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Fall 2014

**Stand Your Ground:
Fostering Independent Thought and Action**

Instructions for **Authors**

ABOUT *THE ALAN REVIEW*. The ALAN Review (TAR; ISSN 0882-2840 [Print], ISSN 1547-741X [Online]) publishes articles that explore, examine, critique, and advocate for literature for young adults and the teaching of that literature. Published pieces include, but are not limited to, research studies, papers presented at professional meetings, surveys of the literature, critiques of the literature, articles about authors, comparative studies across genres and/or cultures, articles on ways to teach the literature to adolescents, and interviews with YA 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 young adult literature, librarians, YA authors, publishers, reading teachers, and teachers in related content areas. ALAN has members in all 50 United States and a number of foreign countries.

PREFERRED STYLE. Manuscripts should usually be no longer than twenty double-spaced, typed pages, not including references. A manuscript submitted for consideration should deal specifically with literature for young adults 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 young adults 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. The names of submitting authors should not appear anywhere in the manuscript. 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 from the copyright owner. YA author interviews should be accompanied by written permission for publication in *TAR* from the interviewed author(s). Interviewers should indicate to the author(s) that publication is subject to review of an editorial board. Original short tables and figures should be double-spaced and placed on separate sheets at the end of the manuscript. Notations should appear in the text indicating proper placement of tables and figures.

The ALAN Review uses the bibliographic style detailed in the *Publications Manual of the American Psychological Association* (APA). Please adhere to that style when including in-text citations and preparing reference lists.

SUBMITTING THE MANUSCRIPT. Authors should submit manuscripts electronically to alan-review@uconn.edu. In the subject line, please write: ALAN Manuscript Submission. All manuscripts should be written using a recent version of Microsoft Word and use APA bibliographical format. Complete submissions include, as separate attachments, the following documents: 1) A manuscript without references to the author(s). 2) A title page with names, affiliations, mailing addresses, and 100–150-word professional biographies for each submitting author. (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 editors and at least three 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 made to the field of young adult literature and mission of *The ALAN Review*, scholarly rigor, and clarity of writing. 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 editors. 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*.

FALL (October) Issue Deadline:	**MARCH 1**
WINTER (March) Issue Deadline:	**JULY 1**
SUMMER (June) Issue Deadline:	**NOVEMBER 1**

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Wendy **Glenn,** Ricki **Ginsberg,** and Danielle **King**

From the Editors

This issue's theme emerged from conversations at the 2013 NCTE Convention and ALAN Workshop in Boston. As we listened to talk both formal and informal, it was clear that we, as educators from all regions and backgrounds, possess a passion for adolescents, the books intended for them, and the authors and publishers who make these texts possible. We recognize the power of story to change lives, grant hope, create resilience, and offer solace. And yet, in the same conversations, too many of us expressed a sense of defeat and isolation, fear and despondence, as we imagined returning to our classrooms a few days following.

We believe that, as educators, we need to be our own best allies as we fight to teach in ways we know to be good and right and true. We need to know how to defend our selection of materials and our practices as we *stand our ground* in the face of scripts and censors, standards and accompanying tests. We need to band together and unite around our shared commitment to kids and YA literature, offer our own evidence-based support for the innovative work we do in our classrooms and libraries, and celebrate the ways in which we encourage our own adolescent students to think independently and act in good conscience, even when the odds feel daunting.

As ALAN members, we recognize the value of stories intended for adolescent readers and strive to share YA titles with the students with whom we work— whether they be middle or high school students, teachers or librarians in training, or young readers in our communities—in innovative, progressive ways.

And yet, we might express surprise when we interact with others who don't—or won't—do the same. At a recent meeting where local teachers and university faculty discussed questions of the ideal high school literature curriculum, a high school teacher posed the question, "Do I give students what they want, or do I give students what they need?" The assumption that underpinned this query was that students need the classics but want more contemporary YA titles. As ALAN members, we are used to thinking in a particular way about literature and how we teach it, a way that begins with readers and their interests and needs rather than a predetermined list of titles deemed worthy. This issue reminds us that we share buildings with some who don't share our passion for YA titles and that the path we pursue isn't always paved.

However, the rocks and roots along the path that challenge our convictions can also serve to strengthen them. Rather than becoming complacent and closing our classroom doors in the belief that we can offer up good stuff there and there alone, we can continue to educate and advocate. In our view, change flourishes when passion and hope persist. With this issue, we begin with the passion expressed by author A.S. King and her call to arms against those who attempt to limit readers' right to choose. We end with hope shared through the wise words of author Joan Bauer, whose belief in a force for good even amidst the very bad evokes images of light in the darkness. And in between, we offer research-based support for the titles and practices that might support our footing as we stand our ground.

In his article, "In Defense of Messing About in Literature," Robert Montgomery draws upon David Hawkins's science work to provide a theoretical and practical foundation for encouraging students to "mess about" in literature through a series of phases that foster positive reading experiences.

James S. Chisholm and Bethany L. Keller in "Making Connections during Transactional Discussions: Adolescents' Empathic Responses to *Thirteen Reasons Why*" explore how adolescent readers engaged empathically during literature circle discussions about *Thirteen Reasons Why* (Asher, 2007), revealing how students leveraged empathic responses during discussions to promote literary analysis of Asher's novel and critically connect issues from the text to their own lives.

In "At the Intersection of Critical Digital Literacies, Young Adult Literature, and Literature Circles," Janette Hughes and Laura Morrison investigate student participation in literature circles designed to focus on global issues of social justice. Students were given opportunities to strengthen their critical digital literacies through opportunities to create digital texts that reflected issues of power, inequality, and injustice.

Cammie Kim Lin, in her article, "Queer(ing) Literature in the Secondary English Classroom," explains how teachers can effectively use YA books with LGBTQ characters to *queer*, or disrupt, common assumptions about sexual identity, leading students to better understand the human experience and become agents of social change.

In their piece, "Linked Text Sets in the English Classroom," Kristine E. Pytash, Katherine E. Batchelor, William Kist, and Kristen Srsen report on the failings of the current reading model used in many high school classrooms and stress the importance of using linked text sets to address the increasing multimodality of reading and writing, honor student voice and choice, enhance cognitive and sociocultural elements of learning, and connect to the CCSS.

And Meghan E. Barnes's article, "Challenging Adolescence through Hybrid Learning Spaces," explores a student-led approach to literacy instruction that encouraged adolescent readers to develop solidarity, individuality, and agency through explorations of young adult literature.

In the final section of this issue, you'll find our three new columns. "Book in Review, A Teaching Guide," edited by S.d. Collins, presents "Sugar and Spice and Everything . . . FIERCE: The Resolute Young Women of *Always Emily*," a collection of teaching strategies, activities, and resources for teaching the novel *Always Emily* (MacColl, 2014). Teri S. Lesesne's "Right to Read: The Tip of the Iceberg" draws upon the metaphor of the iceberg to uncover dangerous and often unnoted examples of censorship that exist below the surface. And "Layered Literacies: Stand Our Ground against Stand Your Ground," by Susan Groenke and Judson Laughter, with Andrew Swafford, uses multiple media and various platforms as support to explore how students are using Internet-based media to speak out and speak back about how they are being portrayed.

