometimes starved, experiences some mind control, and has her life threatened—again, like I've experienced. Like Sarah, I've often been extra sensitive to the way people treat me, especially when there's malice or ill feeling involved. And like Sarah, I tried to figure out what motivated my abuser and how I could be the least abused or tortured while I was held captive.

I only put very small amounts of my abuse and torture experience into each of my books. I may change that one day, but for now I think that the ongoing, repeated abuse and torture that I endured is so extreme that if I put it all in one book, it might overwhelm readers or make them stop reading—and I don't want that. I want to reach readers. So I put fragments of my abuse experience into each book, along with my emotional truths, compassion, and healing, and I keep the focus on specific issues.

Each of my books focuses on a few isolated forms of abuse that are part of what happens in ritual abuse. Rape and incest are a big and ongoing part of ritual abuse, and that's some of what I focused on in *Scars*. But another big part of *Scars* is one of the ways I coped with the abuse—using self-harm. It was really important to me to help people “get it” about self-harm and the connection to trauma. There are so few people who talk openly about self-harm, and there are so many people who judge it and

who are misinformed or believe hurtful myths, such as that people who self-harm are doing it to get attention (there are far easier ways to get attention than doing something that hurts so much, that can cause permanent physical damage or can kill you, and that leaves permanent scars), that we like pain (we're trying to escape overwhelming pain and emotion, not cause it), or that we're trying to manipulate people (we're trying to escape our intense emotional pain and stop ourselves from feeling or remembering; the only one we're trying to control is ourselves). Many people who self-harm go to great lengths to hide their wounds and scars (I used to wear long sleeves and jeans even in the summer; I never went to the doctor even though I often needed stitches; and I always cut alone where no one could see), and many don't talk about it because there's so much prejudice and anger toward people who self-harm. One survivor I knew went to the hospital for stitches, and the doctor refused to give her any pain killers because he said she did it to herself. It's one thing to inflict pain on yourself to escape overwhelming emotional pain. It's something much more painful and scary to have someone else inflict pain on you.

I wrote *Scars* because I wanted people who'd had the same or similar experiences as me to know that they're not alone, and that things can and do get better. It's hard to be in intense emotional pain. It's even harder when you feel like you're the only one or when you know you'll be harshly judged for how you coped. I think it's easy for people to judge others when they



don't understand someone or something. But once they understand, compassion comes more quickly. I also really wanted to increase people's compassion for all three major issues that I addressed in *Scars*—self-harm, sexual abuse, and being queer.

I wanted to write about cults and some of what happens in



ritual abuse, and *Hunted* was my way of doing that. Ritual abuse is not widely talked about or recognized and usually continues

unstopped through generations. Many people don't want to hear about or believe the extreme torture and abuse that happens right within their own civilized countries. It is horrific to endure ritual abuse and the resulting deep emotional and psychological wounds; it makes it even harder when people don't want to believe what happened. But many people can't or don't want to hear the horrors, so I wrote *Hunted* not only as fiction, but as fantasy. I think people can hear more about something that is painful through fantasy than they can through fiction or nonfiction.

So while *Hunted* was for me a book about ritual abuse and cults and torture, and it's emotionally true, it is definitely a fantasy. But within the fantasy, I had a lot of room to show a bit of what cults can be like, including making the government and the renegade Paras similar to cults (though far less extreme and cruel). It gave me a voice in a way that I hope people can hear and learn from, even as

they're being entertained. It was also very important to me to show that you can resist and overcome oppression, as I and some other survivors have. I hope that I inspire some readers to stand up to the various forms of oppression that they see, and also to know that they can survive whatever it is that they are going through.

Another aspect of ritual abuse is abduction and repeated imprisonment, starvation, and informal mind control, and that's what *Stained* is about. There's a lot out there already about abduction and the conditioning that can occur, but much of it is sensationalist; I wanted to show it from a more real, emotional place, so I drew on my own experience. I also wanted to deal with body image, since so many girls and women (and now, increasingly, boys as well) struggle with negative body image. I wanted to show an emotionally strong girl go through the process of learning to accept and love her body. And I wanted to show that you can fight back against predators and protect yourself, both mentally and physically, and that sometimes, you just have to fight long enough and hard enough and you will be able to escape and get safe. That was true for me, though it took me many, many years.

Since I draw on so much of my trauma experience and intense emotion when I write or edit a book, it often doesn't feel healing or like a release. But I know that I'm dealing with the issues as I write and edit. I'm also rewriting my own personal history, giving myself and my characters "happy" endings—happy in a realistic way. I didn't have happy endings with the abuse and torture I endured

for most of my life, didn't have an escape and safety until only a few years ago, but I had it in my writing, and I have it now in my life.

The greatest healing for me comes once the book is published and is reaching people. It comes once I am being heard—the opposite of what my abusers said would happen. They told me that no one would ever listen to me, no one would ever believe me, and that I would never be a success. Even though I knew not to believe their lies, when lies are repeated often enough and with torture to make them go in deeper, they stick. Getting my books published and having them reach people proved those lies wrong for me. I still get reader letters every week from people telling me that *Scars* helped them stop cutting or want to stop; talk to someone for the first time about self-harm or their own abuse or being queer; or feel understood for the first time in their lives. I also hear from readers who haven't had any of the experiences I wrote about but who now have greater compassion for those that do. Those letters are wonderful to receive, and healing. *Hunted* has only just been released, but I'm hoping it will reach people, too.

I always tried to escape the abuse, to protect other kids being abused, to heal, and to break silence, and it's so important to me to keep doing that—to have a positive effect on the world. That's part of every book I write. But I also try to make sure that my books are entertaining reads—that they grip the reader and don't let go. I want my books to reach people and move them, and to do that they need to be great stories written as powerfully and as well as I can.

I put a lot of goodness, sense of justice, and desire for things to get better in all my characters. I care a lot about those things; they're part of who I am and the way I see the world, so they're naturally in my main characters—the characters most like me. It's so important to me to try to increase compassion, awareness, and healing, and writing is my way of doing that. Even as a young child being tortured, I remember looking into the cult people's faces twisted with hate and vowing that I would never be like them in any way. I always fought them emotionally and mentally, even if I couldn't always fight them physically, and I managed to keep them from completely breaking my spirit or destroying my own goodness and soul. To me, life doesn't mean much if you're not putting good out there, if you're not loving people and being loved by them—and my characters have some of that same sense, and a determination to make things better. I love reading about hero characters; they're inspiring, and they give me hope that the world can and will keep getting better, kinder—and I think they do that for other people, too.

I am emotionally strong. I managed to stay alive, even as I saw some other kids die during the torture and mind control. And I was able to keep my true self intact, tucked away from the cult, and to strive always for healing, for safety, and trying to protect others, even though it often meant increased torture for me. My characters all have that, too—great emotional strength, tenacity, and a goodness in them, even as they are vulnerable. They are traits I like and value.

I lived most of my life in terror

and fear. The torture I experienced, the murder I witnessed left me in a permanent state of too much adrenaline, so much so that I used to literally shake inside, and, like many abuse and trauma survivors, I was hyper-alert, startling at loud noises and touch. I think some of that fear and high tension runs through my books—it's what I know, and it's also what I am drawn to in my own writing and in many of the books I read. For years in my critique group, I heard people tell me that there was too much tension in my writing, and that I needed to put in breathing space and moments of calm or happiness. It took me a long time to learn how to do that because I didn't know that in my own life. But I wanted readers to be able to stay with my story and not turn away—so that's one of the things I do when I edit. I go back and make sure there is breathing room and moments of happiness or calm to balance out the tension and pain and fear. It comes easier now that I've had more of it in my life.

I never learned how to be superficial or how to do the social chit chat stuff—or not well, anyway. The largest part of my life was torture, and in between were the periods where I had to act “normal,” only I couldn't act normal enough. My pain and the effects of the trauma always showed through—and they do for my characters, too, in different ways. In *Hunted*, Caitlyn can't hide how powerful a telepath she is or the way that Normals' thoughts bombard her, even though showing this can cost her her freedom or even her life. In *Scars*, Kendra can't stop painting her trauma and surfacing memories, even though her abuser has threatened to kill her if she

reveals who he is, and her pain and the effects of sexual abuse show even though she tries to hide it. In *Stained*, Sarah can't stop being hyper-aware of and hyper-sensitive to other people's stares, comments, and reactions to her port wine stain, and she is constantly braced for further reactions. After her abduction and escape, she struggles with the effects of the trauma.

The characters in all my books are also strongly emotional—tuned in to their own emotions and those of the people around them. Again, I'm drawing on my own way of coping in the world. I've always been very sensitive, and I tried to be extra aware of what my abusers were feeling, how they were reacting, and their body language, so I could figure out what they would do next and possibly escape or lessen some of the torture. Because of this, in my first drafts of novels I naturally focus a lot on my characters' emotions and what they sense from other people—so much so that I often leave out other senses. I always have to go back in later drafts and add in the rest of the senses, especially visual, as well as more details to give a greater sense of the place and the people. I do multiple drafts of my work—rewriting, editing, and polishing each manuscript until it reaches a publishable level, and is as powerful as I can make it.

I love writing books, and I am so grateful that I can make a living writing them (even if tightly)! Sometimes I can hardly believe, after all these years of trauma and pain, that I finally have happiness and am doing what I love and what it feels like I am here to do—write, and reach people through my writing. I am starting to live my dream, and it feels wonderful.



One More Time?

In this graduate-level YA lit class, students were discussing a novel in which two teens confront each other because one didn't want to go to a community event; he just wanted to be left alone that evening. This led the bully to call the other boy "a faggot." The bully later told his friends, word spread, and the devastated small-town boy was shunned.

A teacher taking the course who had read this book was so distressed that he arose and stated: "I'd never let any of my students read such a book. It could give them ideas!"

Isn't it interesting that there are some who worry that reading a book might give students ideas?

At a conference in March of this year, an author spoke eloquently about his growing up in poverty in Texas and the effects on his whole family. He read briefly from his novel based on this experience, and then he opened his presentation for questions and remarks.

One teacher started: "Does your book have any cursing, drinking, sexual situations?"

The author responded: "Some. But the sexual situations are not

detailed."

The teacher immediately scratched out all of her notes about the author and the book and couldn't wait for the session to end. All around her noticed her fidgeting and restlessness.

This author and his book have been nominated for several special literary awards.

A supervisor of language arts and social studies at a large urban high school asked if there were any books that could be recommended that had a more modern approach to critical issues confronting our country, books that would hook the students on reading about critical issues. When I suggested a few titles about conflicts and consequences of wars, WWII, Korea, Vietnam, Iraq, she looked at me and stated, "Those won't do. Some of our students might have relatives involved in those battles and might be deeply disturbed about reading such books. How about WWI?"

Aren't all wars hell?

A professor invited me to speak in a class about censorship. I started with a few cases and explained

the importance of book selection policies that would be approved by the administration and the board of education. I listed the resources at NCTE, Office of Intellectual Freedom at ALA, and The National Coalition Against Censorship. We discussed ways of handling issues when someone objected to a student reading a certain book, either assigned or taken out of the library for a report.

I asked the students to list some of the topics they thought might be controversial. The list included sexual situations (straight, gay, lesbian), curse words, drugs, gangs and violence, abuse, death and dying, unruly school situations, bullying, drinking, unhappy home situations, supernatural, fantasy, science fiction.

The professor then turned to me and said, "In this city, we don't need to worry about such matters. No one seems to care. We don't have to worry about selection processes."

Why did he invite me to speak about censorship and to involve his students? For the sensationalism?

Spread the Wealth

I have done limited research on

an outstanding author's works in the New Jersey schools. This author has won many awards and is regarded as a major figure in young adult literature. However, the author's overall works include a number of the issues listed above. I wrote to English department chairs throughout the state, asking if any books by this author were being used as required reading in any of their middle school or high school classes. I had a decent response, and the overwhelming answer was "No." I didn't have to ask why. Then I wrote to a number of school librarians; a few had some of the titles on their shelves.