Given member interest in exploring online offerings for the journal, each column is available in both print and electronic formats. We encourage you to access these pieces online by typing the weblink into your browser or using the QR code located on the title pages of each column in the print journal. Using a smartphone, you can download a free QR reader application that will allow you to access QR-coded materials (QR Reader for iPhone, Quick Scan–QR Code Reader, and NeoReader are popular choices).

We hope this issue inspires you to consider the necessity (and complexity) of standing our ground as we work to maintain and strengthen our collective work with the young people in our care.

This issue of *The ALAN Review* is dedicated to the life and work of Nancy Garden (1938–2014).

Thank you for standing your ground.

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/page/alan-review-author-guidelines.

Fall 2015: Beyond Borders: Partnering within and across Schools and Communities

"Let me peer out at the world/through your lens./ (Maybe I'll shudder,/ or gasp, or tilt my head in a question.)/ Let me see how your blue/ is my turquoise and my orange/ is your gold" (Naomi Shihab Nye, from *Time You Let Me In*).

These words inspire us to remember the joy and play, struggle and growth that might result from working with others. As busy educators, it is often easy to close the door, work through lunch, and attend to other business during meetings. But collaboration—the good kind—can help us learn more and find collective meaning in our work. Together, we can build connection and community and explore and understand difference.

In this issue, we encourage you to share collaborative efforts involving students, colleagues, and communities in creating spaces for YA literature to flourish. How have you generated ideas and implemented projects in the same building, in the building next door, or in settings across the globe, in person or virtually? How have you designed interdisciplinary curricula with those who study or teach subjects outside your areas of expertise? How have you looked beyond your own walls to foster partnerships with community outreach programs, created shared reading opportunities across neighborhoods and towns, worked with parents and guardians to acquire their wisdom, or invited young people to identify, explore, and propose potential solutions to problems they see in their communities? Regardless of the form these efforts take, and the complications and complexities they present, we are convinced that, "If you let people into your life a little bit, they can be pretty damn amazing" (Sherman Alexie, *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*).

As always, we also welcome submissions focused on any aspect of young adult literature not directly connected to this theme. All submissions may be sent to alan-review@uconn.edu prior to **March 1, 2015**.

Who's Afraid of A.S. King?

As an ALAN member, I have read many issues of *The ALAN Review*. I hoped that one day I would have time between my writing career, my school events calendar, and my faculty work at Vermont College to write a lovely academic piece for this journal that might touch on some of my pet topics. My envisioned piece would not use any personal first- or second-person pronouns; it would involve citations from much research, avoid familiar language, and would make a clear point, just as I instruct my MFA students to do when writing academic pieces.

What you are about to read is not that piece. What you are about to read is a blog post—familiar, with a few curse words, plenty of personal pronouns, and few citations. The research behind this essay is purely personal, and when Ricki Ginsberg wrote to ask me if she might have it for *The ALAN Review*, I faltered. On the one hand, my love for the ALAN organization is enormous, and I knew that ALAN members would understand what I'd written. On the other hand, when I received Ricki's email, I had just turned down a major news website who'd asked me for this piece because I have standards for articles the same as I have standards for academic pieces. This piece was clearly a casual, personal blog post. I told Ricki I would "revise it for a more academic tone."

I've been writing professionally for over 25 years. If there's anything I've learned it is that tone is the hardest thing to change once a piece is written. I have removed main characters and written new endings; I have changed the ages or genders of my characters, and I've changed settings. In fiction, certain elements are interchangeable. But tone or voice is another

story. I couldn't fix that. It is what it is. And so, with Ricki's permission, I have left it as is, for the most part, because the positive reactions to the piece were tied intimately to the tone.

I'm not sure what I was feeling when I wrote this piece. The subject of quiet censorship can make us feel frustrated, angry, concerned, but I think the emotion that dominated as I wrote was one of being tired. I'm tired. I'm tired of defending teachers and librarians. I'm tired of defending teenagers. I'm tired of the adult eye-rolling the minute something teen-related works its way into a conversation. I'm tired of the lack of respect we give teenagers when they are mere moments away from adulthood. To me, it's akin to the laws of basic training. We yell, we disrespect, we limit power, we call their emotions "drama," and then we boot them out into the real world thinking that they might have confidence and self-esteem when, really, our culture on the whole has taken it from them.

I started writing novels 20 years ago because I loved books, and I wanted to write books because I wanted, one day, for someone to love my book enough to make them want to write a book. This has happened, but I still work two other jobs to afford to be a writer because I love writing quality literature for teenagers. The tone of this piece reflects that reality, and I ask you to readjust your reading glasses to blog mode while you read it. The tone in this piece also puts teen readers at the top of the heap, where they should be. They are our future. They are usually underrepresented in intellectual conversations about their own well-being. And yet, when given the opportunity to speak about their realities, I have

heard hundreds of teens share poignant, factual, and well-organized thoughts about this subject. Most of them can't understand why anyone would want to keep books from them. Many of them wonder who, exactly, is in control of this part of their education. Some of them fight (see Muhlenberg School District, Reading, PA—my hometown—and the reaction to the ALAN book boxes their representatives brought home after the 2013 Workshop) but are not taken seriously simply because they are teenagers. Some of them are completely unaware of what's being kept from them because so many books just disappear from classroom library or school library shelves with no fuss. I firmly believe that all children have potential. All of them. I believe that teenagers are in the most important stage of life—where that potential is about to be directed into a vocation. In my mind, it is at this stage where we should allow teenagers access to all books in order to make such important decisions with the full canon of knowledge available to them. With that, I give you "Who's Afraid of A.S. King?"

****

This week, I heard from a good friend of mine who works in secondary education. She was talking to a friend who works in a public high school's guidance center. My friend's friend seemed shocked that *Reality Boy* would be allowed in my friend's school (due to possible parent complaints) even though she personally loved the book. I hear this a lot. I'm used to it. People from my generation didn't have this kind of literature when they were in school. (I'll add they also didn't have the Internet, cell phones, cable TV, or crime shows that got much worse than *Quincy* or *Hawaii Five-0*.)

But.

A year ago, a friend of mine who teaches high school English, and whose school I've visited many times, was talking to a fellow teacher. She mentioned that I visit her school and that her students love my books, and the fellow teacher, who also loves my work, said, "Aren't you afraid to have A.S. King into your school?"

Yikes.

Last year I was quietly uninvited to a school because a math teacher didn't like the last book (from another author) that the organizing librarian promoted during a previous reading initiative. The principal

got involved. I did not go to that school—an inner-city public school that cannot afford author visits and whose students would have probably loved and needed the presentation I give about the "personal suitcase." The librarian had worked so hard on this visit that we were both very upset when the final verdict was given—in quiet code that no school board ever discussed.

I have had my books blocked from school libraries based on a principal finding and reading one negative Amazon review.

People have been shocked when I tell them I visit Catholic schools. I have no idea why they are shocked. Do they think that Catholics can't relate to books that talk about everything from bullying to genocide? Last time I checked, Oliver Cromwell was quite a bully and wanted all Catholics dead.

Yet, people never seem shocked when I tell them that I've visited a juvenile detention center or an alternative school. I can't figure out why. Is it because these kids are throwaways? Why, on one hand, do professionals working with teens seem shocked that I would be allowed into a Catholic school or university to speak and yet think it's completely logical that I would go to talk to the kids they've already given up on?

When I take all these facts and swirl them around, I can't make much sense of it. What is it, exactly, that these people seem to think is so dangerous? Sure, anyone who reads any book is allowed not to like it. That's valid and important, and if you don't like my books, then I don't expect you to promote them in any way. But these things are being said either by people who adore my books, or in two cases above, never read them. So why the shock? Why the implied fear of me, in general?

Maybe it's the cursing. I am very aware that some of my characters curse. I curse too sometimes. But I was raised in a no-cursing house, and I am raising my kids in a no-cursing house. I don't even curse when I burn a grilled cheese sandwich. I say, "Shazbot." I say, "Sugar." I say, "Darn it!" So why do my charac-

> **It is at this stage where we should allow teenagers access to all books in order to make such important decisions with the full canon of knowledge available to them.**

ters curse? Because some kids curse. All kinds of kids, too. Not just what some people label "bad kids." Good kids curse plenty. Calculus geniuses curse. Cheerleaders curse. Kids who go to church curse. Top-notch athletes curse. Valedictorians curse.

My eleven-year-old kid learned every swear word on a shared school bus last year. She was nine then. She also learned the racial words. You know. The N-word, the Sp-word, the Ch-word, the W-word. Usually, these words were used in conjunction with a curse word. Example: "Those fucking N-words are living off the government," or "Fucking W-words need to go back to Mexico," etc. You get the picture. Apparently, these children, all of whom attend a private religious school, some of whom were younger than my kid, learned these curse words somewhere and dutifully taught my then-nine-year-old about them by using them in competent sentences in casual conversation on a bus before eight in the morning.

> The idea that a book about something unfamiliar to you is automatically irrelevant is perplexing. To me, reading is a way to explore new worlds and grow as a human.

Luckily, she told me. And I told her what the words meant, why they are offensive, and why we don't use them in our house. I assume this process is the same for most parents. Frankly, I'm glad she learned the words when she did. This experience made her a voracious reader of novels about racism and injustice, which has made her the type of citizen that I'd be proud to call my neighbor. Thanks to those kids on the bus, she better understood books like *Persepolis; Maus; American Born Chinese; March; Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry; Boxers and Saints; Journey to Topaz; Number the Stars; Anna of Byzantium;* and the Resistance series, and she is far less likely to hate or tolerate hate.

So, if it's the cursing that makes some adults squeamish about my books in schools, then why do they project that fear when referring to me, the author? Do they think that my author visits, my assembly programs, or my classroom workshops involve some sort of inappropriate material? Do they think that 40+ schools and libraries per year pay me to

come and talk to their students because I'm scary? I'm thinking that adults are smarter than this. No, it can't be that they think I will curse or will promote cursing when I go to a school. So I'm guessing it isn't the cursing.

Maybe it's sex. I don't really write sex in my books. I can't write a sex scene to save my life. And I didn't have sex in high school (not like it's any of your business), so I can't really feel what that feels like, so I find it hard to write about it. That said, I know that the average age American teens first have sex is about sixteen. And I know fourteen-year-olds have sex. And probably twelve-year-olds, too. And no, I'm not comfortable with that, but it's happening, right? So, I don't write sex scenes, though some of my characters have had sex or talk about it. But find me a high school student who hasn't talked about or thought about sex, and I'll hand-deliver you a home-baked muffin. There are writers in my field who do write sex scenes, and I applaud them, especially those who are writing sex-positive and consent-centered sex in teen fiction. Sex is a huge part of teenhood. Even if teens aren't doing it, the teen years are where they learn the rules, so it's an important time. If there is silence from the adults about sex, then how will we, as adults and as a culture, make sure those rules are clear in a world full of easily accessible porn, blurred consent definitions, and rampant relationship violence?

Even listing these things is making me feel a bit ill. As if there is certain subject matter we can't share with teens . . . while we are happy to watch CSI-whatever right in front of them. So what's left?

Violence. My books have a little of that. Sure. So does life. Next. *Death.* Seriously. Death is part of life. Just ask Forrest Gump. Next. *Empathy toward others, or tolerance toward those who are different from the reader.* When I first wrote this piece, I didn't understand why this would be a problem, but author and teacher Eric Devine made me realize that this is actually a huge issue and can be compared loosely to the "This kind of thing doesn't happen in our town" idea I mention later. So, a school board doesn't believe that LGBTQ books belong in its school libraries because they have no LGBTQ students. First of all, this can't be accurate. But most of all, the idea that a book about something unfamiliar to you is automatically irrelevant is perplexing. To me, reading is a way to explore new worlds and grow as a human. A book is a

life experience. A book can make you more tolerant. A book can open one's mind. Some people are frightened of this no matter how much we don't understand that reasoning.

Abuse. My books don't touch on this in a full-on way, but again, that's life. Why wouldn't we talk about this? CSI-whatever talks about it all the time. One in four kids in America has been sexually abused or raped by the time he/she gets to be a senior in college. So, why are we keeping this a secret? Don't you think kids talk about it in school when a friend gets assaulted? You don't think they saw it on Facebook? They know. Trust me. *Drugs and alcohol.* Yes. My books do touch on this a bit. I once had an adult contact me on Twitter to say she got to page eleven of *Please Ignore Vera Dietz* where Vera pulls out a bottle of vodka from under her car seat, and she tweeted something like, "A.S. King promotes teen drinking and driving! Not reading the rest of this book!" If she'd kept reading, she could have actually learned that the book was not at all what she thought it was. Then again, it seemed she was looking for a reason to stop reading, and I'm glad she found one. I've recently learned of a small rural town in my home county that is plagued by teen heroin addiction. Do we not think that teens know this stuff exists? They know. Again, trust me. *Bullying.* Yes, my books have this. And so does every school in America. And every workplace. Most schools have anti-bullying initiatives built into curricula, but maybe they don't like the words bullies use. Maybe they don't like the violent, emotional reality of bullying because it is difficult to think about a child living inside that reality.

I'm thinking that might be the problem on the whole. *Reality.*

I mean, real reality. You know—where life is sometimes hard and parents aren't always perfect and school sometimes sucks and college decisions seem pointless and sex is a possibility on a Friday night the same as smoking a joint, drinking to excess, or getting into a fight or studying for SATs. I have yet to write about stealing a car, but that's a Friday night possibility as much as considering committing suicide, and I've written about that, too.

Last year I talked to thousands of teenagers in their high schools. When I talk, do you know what I talk about? I talk about making smart mistakes. Do you know why I do that? Because I meet a lot of teenagers who are afraid of making mistakes. One of my presentation slides reads: EVERYONE MAKES MISTAKES. That's what I tell students. I tell them that making mistakes is universal. We all do it. I tell them that making a mistake is not a reason to give up. Do you know how many teens need to hear this? Judging by the letters I get from classrooms all over the country, a lot. I'm guessing that's because someone somewhere along the line gave them the impression that they should be perfect.