Students discover many books on their own. They spread the word about what they like, and then these books become popular. Sales go up. Circulation increases. Many of these books are personally enjoyed, but they are not part of any school activity or curriculum. Yet, many teachers have heard the authors of these books speak at such conventions as NCTE, IRA, ALAN Workshops, local and state conferences, public libraries, book store signings. When I meet teachers professionally or socially and ask them about some of these books, they tell me they already have a curriculum that has been approved, and it's too much trouble to add anything else. Besides, some of these books are controversial, and they don't want to have any more problems than they already have with students who don't want to read or write anything.

How do teachers get students to read and write more?

Hardly anyone enjoys writing book reports. But having students share their reading experiences

with others can often be not only enjoyable, but also motivating. Yes, give students credit for all books they are reading. Find books that meet the abilities and interests of students. Fiction, nonfiction, plays, poems, short stories, essays. Students might start a book because of the subject matter, but find they don't enjoy an author's literary style. Finding another book on that subject is not all that difficult. Reading is so personal. How long can one impose one's taste on others? Isn't this extremely limiting?

There are so many good books out there. ALAN and *The ALAN Review* do an excellent job in helping teachers discover the wealth of resources available. We need to engage more teachers in our organization and help them become familiar with the many ideas for bringing students and books together. Reading achievement is not a test score. It's a lifetime experience.

Some Themes to Consider

A thematic approach allows students to look at several possible titles and to select a book that meets their personal interests. These are just a few suggestions. Most of the titles listed here are recent publications.

A Dash of Humor

- Andrews, Jesse. *Me and Earl and the Dying Girl*. Amulet, 2012.
- Bray, Libba. *Beauty Queens*. Scholastic, 2011.
- Clark, Jay. *The Edumacation of Jay Baker*. Henry Holt, 2012.
- Collins, Tim (illustrated by Andrew Pinder). *Prince of Dorkness*. Aladdin, 2011.
- Greenwald, Tommy (illustrated by J. P. Couvert). *Charlie Joe*

Jackson's Guide to Not Reading. Roaring Brook, 2011.

Korman, Gordon. *Ungifted*. Balzer & Bray, 2012.

Mellon, Robin. *Ditched: A Love Story*. Hyperion, 2012.

Seigel, Andrea. *The Kid Table*. Bloomsbury, 2010.

Family Matters

Block, Francesca Lia. *Pink Smog*. Harper, 2012.

Chayil, Eishes. *Hush*. Walker, 2010.

King, A. S. *Everybody Sees the Ants*. Little, Brown, 2011.

McCall, Guadalupe Garcia. *Under the Mesquite*. Lee & Low, 2011.

Meredith, Christina. *Kiss Crush Collide*. Greenwillow, 2012.

Michaels, Rune. *Fix Me*. Atheneum, 2011.

Nielsen, Susin. *Dear George Clooney*. Tundra, 2010.

Parkinson, Siobhan. *Long Story Short*. Roaring Brook, 2011.

Sand-Eveland, Cyndi. *Tinfoil Sky*. Tundra, 2012.

Smith, Andrew. *Stick*. Feiwel, 2011.

Weaver, Will. *The Survivors*.

Harper, 2012.

Zusak, Markus. *Underdogs*. Scholastic, 2011.

Fantasy

Archer, E. *Geek: Fantasy Novel*. Scholastic, 2011.

Cross, Sarah. *Kill Me Softly*. Egmont, 2012.

Guilin, Peadar O. *The Deserter*. David Fickling, 2012.

Hirsch, Jeff. *The Eleventh Plague*. Scholastic, 2011.

Meyer, Marissa. *Cinder*. Feiwel, 2012.

Nayeri, Daniel and Dina. *Another Jekyll, Another Hyde*. Candlewick, 2012.

Norcliffe, James. *The Boy Who*

Couldn't Fly. Egmont, 2010.
Pierce, Tamora. *Tortall and Other Lands: A Collection of Tales*. Random House, 2011.
Valente, Catherine M. *The Girl Who Circumnavigated Fairyland in a Ship of Her Own Making*. Feiwel, 2011.

Friendships

Chambers, Aidan. *Dying to Know You*. Amulet, 2012.
Emond, Stephen. *Winter Town*. Little, Brown, 2011.
Green, John. *The Fault in Our Stars*. Dutton, 2012.
Handler, Daniel (art by Maira Kalman). *Why We Broke Up*. Little, Brown, 2012.
Leveen, Tom. *Zero*. Random House, 2012.
Marcus, Kimberly. *Exposed*. Random House, 2011.
Saldin, Erin. *The Girls of No Return*. Scholastic, 2012.
Schroeder, Lisa. *Chasing Brooklyn*. Simon Pulse, 2010.

Historical Fiction

Burg, Ann E. *All the Broken Pieces*. Scholastic, 2009.
Dogar, Sharon. *Annexed*. Houghton Mifflin, 2010.
Edwards, Eve. *The Queen's Lady*. Delacorte, 2012.
Fitzmaurice, Kathryn. *A Diamond in the Desert*. Viking, 2012.
Janeczko, Paul B. *Requiem: Poems of the Terezin Ghetto*. Candlewick, 2011.
Kent, Trilby. *Stones for My Father*. Tundra, 2011.
Kurlansky, Mark. *Battle Fatigue*. Walker, 2011.
Parry, Rosanne. *Second Fiddle*. Random House, 2011.
Wein, Elizabeth. *Code Name Verity*. Hyperion, 2012.

Wolf, Allan. *The Watch That Ends the Night*. Candlewick, 2011.

In The Schools

Coriell, Shelley. *Welcome, Caller, This Is Chloe*. Amulet, 2012.
Eulberg, Elizabeth. *Prom & Prejudice*. Point, 2011.
Jones, Traci L. *Silhouetted by the Blue*. Farrar Straus Giroux, 2011.
Shank, Marilyn Sue. *Child of the Mountains*. Delacorte, 2012.
Van Cleave, Ryan G. *Unlocked*. Walker, 2011.
Vivian, Siobhan. *The List*. Push, 2012.
Whitney, Daisy. *The Rivals*. Little, Brown, 2012.
Zeitlin, Meredith. *Freshman Year & Other Unnatural Disasters*. Putnam, 2012.