So I tell them that they are not perfect. I tell them that, like me, they are flawed and will make mistakes. And I tell them that maybe, like me, if they think about their own mistakes (and the mistakes of others, through, say, reading fiction) and figure out why they made them, that maybe they can be the lucky ones who learn from their mistakes and go on to make smarter and smarter mistakes. I also ask them to look into their pasts, and I ask them what they're lugging around with them—that personal suitcase—and I tell them that this baggage, we all have it. And then I explain how to unpack and repack that suitcase in order to survive real life and be happy.

> **I tell them that making mistakes is universal. We all do it. I tell them that making a mistake is not a reason to give up. Do you know how many teens need to hear this? Judging by the letters I get from classrooms all over the country, a lot.**

My books are on school and state reading lists all over the country and have won state awards and national awards. I get letters every week from students who read my books and find themselves in them. "This book changed the way I look at the world." I also get letters every week from adults who read my books and find themselves in them. "This book changed the way I look at the world. I wish it was around when I was in school."

So why, when chatting over a casual cup of tea on a random morning, would anyone say, "Aren't you afraid to have A.S. King into your school?"

My mother worked in schools and in school administration for years. I understand well what goes

on. I do not like that teachers—those trained best to teach and run their own classrooms—are not at the top of the decision-making pyramid when it comes to what and how they teach. I do not like most standardized testing because I don't think it prepares students for much . . . other than more standardized testing. Teachers, teacher training professors, and teaching students I know (my husband included) know how I feel about these things. One of the coolest administrators I met actually participated in a community read of one of my books and invited me to Skype into her office one day while students were there. It was refreshing to see a super-intendent getting involved in reading and reality. Our discussions that day serve as proof that not all admin-istration is bad or limiting. But this is a rarity, and I think we all know it. So we'll move on.

> It's always fascinating to me to try and get into the minds of people who think they can remove reading material from the same stacks that I read from—as if they are saving me from something I can't handle. People are weird.

I've worked on library boards and know that some patrons think that "cleans-ing" the stacks of anything they deem inappropriate is a good idea. Since this piece isn't about libraries, I won't say too much about this, but we all know what happens when a library cleanser comes around. It's always fascinating to me to try and get into the minds of people who think they can remove reading material from the same stacks that I read from—as if they are saving me from something I can't handle. People are weird.

I know parents. I know parents who say, "I loved your book and can't wait for my teen to read it!" I know parents who say, "I loved your book, but I'd never let my teen read it!" I also know parents who tell me at signings, "My child can read at a high school level. Yes, I know she's ten, but she loved [insert popular YA book here.]" I do my very best to explain to this third type of parent that age recommen-dations are for mature (teen) content and that maybe they should read the book *with* their child, just in case any questions come up. They often tell me they don't have time to read for pleasure and that their child will

be fine. I trust them. I have to. It's not my job to censor their kid's reading the same as it isn't anyone's job to censor what my kids read.

I don't know about you, but quiet censorship freaks me out. It's the censorship that's spoken over tea, over lunch, at random times when we are not prepared to answer because we are caught so off-guard that we really only think about what was said on the plane home. Last year I was asked to be on a censorship panel as an "expert." I had to reply and say I was not an expert at official challenges. So far, my books haven't had an official challenge as far as I know. Instead, I get embarrassed looks from dedicated librarians who whisper, "My principal won't let me have that one in the stacks." I get near-inaudible un-invitations. I get quiet letters from devoted teachers who apologize for not being able to share my book with a student who needs it because of a fear of losing their job. Ah, quiet. It is usually an indication that important information is being withheld. Like the way we whisper *cancer.*

My favorite response to certain books is: "This kind of thing doesn't happen in our town!"

I heard this once in response to *Please Ignore Vera Dietz.* Here's a funny fact: I based the creepy guy in *Please Ignore Vera Dietz* on a real guy named Eddie Savitz. Savitz had haunted me for years after his story came out in the early 1990s. But when the book came out, I got all sorts of letters asking how I knew about "Big Bill" or "Teddy Bear" or other towns' creeps. I got more than ten of these letters just in the year the book came out. None of the letter-writers knew that creeps other than their own town-creeps existed. But creeps happen. All over the place. If you watch the TV news, you hear about them every single day. Check your state's online database. I bet you have a creep living near you.

But not in your town. I get it. Drugs and alcohol also don't happen in your town, nor does teen sex, violence, or swearing. Or death. If there really is a town like this in America, I am happy about that. Really truly happy. But are your teenagers going to stay in that town forever? Don't you want them to go to college? Or go out in the world and do stuff? Don't you want them to be prepared for all of these real things that happen all the time in real life? Don't you want them to know that they will make mistakes? Don't you want them to learn how to make smarter mistakes?

Fiction can help. I write my books for one reason, whether they are for adults or teens. I write to make readers think. I write to widen perspective. I write to make readers ask questions and then answer the questions or start conversations. And I write sometimes to give voice to the throwaways, of which our society has many, but we usually hide them because we are still uncomfortable with what we see as our own mistakes. Make sure you say that in a whisper. *Throwaways.*

As a parent, it is certainly up to you what your child reads, just as it is up to me what my child reads. We can control this at home. No doubt. But the one thing we cannot control is time, and as time passes, our children will become adults. I know my child would make a good neighbor. She knows what hate looks and sounds like. She knows how to speak her mind, and she knows she makes mistakes because we make her own those mistakes. I know that one day, when she is your neighbor, she will help you shovel your sidewalk of snow if you need help. I know she will babysit your kids responsibly and play a patient game of Scrabble with them. She will make them brush their teeth before bed. If she reads them a bedtime story, it will most likely be Dr. Seuss or a few Shel Silverstein poems.

People who know me read this blog post when I posted it. People who *really* know me. And anyone who knows me knows that I am the least scary person you will ever meet. My books? Are not anything to be afraid of. I mean, unless you're afraid of real things that go on every day. I mean, unless you're afraid of kids knowing more about reality than, you know, CSI-whatever. I mean, unless you're afraid of an adult whose sole purpose on planet Earth is to empower people to be the very best they can be no matter how heavy their personal suitcases might be.

I'm that adult, and I own it. If I'm scary to you, then okay. Most teachers I know also have this same goal: to empower students to be the very best they can be. And many of those teachers know that this also scares some people. I have no idea why.

This isn't about administrator's rules. Those are real, and I know in every job, there are rules that dictate what you can do, even if you want to do more. I am so grateful to teachers and librarians all over the world who share young adult books with their teens. And I stand with those of you who are tied by your administrations into this uncomfortable atmosphere of occasional, quiet censorship. I know you don't want it. I'm sorry you have to deal with it as well-trained and educated professionals. I don't want you to lose your job and really appreciate the things you do to steer your students toward the fiction they might need when they need it. Thank you.

When I look back at me at 12 years old, in seventh grade, I know that Paul Zindel's books saved the me that finally fought hard to come back. That's the me you know now. The me in between (from 12.5–18.5) was a strange sort of throwaway kid. Bad grades. Bad habits. Bad attitude. I was bored, and I gave up on everything, and the minute I did, so did most of the teachers. But some still knew that deep down, I was a *thinker* . . . and I can bet they were wondering what I was *thinking* while I chose that in-between me who would rather smoke in the bathroom and get detention than study when I was in high school.