Multicultural

Booth, Coe. *Bronxwood*. Push, 2011.
Cortez, Sarah (Ed.). *You Don't Have a Clue; Latino Mystery Stories for Teens*. Pinata Books, 2011.
Lake, Nick. *In Darkness*. Bloomsbury, 2012.
Levine, Kristin. *The Lions of Little Rock*. Putnam, 2012.
Long, Mark, Jim Demanakos, Nate Powell. *The Silence of Our Friends*. :01 First Second, 2012.
Noe, Katherine Schlick. *Something to Hold*. Clarion, 2011.
Troncoso, Sergio. *From This Wicked Patch of Dust*. University of Arizona Press, 2011.
Walker, Brian F. *Black Boy White School*. Harper, 2012.
Wright, Barbara. *Crow*. Random House, 2012.

Mystery And Suspense

Berk, Josh, Guy Longman. *Crime*

Scene Procrastinator. Knopf, 2012.

Child, Lauren. *Ruby Redfort: Look into My Eyes*. Candlewick, 2012.
Fredericks, Mariah. *The Girl in the Park*. Knopf, 2012.
Gilman, David. *Blood Sun*. Delacorte, 2011.
Harrington, Kim. *Clarity*. Point, 2011.
Hathaway, Jill. *Slide*. Balzer & Bray, 2012.
Jarzab, Anna. *All Unquiet Things*. Delacorte, 2010.
Johnson, Maureen. *The Name of the Star*. Putnam, 2011.
Lee, Y. S. *The Agency: The Traitor in the Tunnel*. Candlewick, 2012.
Peacock, Sharon. *The Dragon Turn*. Tundra, 2011.
Petrukhka, Stefan. *Ripper*. Philomel, 2012.
Plum-Ucci, Carol. *Following Christopher Creed*. Harcourt, 2011.
Valentine, Jenny. *Double*. Hyperion, 2012.
Wood, Mary Rose. *The Poison Diaries: Nightshade*. Balzer & Bray, 2011.

Nonfiction

Bernstein, Richard. *A Girl Named Faithful Plum*. Knopf, 2011.
Hopkinson, Deborah. *Titanic: Voices from the Disaster*. Scholastic, 2012.
Hunter-Gault, Charlayne. *To the Mountaintop: My Journey through the Civil Rights Movement*. Roaring Brook, 2012.
Lakin, Patricia. *Steve Jobs: Thinking Differently*. Aladdin, 2012.
Sommer, Shelley. *Hammerin' Hank Greenberg: Baseball Pioneer*. Calkins Creek, 2011.
Swanson, James L. *Bloody Times: The Funeral of Abraham Lincoln and the Manhunt for Jefferson*

Davis. HarperCollins, 2011.
Winkler, Lisa K. *Black Cowboys Ride across America*. CreateSpace, 2012.

Science Fiction

Asher, Jay, and Carolyn Mackler. *The Future of Us*. Razorbill, 2011.
Bush, Penelope. *Alice in Time*. Holiday House, 2011.
Gordon, Roderick, and Brian Johnson. *Closer*. Chicken House, 2012.
Grant, Michael. BZRK. Egmont, 2011.
Johnson, Elana. *Possession*. Simon Pulse, 2012.
Oliver, Lauren. *Delirium*. Harper, 2011.
Reese, Jenn. *Above World*. Candlewick, 2012.
Smith, Alexander Gordon. *Death Sentence*. Farrar Straus Giroux, 2011.

Special People, Special Problems

Anthony, Jessica, and Rodrigo Corral. *Chopsticks*. Razorbill, 2012.
Blackstone, Matt. *A Scary Scene in a Scary Movie*. Farrar Straus Giroux, 2011.

Cerrito, Angela. *The End of the Line*. Holiday House, 2011.
De La Pena, Matt. *I Will Save You*. Delacorte, 2010.
Goodman, Shawn. *Something Like Hope*. Delacorte, 2011.
Jordan, Dream. *Bad Boy*. St. Martin's Griffin, 2012.
Koertge, Ron. *Now Playing: Stoner & Spaz II*. Candlewick, 2011.
Vaught, Susan. *Going Underground*. Bloomsbury, 2011.
Walton, Kim. *Cracked*. Simon Pulse, 2012.
Woodson, Jacqueline. *Beneath a Meth Moon*. Nancy Paulson Books, 2012.

Sports World

Aronson, Marc, and Charles R. Smith, Jr. (Eds.). *Pick-Up Game*. Candlewick, 2011.
Bloomberg, Georgina, and Catherine Hopka. *My Favorite Mistake*. Bloomsbury, 2012.
Keplinger, Kody. *Shut Out*. Poppy, 2011.
Ockler, Sarah. *Bittersweet*. Simon Pulse, 2012.
Quick, Matthew. *Boy 21*. Little, Brown, 2012.
Ritter, John H. *Fenway Fever*. Philomel, 2012.

Volponi, Paul. *The Final Four*. Viking, 2012.

Supernatural

Billingsley, Franny. *Chime*. Putnam, 2011.
Clement-Moore, Rosemary. *Texas Gothic*. Delacorte, 2011.
Despain, Bree. *The Savage Grace*. Egmont, 2012.
Faegin, Trinity. *The Mephisto Covenant*. Egmont, 2011.
Feasey, Steve. *Dark Moon*. Feiwel, 2011.
Grant, Michael. *Fear*. Katherine Tegen, 2012.
Healey, Karen. *Shattering*. Little, Brown, 2011.
Miranda, Megan. *Fracture*. Walker, 2012.
Reese, James. *The Strange Case of Doctor Jekyll and Mademoiselle Odile*. Roaring Brook, 2012.
Reeves, Dia. *Slice of Cherry*. Simon Pulse, 2011.
Spotswood, Jessica. *Born Wicked*. Putnam, 2012.
Taylor, Laini. *Daughter of Smoke & Bone*. Little, Brown, 2011.
Wiggins, Bethany. *Shifting*. Walker, 2011.



YA Lit as Springboard for Social Relevance and Classroom Research

One of the everlasting appeals of young adult literature is that it is a springboard for the discussion of almost everything—from teenage angst to midlife crisis, from coming-of-age difficulties to old-age joys and sorrows—this is a genre whose appeal is widespread and constantly growing. And as this spate of research reports suggests, the enduring presence of young adult literature has begun to give editors and publishers great pause.

It used to be that YA literature was thought of as a good “teen read.” Adults would cluck their tongues in polite amusement as if to say, “Yes, continue reading that ‘junk’ until you are ready to read more sophisticated fare.” You know, *The Scarlet Letter*, *Hamlet*, *War and Peace*. Nowadays, though, more and more adults are reading young adult literature and asking themselves, “Oh, is *this* what I’ve been missing?”

Publishers and authors alike have been noticing this trend and, as a result, have been asking themselves some very hard questions. Why the appeal? Why the fascination with books primarily aimed at

kids? And more important, as many academics ask, what is young adult literature saying about the human condition that our teens need to know? What are they learning as a result of their reading?

Young Adult Literature and Teenage Sexuality

In “Beyond Forever: The Next Generation of Young Women Protagonists’ Sexual Motivations in Contemporary Young Adult Novels,” Caroline McKinley (2011) analyzes the sexual habits and proclivities of young female protagonists as portrayed in contemporary young adult novels. In the past, McKinley writes, female teens were often portrayed as “fending off” male advances, lacking desire, or facing punishing consequences for their sexual activity. Not anymore. In contemporary young adult novels, unwilling female adolescents are no longer the norm; their reasons for sex are “as varied as life itself” (McKinley, p. 38).

Examining twelve novels published in the last ten years (2001–2011), McKinley demonstrates that “yes, girls have feelings

and urges,” but the old stereotype of passive, unwilling females has been replaced by a more aggressive and self-conscious teenage protagonist. What McKinley underscores is that young adult novels that depict teens in the throes of sexual behavior reveal something that mere statistics cannot—the raw emotions that young people feel. In fact, contemporary young adult novels *supplant* the common stereotype that is often portrayed in popular culture—that teen girls need to be attractive to men and that sexual activity is risk-free. Instead, McKinley argues, young adult novels can pave the way to a more mature understanding of how sexual activity is a serious business that involves real consequences—physically, psychologically, and morally.

McKinley looks closely at 12 YA novels: Sarah Dessen’s *Dreamland* (2000), Dana Davidson’s *Played* (2005), Mary Pearson’s *A Room on Lorelei Street* (2005), Ellen Wittlinger’s *Sandpiper* (2005), Laura Ruby’s *Good Girls* (2006), Tanya Stone’s *A Bad Boy Can Be Good for a Girl* (2006), Jenny Downham’s *Before I Die* (2007), Daria Snad-

owsky's *Anatomy of a Boyfriend* (2007), Kristen Tracy's *Lost It* (2007), Sara Zarr's *Story of a Girl* (2007), Jo Knowles's *Jumping Off Swings* (2009), and Lauren Strassnick's *Nothing Like You* (2009). She concludes that these YA novels should be front and center when discussion of sexual activity among adolescents is the topic of conversation. Too often, McKinley says, teen books that depict a more fully realized portrait of teenage sexual behavior are not even part of the discussion. This, she insists, must change.

Similarly, Jeanne T. McDermott's "Getting It On: An Examination of How Contraceptives Are Portrayed in Young Adult Literature" (2011) examines books for teens published between 1995 and 2010. The purpose of her review is to stress how important the depiction of sex and sexuality is in young adult literature as it provides for many teens (and adults) information that often cannot be conveyed as clearly and as sensitively in more traditional "how-to manuals."

McDermott's central premise is to question the quality of the information presented on sex and sexuality in novels where teens are engaged in sexual activity. Is the information presented accurate? Realistic? Factual? Honest? Or has the author simply portrayed sexual activity with no discussion of the choices the protagonists are making? Do authors of books for teens show teens navigating the question of contraception or do they simply ignore the topic altogether?

Of the 25 novels that McDermott analyzed—including *Things Change* (2004) by Patrick Jones,

Unexpected Development (2004) by Marlene Perez, and *Rules of Attraction* (2010) by Simone Elkeles—it should come as no surprise that only "six to eight provide enough details that might be helpful for a teen in need of information about contraception" (McDermott, p. 52). And of these, McDermott writes, only six books portrayed contraception somewhat positively. The implication, McDermott states, is obvious. Fiction is where young people go to read about sexual activity, but fiction, especially contemporary teen fiction, is not where they will find factual information that will help them make healthy, responsible choices about their sexual behavior. For that, nonfiction is still the answer.

Young Adult Literature and Teenage Sexual Identity

In "Codes, Silences, and Homophobia: Challenging Normative Assumptions about Gender and Sexuality in Contemporary LGBTQ Young Adult Literature," Corrine Wickens (2011) reviews a multitude of young adult novels dealing with issues of sexual identity. She has found that since the publication of John Donovan's *I'll Get There, It Better Be Worth the Trip* (1969)—the first young adult novel to deal with issues of sexual identity—many authors have included LGBTQ characters in their novels and, more important, have portrayed them in a more fully realized, positive light. Gone, or at least portrayed less frequently, are negative stereotypes of LGBTQ literary figures; instead, they are portrayed more three-dimensionally. Wick-

ens presents several representative examples from contemporary YA novels that portray LGBTQ characters in a light that was previously considered unthinkable—normal, and even ordinary.

Drawing on Cart and Jenkins's *The Heart Has Its Reasons: Young Adult Literature with Gay/Lesbian/Queer Content 1969–2004* (2006), Wickens compares and contrasts early texts that tackle the issue of sexual identity with many current young adult novels. She concludes that the sophistication of the narrative has made it possible for young adult authors to challenge and reposition heteronormative assumptions and adolescent gender behavior. Specifically, Wickens reviews *Eight Seconds* (Ferris, 2000), *Empress of the World* (Ryan, 2001), *Finding H. F.* (Watts, 2001), *Love Rules* (Reynolds, 2001), *The Rainbow Kite* (Shyer, 2002), *My Heartbeat* (Freymann-Wehr, 2002), *Keeping You a Secret* (Peters, 2003), *Geography Club* (Harteringer, 2003), *So Hard to Say* (Sanchez, 2004). She compares their depictions of sexual identity with *Boy Meets Boy* (Levithan, 2003) and *Totally Joe* (Howe, 2005). The result is a fascinating read that adds considerably to the growing body of literature on how YA lit explores the identification of sexual selves and the presentation of three-dimensional LGBTQ characters.