Here's what I was thinking: I can't wait to get out of this bullshit place and be myself. Maybe that's what makes me scary. I don't know. What I do know is: I was a throwaway kid in the eyes of my eighth-grade guidance counselor (who, while filling out a soon-to-be-denied form to request the reinstatement of a gifted program for me, spelled cello "chello") and in the eyes of many who came after him. I knew high school had an expiration date and all I had to do was survive until the expiration date was up, so I could think again and be myself again and finally be happy.

I did make it to graduation, thanks to Paul Zindel and many other authors; but thanks, really, to the teachers who gave me those books to read. I graduated from high school thanks to books.

But more importantly, when I entered the real world—the one with awful bosses, crappy paychecks, regular sexual harassment/gender discrimination,

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untrustworthy people, drug addicts, alcoholics, bad friends, bad drivers, bad doctors, keg parties, your-list-here—I was better able to make smart decisions and learn from my not-so-smart decisions because I'd read about characters who made mistakes and who recovered from those mistakes. Well, that and my parents who never once flagged a book I was reading as inappropriate and who had never once lied to me about the real world.

> **Lying never helped any relationship improve. Whispering never cured cancer. And some throw-away kids become adults like me . . . if someone somewhere along the way gives them a voice.**

After graduating college, I went to a Philadelphia mansion party with a 60-year-old businessman who'd promised we'd talk about a full-time job (I'd interviewed with him prior to this). When I was grabbed and groped and forcefully kissed by a different 60-year-old man, I knew, after a panicked moment alone in the bathroom, to get the hell out of that swanky mansion and drive the hour home. I was 21 years old on the day of that party. On my way home, I stopped at a friend's house and bawled my eyes out. I was embarrassed, yes. Grossed out, certainly. But most of all, I was afraid that my parents would be mad at me for leaving the party because they had been hopeful about the job from this businessman.

I'll never forget the laughter that night. My mother laughed so much as I told her and my father, through tears, what had happened. They laughed to make me feel better, yes. They laughed because they wanted me to see the humor in this sick and twisted world. They laughed because they wanted me to know it wasn't my fault. They laughed because up until then, they had prepared me for the real world, and I was safe at home and not still at the party getting roofied and god-knows-what-elsed. They were, in a word, relieved.

I know why people want their children to remain innocent. I have a six-year-old. She is adorable. She loves unicorns. She loves dressing up like a pirate princess, she has no idea that the real world exists, and so far no harm has come to her, and it's a beautiful thing. It really is. We read *Freedom Summer* to-

gether, and she knows the evil of racism even though she hasn't experienced it yet. But she will. And when she does, thanks to books like *Freedom Summer*, she will be repulsed.

I am repulsed by many facets of the real world teens have to navigate now. I am also very aware that my repulsion has nothing to do with its existence. It will exist whether I am repulsed or not.

So I write about it.

It's that simple.

If that makes me scary, then I'm proud to be scary. But I don't think I'm scary at all. I'll shovel your sidewalk if you need help. I'll make you a big pot of spicy corn chowder if you're sick. I'll read Dr. Seuss to your kids, and I will make them brush their teeth. And if one of them doesn't understand something about the real world—say, racism—and they ask me about it, then I will buy your family a copy of *Freedom Summer*, and if you feel like sharing it with them, then I bet you'll have a great conversation after you read it, and I bet your relationship will be all the better for the honesty you share.

Lying never helped any relationship improve. Whispering never cured cancer. And some throwaway kids become adults like me . . . if someone somewhere along the way gives them a voice. Fiction does that. Vonnegut did it for me. Zindel. Heller. Rushdie. Plato. Twain. Steinbeck. Plath. Hemingway. Woolf. Dahl. Salinger. Golding. Orwell. Lee. They all did that for me. But they were quietly censored, too. Over tea. During lunch. At random times. So maybe it's a big club.

It's scary out there. I know it. I turned on the Winter Olympics so I could watch with my kids, and I had to turn it off because the commercials for prime time that NBC aired—images of terrified, captive children, guns, and violence—were not something I wanted my kids to see. But if I mentioned that I was going to watch the Olympics with my kids, I doubt anyone would say, "Aren't you afraid to watch the Olympics with your kids?"

I've swirled all of this stuff around in my head for years, and I still can't make sense of it.

Except this part: hiding things from teenagers is a known fail. Teenagers already know what we're attempting to hide from them. They probably know a lot more than we do about the reality of being a teenager today. They're a lot smarter than most people give

them credit for. Contemporary young adult books are not going to tell them anything they don't already know. The people who know this best are teachers, teen service librarians, and others who give their time to the cause of young adult literature and teenagers in general. I only wish the rest of the adult world would catch up.

A.S. King is an award-winning author of young adult books, including highly acclaimed Reality Boy; *the 2012 Los Angeles Times Book Prize winner,* Ask the Passengers; Everybody Sees the Ants; *2011 Michael L. Printz Honor Book,* Please Ignore Vera Dietz; *and the upcoming* Glory O'Brien's History of the Future. *King's short fiction for adults has been widely published and nominated for Best New American Voices. After 15 years living self-sufficiently and teaching literacy to adults in Ireland, she now lives in Pennsylvania. Find more at www.as-king.com.*

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2015 Call for CEL Award for Exemplary Leadership

Please nominate an exceptional leader who has had an impact on the profession through one or more of the following: 1) work that has focused on exceptional teaching and/or leadership practices (e.g., building an effective department, grade level, or building team; developing curricula or processes for practicing English language arts educators; or mentoring); 2) contributions to the profession through involvement at both the local and national levels; 3) publications that have had a major impact. This award is given annually to an NCTE member who is an outstanding English language arts educator and leader. Your award nominee submission must include a nomination letter, the nominee's curriculum vita, and no more than three additional letters of support from various colleagues. Send by **February 1, 2014,** to: Rebecca Sipe, 8140 Huron River Drive, Dexter, MI 48130. Or email submission to Rebecca.sipe@emich.edu. (Subject: CEL Exemplary Leader).

Robert **Montgomery**

In Defense of Messing About in Literature

"**W**hy are we doing this?"
The voice—male, indignant, defiant—came sneering from the rear rows of the classroom with all the pinpoint precision of a well-aimed spitball. We were several days into *Romeo & Juliet,* and I was only a few months into my second year of teaching high school English. The role of soliloquies was on that day's agenda. Even though this was 1996, still two years before the advent of content standards in the state of California, I had been given a slim binder of 9th-grade literary terms at my new teacher orientation. From this, I knew I was required to teach soliloquy in the context of Shakespeare's play.

And so, after reading the speeches that open Act II, Scene 2 and explaining these lines in modern day English, I gave my students a worksheet on which they were asked to rephrase key terms from the soliloquies in their own language—essentially asking them to replicate the lecture I'd just given.

"Why are we doing this?"

I suddenly found myself fumbling with the worksheets as I tried to pass them out, and I felt the tips of my ears supernova with embarrassment.

"Um . . . it's important to be able to, um, put Shakespeare's language in a modern context because it's . . . a . . . skill . . . you'll use, um, later in life?"

I wasn't fooling anybody. If the purpose of the lesson wasn't clear to me, why did I think it would be clear to my students? This wasn't the first time I'd heard this question, and even worse, it had to be asked of me several more times before I was able to ask an even more important question of myself:

why was *my* purpose for doing something (reading this book, writing that paper) always at the center of instruction? Surely there were instances when I could (and probably should) turn over the reins to my students. In my own experience as a student, reading and writing were intensely personal pursuits. In fact, even though I was a confident reader and writer, I often balked at assignments that seemed to hold no personal relevance to me. Yet this was the very kind of teaching in which I often found myself engaging: teacher-directed, with little or no personal input from the students. As teachers, why should we expect students to naturally engage with our lessons when we seldom take into account what the students themselves might want to get out of a text or a piece of writing?

Yet this is where many teachers currently find themselves, locked in both by the Common Core State Standards (CCSS; National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010) and the restrictive, reductive ways in which they've been implemented at the site and/or district level. But allowing students to read and/or write for their own purposes—"Messing About," as science writer David Hawkins (2002) calls it—should not be anathema to the English language arts classroom, even in an era where standards and testing are encouraging (and in some cases even mandating) teachers to march through curricula in a lock-step fashion. Just because these standards and tests appear to have been concocted in a studentless vacuum does not mean we have to follow their lead and banish the students' own interests and passions from the classroom.

Theoretical Foundations for Messing About in Literature

It is not exactly a revolutionary idea to leverage our students' interests, but current conditions often make it difficult. As a standards document, the CCSS is like many of its predecessors in that it focuses on the "things" students will find in a text, such as theme, elements of characterization, stylistic devices, etc. This approach asks students to adopt an efferent (as opposed to aesthetic) stance toward the books they read, focusing on, as Louise Rosenblatt (1978) put it, "what will remain as the residue after the reading" (p. 24). In the CCSS (and especially in its emphasis on close reading), students read for information, not for enjoyment, which, for most of us, runs counter to why we read literature in the first place. We certainly may learn things as we read, but we do not read a novel with the same purpose as we read a history text-book or a recipe or a set of assembly instructions. We read literature aesthetically, "to live the adventure that unfolds in the book" (Beers, 1998, p. 46).

When we overemphasize the importance of un-earthing information in literary texts, turning the act of reading into a scavenger hunt, we ask our students to remove themselves from the very personal nature of reading, which is one reason why some students eventually "turn off" from reading assigned texts in school. Gallagher (2009) tells us as much when he details the "tsunami" of "overarching questions, chapter study questions, essay questions, vocabulary lessons, activities for specific chapters, guided reading lessons, directions for setting up a writer's notebook, literary analysis questions, collaborative activities, oral presentations, handouts, transparencies, displays, quizzes, and projects" (p. 61) in his school district's 122-page unit plan for teaching *To Kill a Mockingbird* (Lee, 1960/1988). Is it any wonder students have difficulty finding personal value in a book when its instruction is dictated so extensively from above?

And reading is, make no mistake, a selfish venture. As Probst (2004) reminds us, the value of reading—for mature adults as well as small chil-dren—stems from self-indulgence. We, as indepen-dent adults, read because we enjoy it; we do it for ourselves, for our own purposes, and we are primar-ily concerned with how a work affects us, or when an efferent focus is needed, what we can learn from

it. Even if we read to learn or to discover how other people think and feel, the act of reading benefits, first and foremost, the reader. If we want our students to understand the aesthetic pleasure of reading, we need to create conditions where they can explore literature and other texts for their own purposes.

Smagorinsky (2008) illustrates the fundamental dichotomy between read-ing for selfish, aesthetic purposes and enforced, efferent purposes (which is often how schools position the act of reading: as an either/or proposition) by reminding us of the differ-ence between transmission and constructivism. In my ten years of experience as a high school teacher and, for the last five years, as a teacher educator, it seems as though the transmission model is what is most valued by standards and stan-dardized assessments. As Smagorinsky puts it, it is the assumption "that knowledge is objective and static and capable of being handed down intact from one person to another, from text to student, from lecture to notebook and back again" (p. 7). This is the kind of knowledge valued by standardized tests—and those who teach to them; for example, such advocates teach literature by enforcing the perception that a "right" theme can be found in a text if one only looks hard enough for it.

Constructivism, on the other hand, gets at what Rosenblatt and her philosophical kin are advocat-ing—namely that personal experiences, tentative understandings, cultural backgrounds, and the like influence how meaning is constructed by the reader. In rich texts, for example, there may be a range of plausible interpretations, which is an idea not ex-actly championed by the CCSS or easy to test through standardized, multiple-choice assessments. Blau (2003) demonstrates this with Theodore Roethke's poem, "My Papa's Waltz" (p. 61), where some of his students read it as a fond childhood memory and others read it as a poem about abuse or neglect. Blau reminds us that poems can't simply "mean anything a reader might claim it means," but that "every read-

> **If we want our students to understand the aesthetic pleasure of reading, we need to create conditions where they can explore literature and other texts for their own purposes.**

ing [of Roethke's poem] offered and counted as a viable reading was supported by evidence to warrant it" (p. 75). This is good news for us as teachers when it comes to writing and discussion, but it's more problematic when we consider how our students (and, increasingly, ourselves) will be evaluated by standardized tests.

Just as important, though, for the discussion of constructivism, is the notion that these competing interpretations of Roethke's poem came about after a process of mediated discussion, underscoring Blau's contention that "reading is . . . a social process, completed in conversation. Students will learn literature best and find many of their best opportunities for learning to become more competent, more intellectually productive, and more autonomous readers of literature through frequent work in groups with peers" (p. 54). What Smagorinsky and Blau both posit is the importance of giving our students a chance to *work with* the text for their own purposes, as opposed to having it dictated to them.

> This emphasis on autonomy and individuality requires that students dig deeply into the subject matter of a class. Whether the class is science or English, students should be free to follow their own interests.

When it comes to making a practical argument for a classroom that values the kinds of things advocated by the authors mentioned above, it is worth considering how these ideas are not strictly confined to the English language arts classroom. In fact, I believe one of the best places to turn is, strangely enough, to a science teacher. Hawkins (2002) wrote about this very issue long before public education was gripped by the current mania for standards and accountability. In short, Hawkins advocates for students' freedom to "mess about" in a given subject, exploring it in a way and at a pace that is useful to them and that meets their own educational purposes, but that still results in real learning and is not at odds with whatever goals the teacher has to accomplish, whether those goals be personal or bureaucratic in nature.

Before explaining exactly how "messing about" worked for me with a young adult text, I first need to describe two foundational ideas that are key to Hawkins's argument.

Tree Learning and the Instructional Triangle

What is meaningful learning, and what does it look like? In his 1965 essay, "On Living in Trees" (2002, pp. 171–191), Hawkins speaks metaphorically, using *trees* to represent the kind of authentic learning we do naturally. The tree, as Hawkins sees it, is the desired mode of teaching and learning. In his experience as a science teacher, students were engaged as active learners when they were free to explore the subject matter based on their own interests and questions. In tree terms, the students were free to move vertically to a new branch, and once there, could move left or right depending on their interest, or perhaps continue to move vertically (or even diagonally) before finding a branch that looked promising to them and on which they could rest a while. Hawkins explains it this way:

> The understanding of a subject, the grasp of its structure, comes—in short, *learning* comes—through a self-directed activity of the child, an activity of inventing and discovering. To teach means to *facilitate* learning by surrounding the child with and helping him into, situations where learning can take place. (p. 186)

This emphasis on autonomy and individuality requires that students dig deeply into the subject matter of a class. Whether the class is science or English, students should be free (or encouraged, at the very least) to follow their own interests and to explore the subject matter for their own purposes.