An equally fascinating study is "Analyzing Talk in a Long-Term Literature Discussion Group: Ways of Operating within LGBT-Inclusive and Queer Discourses" (Blackburn & Clark, 2011). This helpful research examined 18 transcripts of talk from a literature discussion group of 32 adolescents and

adults, including the authors, using 24 texts over 3 years in an LGBTQ youth center. The purpose of the study was to identify and analyze the nature of the discussions and the ways in which these talks were liberatory and/or oppressive. The findings suggest the discussions represented a “complex, reciprocal process among texts, talk, and context in which no discourse [was] monolithically liberatory or oppressive.”

Simply, conversation among participants revealed a comforting level of satisfaction that allowed direct references to LGBTQ concerns and their relatability in the many novels the groups explored. “In our discussions, especially about *Finding H.F.* [Watts, 2001], *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*

[Chbosky, 1999], and *The Tragedy of Miss Geneva Flowers* [Babcock, 2002], we often drew directly on the behaviors or actions of specific characters, which gave us language and images that afforded us opportunities to talk in particular ways” (Blackburn & Clark, p. 246).

The Crossover Nature of Young Adult Literature

The Appeal for Adult Readers

Librarian Angelina Benedetti makes an interesting point that we have known for quite some time: young adult literature is becoming increasingly popular among older adult readers. Coming-of-age literature, Benedetti surmises, appeals to a wide variety of readers, particularly adults, because of everyone’s mem-

ory of being a teenager. And as she notes, authors of young adult literature are validating her observation by more frequently writing books for more general audiences.

In “Not Just for Teens” (2011), Angelina Benedetti, a library manager with the Kings County Library System, Issaquah, Washington, writes that part of this crossover appeal stems from the sudden appearance and popularity of what she calls the Big Three—J. K. Rowling’s Harry Potter series, Stephenie Meyer’s Twilight series, and Suzanne Collins’s The Hunger Games series. According to Benedetti, these wildly successful series have prompted adult readers to also read less well-known but equally compelling adolescent novels, such as Sara Shepard’s *Pretty Little*

Teaching Teachers the Benefits of YA Lit in the Classroom

Experienced teachers and preservice teachers alike can use some guidance in understanding the value of young adult literature and incorporating it into their lessons. The readings below supplement our reference list with research-based rationales and ideas for growing readers, writers, and thinkers in your classroom.

Bach, J., Hensley Choate, L., & Parker, B. Young adult literature and professional development. *Theory into Practice*, 50, 198–205.

Beumer Johnson, A. (2011). Multiple selves and multiple sites of influence: Perceptions of young adult literature in the classroom. *Theory into Practice*, 50, 215–222.

Byrne Bull, K. (2011). Connecting with texts: Teacher candidates reading young adult literature. *Theory into Practice*, 50, 223–230.

Carter, J. B. (2011). Graphic novels, web comics, and creator blogs: Examining product and process. *Theory into Practice*, 50, 190–197.

Comer, M. (2011). Young adult literature and alternative assessment measures. *Theory into Practice*, 50, 239–246.

George, M. A. (2011). Preparing teachers to teach adolescent literature in the 21st century. *Theory into Practice*, 50, 182–189.

Hayn, J., Kaplan, J. S., & Nolen, A. (2011). Young adult literature: Research in the 21st century. *Theory into Practice*, 50, 176–181.

Hazlett, L. A., Sweeney, W. J., & Reins, K. J. (2011). Using young adult literature featuring LGBTQ adolescents with intellectual and/or physical disabilities to strengthen classroom inclusion. *Theory into Practice*, 50, 206–214.

Henderson, S. C., & Buskit, C. (2011). Promoting the comprehension of teachers and students using young adult literature. *Theory into Practice*, 50, 231–238.

Liars, Cassandra Clare's Mortal Instrument (2007–2012) series, and recently published author Ally Condie's *Matched*.

Issues of identity and finding your way in the world are nothing new and, as David Levithan, a noted author for teens and editor at Scholastic, says, "never actually go away," (Benedetti, p. 40); they just become more compounded as we grow older—hence the appeal of young adult books that address "coming of age directly" and do so with angst and a flare for what matters most as a teenager: asserting one's identity in a universe that appears to be ever so brand new and equally confusing. The other obvious appeal, Benedetti asserts, is the excellent writing. The writing in young adult novels is not subpar; it is not "written down" for a teen audience. Instead, as testament to the many distinguished awards given to young adult literature, the writing is artistic, subtle, and equivalent to any book written primarily for adults, if not better. Young adult literature stands on a plane of high literary merit and thus, Benedetti insists, attracts a crossover audience of both teen and adult readers.

As Benedetti says, adults desirous of learning what their kids are reading are picking up young adult novels just to stay "hip" and in the know. They are certainly staying current when it comes to book formats; a 2011 *Library Journal* Public Library E-Book Survey asked librarians which age group used e-books the most; 61% said patrons ages 35–54 (summary available at http://www.libraryjournal.com/lj/home/887020-264/ebook_summit_kicks_off_with.html.csp). Additionally, Benedetti remarks, the

Pew Research Center's Internet and American Life Project reported that the greatest market penetration for e-readers is with middle-age adults, 47–56 (Benedetti, p. 47). Clearly, the e-book appeal is there, and that can only bode well for the life and durability of young adult literature.

Similarly, in "Navigating the Flood: Exploring Literature for Children and Young Adults," Janet Pariza and Deborah Augsburger (2011–2012) write that the publishing industry has literally flooded the market with thousands of new titles each year that are designed to appeal to both adolescents and adults. As evidenced by the crossover appeal of many such works, the appeal seems to be working—both in print and electronically.

Theory into Practice

Finally, let me draw your attention to a special themed issue of *Theory into Practice* edited by Judith Hayn and Jacqueline Bach (2011) that highlights the ability and necessity of young adult literature to diversify and unify the English language arts curriculum. Several articles discuss how the theoretical and literary constructs of young adult literature need to be examined in light of their continued presence in the secondary curriculum. By arguing for a more extensive use of young adult literature, these authors define the study of young adult literature not just as something relevant to reluctant readers, but as a viable, living, dynamic genre of literature that should be read, discussed, and researched by all devotees of literary theory and practice.

Studying young adult literature should not be relegated to education circles, these authors profess,

but subsumed by curriculum leaders and academic researchers across the curriculum in both secondary and university settings. The titles of some excellent articles are listed in the references of this piece; each reveals a particular aspect and current concern in the study of young adult literature.

Conclusion

As this brief discussion reveals, the field of young adult literature has begun to blossom into a force that not only reveals societal trends and issues, but also anticipates and inspires discussion about topics that are hard to share, even for adults. Young adult books have long dealt with themes and issues—sex, drugs, abuse—that many educators have been hesitant to discuss with adolescents in classroom settings. Fortunately, these barriers are slowly but surely being dismantled as more and more public and private schools make way in their curriculum for open and honest discussion of issues and concerns that matter to today's young adults. True, these issues might be difficult to share with young people—whether they are yours or not—but as young adult novels prove time and time again, good books can reveal hidden dilemmas, untapped secrets, and the singular importance of how stories of life and love, of honesty and truth, of pain and reconciliation, can and do serve as a springboard for meaningful conversations and, ultimately, research. As teachers and adolescents know intuitively, books do save lives. What could be more powerful?

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ing, and Leadership in the College of Education at the University of Central Florida, Orlando. He can be reached at Jeffrey.Kaplan@ucf.edu.

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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.

Boys and Poetry Do Mix: A Story of Engagement

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My first experience in a 7th-grade language arts classroom was as a preservice teacher. It was here that I learned a lesson that has stayed close to my heart and my pedagogy. When offered the motivational factors of challenge, choice, and collaboration (Gambrell & Morrow, 1996), poetry and boys *do* mix.

When I was first placed in the middle school outside a large city, I thought I was out of my league. The school was big, and the students were worldly. Coming into the classroom, I felt ready to teach language arts to highly motivated students; however, I found that engaging middle school students in literature was going to be challenging. What grabbed my attention was the difficulty in engaging the adolescent boys.

This was until we decided to start a poetry unit based on traditional and modern poetry, including music and rap. The unit started with an analysis of poetry during which students could choose what they

read, and it culminated with a reading of the students' original poetry. It was interesting to note that once the students had the choice and challenge of writing their personal poetry, their motivation and engagement grew. To add to my excitement, all of the boys were reading, writing, revising, and eager to share.

In our culmination of the unit, we celebrated and collaborated with formal poetry readings. My mentor brought candles, food, and drinks, and the students and teachers dressed in suits. I was inspired watching previously apathetic students now coming to class in suits and ties eager to share their work. The memory still brings tears to my eyes. While young man after young man came to the front of the room to share his personal poetry, their pride in their literary accomplishments was overwhelming.

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Poetry Breaks!

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In a Literature for Young Adults class I teach for prospective language arts teachers, only a few genuinely appreciate poetry. Some remember poetry fondly from elementary school, but not from high school.

The leading complaints? “The teacher told us our interpretations were wrong” or “I couldn’t relate to the required poems.” Often, many of these soon-to-be teachers don’t read aloud well, aren’t familiar with the wealth of poetry by and for YAs, and don’t realize the critical role exposure plays in making poetry accessible and engaging. So, I adapted Luchetti’s (n.d.) Poetry Breaks concept.

First, during a 2–3 minute Poetry Break, I read aloud poems I believe are suitable and appealing to YAs: Wayman’s mirthful and sarcastic “Did I Miss Anything?” or Webb’s ironic “The Death of Santa Claus,” which elicits gasps of (horrified!) laughter. Then, I bring an extravaganza of poetry books to class for inspiration: Betsy Franco’s collections of compelling poems composed by disenfranchised YAs, John Grandit’s irreverent concrete poem books, and Mel Glenn’s poem novels that capture the cruelty of high school, to name a few.

Gradually, the class takes over Poetry Breaks. They select, practice, and then read poems to us. Ken reads in a respectful, quiet voice from Sonya Sones’s (2001) *Stop Pretending: What Happened When My Big Sister Went Crazy*; Tonja reads a dazzling poem a teen girl wrote about soft Haitian rain—pre-hurricane—from Lydia Okutoro’s (1999) anthology; Katia reads Sylvia Plath’s (1959) “Mushrooms” in measured confident tones. Other selections come from Mark Bibbins’s (2009) *The Dance of No Hard Feelings*, Jack Prelutsky’s (2009) *Swamps of Sleethe*, and humorist Douglas Florian’s expressionistic illustrated poetry collections about fish, insects, and mammals.

Students report that Poetry Breaks expose them to poems and poets they might not otherwise have known and give them a chance to read aloud in a safe harbor. Through Poetry Breaks, these novices are finding their voices as teachers.

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How Lauren Gave Sam Her Voice

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“You just don’t know how it feels to be hated,” Sam said to me. Sam (a pseudonym) “came out” to her classmates a week prior. Immediately, she said, notes threatening and demeaning her were passed around like bottles of beer at underage parties. She was spat on, called names, and even picked up and slammed into a garbage can. Her response was to keep silent, for she was more afraid of what might happen if she fought back or told anyone than what was already occurring. Sam lost her voice and her spirit.

In an effort to help Sam, one thing I did was to turn to what I know best—books. I placed a copy of Lauren Myracle’s *Shine* in Sam’s hands and asked her to read. The next day, she rushed into class ready to discuss what she had read. Witnessing her passion for what she was reading, I asked Sam to keep a journal. The day Sam finished the book, she handed me her journal and asked me to open it up to the last page and read it. So I did. It read “Ms. Taylor, not only did this book save my life, it saved the lives of so many others! Thank you for giving me my voice back!”

As the tears streamed down my face, I looked at Sam and noticed a beautiful, strong, and confident young woman standing in front of me. I smiled, gave her a hug and whispered in her ear “You are never alone!” Books have the power to save lives. While not every book is for every reader, for every reader there is a book. For Sam it was Lauren’s. Without this encounter, we may be reading a very different ending to how Sam got her voice back!

Infiltrating the Classroom

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In order to fulfill my Geaux Teach requirements for LSU, I have been observing classes at an inner-city high school in Baton Rouge. During this time, I was also enrolled in a course at LSU called Young Adult Literature. All semester, I have been learning about the merits and value of young adult literature, about how it touches and relates to the kids who read it. I had never thought about young adult literature as its own genre or as a viable reading/teaching option for an English classroom, but this course changed my opinion. However, I was skeptical as to how young adult literature would translate into a real-world classroom.