Tree-learning exists in contrast to what Hawkins refers to as ladder-learning: highly programmed (recall Gallagher's 122-page unit plan), where positive movement can only occur in one direction and is strictly sequenced. The rungs on this ladder are evenly spaced, with no diverting horizontal paths to distract from vertical advancement, putting the students' learning in "a strait-jacket and rob[bing] the learner of that autonomy which is his chief means of self-education" (p. 181). In my own experience, "ladder-learning" is all too real as many teachers are made to spend an inordinate amount of time meeting the demands of pacing guides and benchmark tests at the expense of

addressing the curriculum through meaningful subject matter that allows students to explore their own passions and purposes. It is worth mentioning, however, that Hawkins's use of ladder-learning as a pejorative stands in contrast to the way Lesesne (2010) employs the ladder as a positive metaphor for building students' reading competence and confidence. In fact, Lesesne's use of "reading ladders" has much in common with Hawkins's version of tree-learning, and the difference in terminology shouldn't be seen as a difference in philosophy.

A necessary offshoot of tree-learning is the importance of devising meaningful subject matter to teach within a stringently standards-based environment. Hawkins explored this issue in his 1967 essay, "I, Thou, and It" (2002, pp. 51–64). Here, Hawkins envisions a triangle. The first two corners, "I" and "Thou," represent the student and the teacher. The third corner of his instructional triangle (the "It") is the rich and engaging instructional material provided by the teacher and the students' freedom to explore their own questions, curiosities, and purposes. The role of this instructional material is to create the common ground upon which teacher and student will stand. The richer the subject matter, the firmer the ground, and the more confidently the teacher can assist the student in his or her journey toward becoming an autonomous learner. Hawkins believes it is crucial for teachers not to neglect this third corner, for there must be "some third thing which is *of interest to the child and to the adult*, in which they can join in outward projection" (p. 60; italics mine). In short, it is through interesting and engaging subject matter provided by the teacher—such as YAL and what we choose to do with it—that students begin to take their first steps toward independence.

Hawkins's version of the instructional triangle comes into play, then, in the way in which we engage our students in their tree-learning. Remembering that the first two corners of the triangle are teacher and student, it is incumbent upon us—as teachers and, presumably, as avid, confident readers—to provide them with instructional material that enriches their journey through the trees. If we only give our students the kind of standardized, top-down material described earlier by Gallagher, it makes sense that students would see reading as a limiting, onerous chore. But if we can help them see that reading is not just pleasur-

able, but can be a vehicle by which they can explore their own interests and questions, it is more likely that they will participate in the process.

Messing About

How do we get to that point? Hawkins believes it comes by letting the students "mess about" in the subject matter of the classroom. In his seminal 1965 essay, "Messing About in Science" (2002, pp. 65–76), Hawkins makes a compelling argument for increased autonomy in student learning—not an outright abolition of curricular guidelines, but at least, as I mentioned at the beginning of this article, a loosening of the reins. He makes this argument as a result of his experience with an elementary science class; in it, he proposes three phases to student learning, all of which resist curricular stringency and instead allow for student freedom in exploring the subject matter of science.

> **If we can help them see that reading is not just pleasurable, but can be a vehicle by which they can explore their own interests and questions, it is more likely that they will participate in the process.**

In the first phase, which he calls "Messing About," "children are given materials and equipment, or *things*, and are allowed to construct, test, probe, and experiment without superimposed questions or instructions" (p. 68). In the science class, Hawkins found that when students were given this unrestricted time for individual exploration, they were engaged and excited, and they were making discoveries—noting them, losing them, making them again, and sharing them with their peers.

The second phase, "Multiply Programmed," is born out of the problem caused by Messing About. Hawkins notes:

> If you once let children evolve their own learning along paths of their choosing, you then must see it through and *maintain* the individuality of their work. You cannot begin that way and then say, in effect, "That was only a teaser," thus using your adult authority to devalue what the children themselves, in the meantime, have found most valuable. (p. 72)

The problem to which I alluded should be obvious: How does a teacher guide a class in one direction without sacrificing the autonomy created in the Messing About phase? In order to preserve the spirit of Messing About, Hawkins came to advocate the use of "multiply programmed" materials, which are learning materials "designed for the greatest possible variety of topics . . . so that for almost any given way into a subject that a child may evolve on his own, there is material available which he will recognize as helping him farther along that very way" (p. 72).

How, then, does this add up to anything? In encouraging students to take control of their own learning, how is any common purpose accomplished? Hawkins addresses this concern in the third, unnamed, phase, which is designed to move students into a deeper understanding of the principles they have been studying individually. This untitled phase, arguably the most conventional of the three, consists of lecture, storytelling, question and answer, and discussion; it grows out of student questions and misunderstandings and "come[s] primarily with discussion, argument, the full colloquium of children and teacher" (p. 75). This phase deepens and extends student understanding of a topic and attempts to tie up some of the loose ends that have unraveled during the other two phases.

Messing About in Young Adult Literature

So how does Hawkins's work in an elementary science classroom connect to the work of an English language arts classroom? I was introduced to Hawkins's work by Richard, a science teacher friend with whom I shared the encounter described at the beginning of this article, as well as my nagging suspicion that I had, as a novice teacher, a lot of room to improve. He steered me to Hawkins's work, which resonated with me immediately, and I began thinking about

> It made sense to make my first tentative steps in this direction with YAL, which I knew, from my own experience as a reader, had a higher likelihood of personal engagement than the more commonly taught classical texts.

how I could apply it to an ELA classroom. One thing I knew: it made sense to make my first tentative steps in this direction with YAL, which I knew, from my own experience as a reader, had a higher likelihood of personal engagement than the more commonly taught classical texts. I didn't have a wide range of YAL at my disposal, but I did have Chris Crutcher's (1993) *Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes* as a 9th-grade text. Crutcher's book tells the story of the friendship between the title character and Eric "Moby" Calhoune, a high school swimmer who has struggled with weight issues throughout his life. Sarah, who has significant facial scarring, becomes catatonic in class one day, necessitating psychiatric care and spurring Eric, along with his best friend Ellerby, to unravel the mystery of her scars and why she has fallen mute. This rich, provocative text became the vehicle by which I refined the three phases—with much trial and error—over the next few years.

Rather than describing my halting, stumbling progress, I'll describe what the three phases eventually looked like after some experience incorporating them with my teaching of Crutcher's book. One thing that bears mentioning at the start of this description is that I think this can work when teachers have to teach from a core text (such as I did, so slim was our selection of YAL), but it would certainly bear even more fruit if students could choose from a range of thematically related texts for independent or small-group reading. While you read, I encourage you to consider how you might use these phases in your classroom if you have such resources.

Phase 1: Messing About

Because *Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes* deals with a wide range of hot-button issues (personal identity, body image, child abuse, abortion, psychology, religious fundamentalism, and institutional hypocrisy, to name seven), I wanted to give my students as much of a chance as possible to engage with whatever issues were most interesting to them as they read, recognizing that their interests may change over time and with the understanding that they would eventually choose one issue to work with in greater detail at the completion of their reading.