In the classroom I was observing, the students were completing outside reading of *The Hunger Games*. I was immediately filled with cynicism. Was this young adult book actually getting through to these inner-city students? Were they actually able to relate and find meaning in this novel? I had a hopeless feeling that the students weren't any more interested in

this book then they were in *The Crucible*.

Then one day, while I was observing 5th hour, my cynicism evaporated. As I walked around the room collecting *The Hunger Games* from the students after their 15 minutes of silent reading, I saw it: the third book in the Hunger Games series sitting on a student's desk! I looked at this student who I saw as quiet, a student who flies under the radar, a student who looks asleep half of the time during class. Yet there the book sat. My heart fluttered as I asked him if he had read the entire series. He replied with a quiet, "Yes." I asked, "Well, what do you think? Are they good?" and he said, "They're great."

That day I realized that young adult literature can infiltrate the classroom and students' interests despite all the usual odds. It's as simple as one young adult relating to another young adult, even if he or she comes from a different background or lifestyle. The struggles of young adults are universal, and although I don't know what this particular student struggled with or for what reason he was so intrigued by *The Hunger Games*, the fact remains that he *was* intrigued, and he did find something that pushed him to keep reading an entire series. So there you have it: young adult literature *is* a viable and valuable option for the modern classroom!

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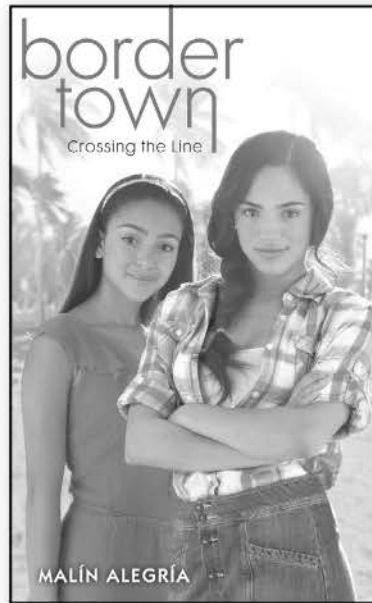
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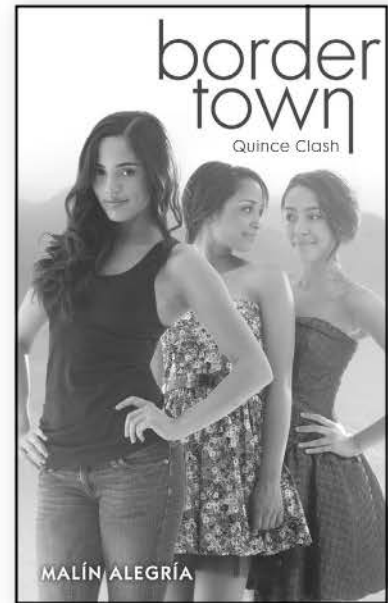
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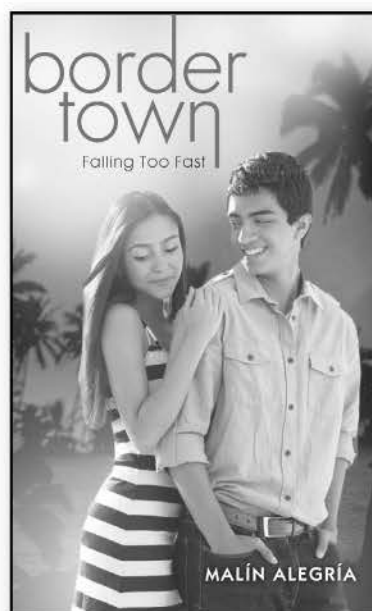
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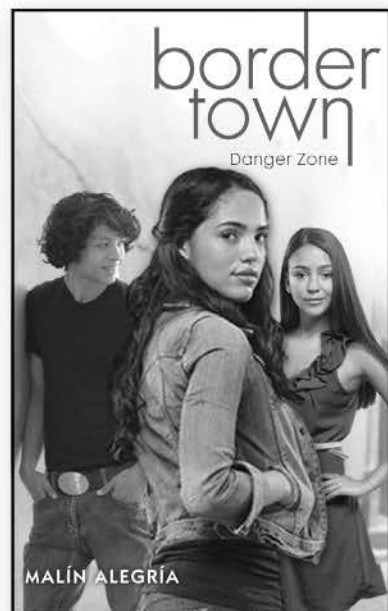
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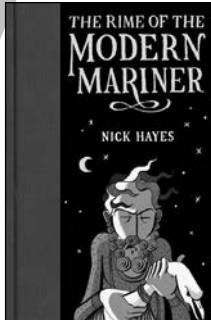
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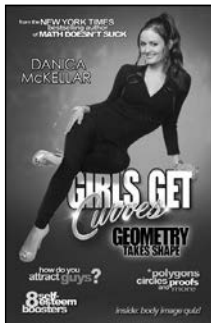
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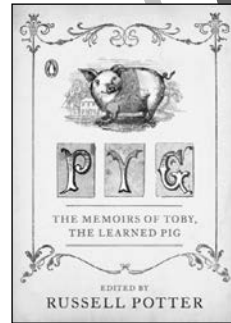
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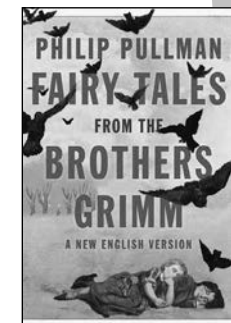
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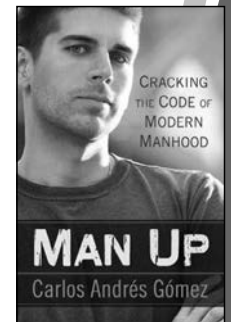
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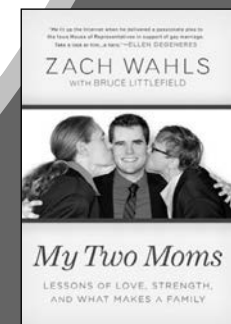
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