The "Messing About" phase, then, involved a great deal of individual writing and small-group discussion. To facilitate this and give it some structure,

my students came to class each day with a written response to the assigned reading, which was usually one or two chapters each night. There were no particular requirements for this writing, except that it should be a personal response to the literature (an approach favored by authors such as Bushman & Haas, 2005; Miller, 2009; and Probst, 2004). My thinking here was that my students would be able to dig into the issues (of plot, of character, of theme) that mattered to them without me dictating what I thought they should find important.

Also worth noting is that unconventional responses to the text (such as drawings, graphic organizers, or other primarily visual products) were also acceptable, and in allowing them, I tried to honor the work of Purves, Rogers, & Soter (1995): "If we want students to respond genuinely to what they read, we must be careful not to cut off that response or to limit it simply because we lean more toward traditional forms of responding" (p. 130). In other words, if I really wanted my students to "Mess About," I needed to put as few limits as possible on what that looked like. I also hoped this flexibility prevented my students from seeing the "Messing About" phase as just another reading log or journal entry, both of which can serve a purpose, but with which many students are familiar enough that they can resort to boilerplate "reflection" instead of genuine engagement with the text.

As it turned out, 9th graders needed much more guidance on what a personal response to literature could look like than I thought. Like most things in the English classroom worth doing, from writing groups to literature circles to Socratic seminars, it takes time for students to adjust to this kind of teaching. Student responses (particularly those at the beginning of the book) would often take the form of summary, simply relating the events of the chapter as though they were looking for me to check their comprehension (which was probably not an unreasonable assumption on their part). To open up the range of response types available to them, I shared high-quality examples from their peers (the nontraditional responses mentioned above proved to be particularly eye-opening to students who were locked into the idea of a one- or two-paragraph writing as the only possible way of responding to texts), but I also shared writing of my own where I wrestled with issues from the novel, demonstrating that I didn't hold the keys to a "per-

fect" understanding any more than they did and that asking questions puts readers in a better position to find the answers they need.

Over time, I saw the students come to engage in highly personal responses to the text: from the superficial (who is Raymond Burr, and why is he referenced at the beginning of the novel?) to the complex (a very religious student arguing with Crutcher about the perceived blasphemy she saw in one character's car), and they wrestled with passages that confounded or amused them. Some students would retell a portion of a chapter from the perspective of a different character, and in one or two instances, I had students write a short version of something they wished had happened instead. In the process, they were writing about all of the kinds of things I would want them to write

> **As it turned out, 9th graders needed much more guidance on what a personal response to literature could look like than I thought.**

and talk about anyway, but they were coming to those ideas authentically, on their own terms, just as we do when we read something for pleasure.

One additional aspect of my "Messing About" phase is that my students would also come to class with at least one question about the assigned reading: some aspect of the text about which they were genuinely curious. Sometimes this would reflect needed background information (in the late 1990s, Crutcher's reference to Nixon and Watergate was already lost on many students), but it would just as often be a passage they just didn't *get*. At the beginning of the book, for instance, it was common to get numerous questions about why Sarah Byrnes is in the hospital or what has made her catatonic. My students would share their personal responses and questions in small groups, the purpose of which was to initiate discussion based on those issues they found personally relevant, as well as to help one another explore each other's questions. As they discussed in their groups, I would circulate—listening, contributing when I had something to say, and making notes about the content of their conversations.

These small-group discussions would then often form the basis for the day's whole-class discussion, as

I would introduce common threads I had heard from the individual groups. In the course of this larger conversation, I could push students to greater interpretive and analytical sophistication and help them refine their responses. I would also ask them, when appropriate, to consider and work with those elements of the text (such as character, point of view, elements of style, etc.) that make up its skeleton, and which are, of course, currently required by the standards. But those elements were part of a much larger, more important discussion that was initiated by giving students the chance to "Mess About" in the text based on their own interests and purposes for reading. Finally, I would collect their responses and questions in order to take a longer look at the individual issues and challenges about which the students were writing. Often, I would use them to initiate Hawkins's "Multiply Programmed" phase.

Phase 2: Multiply Programmed

Before I go any further, one fact I quickly learned about the three phases is that implementing them is a messy, imperfect science. They don't follow a neat, linear order, and they will often be recursive in nature. As I refined this process for an English class, I never found a time when I could comfortably say, "Okay, gang! We're done Messing About! Now it's on to the Multiply Programmed phase!" The three phases complement one another, and it is up to the teacher to be sensitive to what the students need. In this way, Hawkins's three phases have common ground with the concept of differentiation, where "teachers focus on processes and procedures that ensure effective learning for varied individuals" (Tomlinson & Mc-Tighe, 2006, p. 3). Because the purpose of Hawkins's phases is to help make learning personally relevant for students, it makes sense that there will be a degree of differentiation involved in accomplishing that.

When one remembers that the main idea behind the "Multiply Programmed" phase is to provide students with rich instructional materials (the third point of the instructional triangle) that will help them further explore the concepts in which they are interested (the tree-learning explored in Phase 1), two logical questions follow: 1) How can I possibly anticipate what my students will be interested in? and 2) Do I really have to create individual materials for each of my students?

To take each of those questions in turn, you *don't* have to possess a comprehensive inventory of students' personal textual interests to be prepared for this phase. The good news is this: rich texts resonate with our students for many of the same reasons they resonate with us, so the materials I gave my students to enrich their reading of *Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes* were necessarily constrained by the text. After teaching the novel in this way just once, I knew I was going to have some students who wanted to explore Crutcher's use of religion, some students who were compelled by Mark Brittain's hypocrisy or Jody Mueller's strength, and some students who latched onto and wanted to talk about the book's First Amendment issues. That isn't to say I didn't have interests for which I was unprepared—one year a student was fixated on creating a *Sarah Byrnes* graphic novel, which I tried my best to accommodate—but the texts we use provide us with some boundaries for possible interests, in much the same way that Hawkins wouldn't provide his students with a Geiger counter for a lesson on soap bubbles.

Similarly, you don't have to prepare materials for each of the 30 students in your class. Because their interests will be constrained by the text, so too will those interests run in trends. In addition to the issues I mentioned above, I always had several students who wanted to talk about whether Mark Brittain's suicide attempt made sense in the context of his character. I couldn't anticipate everything in the novel with which my students might connect, but I had a relative degree of certainty that there would be five or six key issues that caught most of their attention, and I could make small adjustments to my instructional materials as the circumstances warranted.

So what did these materials look like? My go-to (as someone who had early exposure in his undergraduate program with the Ohio Writing Project) has always been writing. The prompts would be broad enough so as not to minimize a student's personal

> **You don't have to prepare materials for each of the 30 students in your class. Because their interests will be constrained by the text, so too will those interests run in trends.**

engagement with the text but specific enough that I was teaching and assessing the kinds of things I needed to know. This usually involved the student making a personal connection to the text and then engaging in some interpretive or analytical discussion of an issue with which he or she seemed particularly interested. In the suicide example mentioned above, I asked those students to recount a time when they had done something out of character and then argue for or against the believability of Mark Brittain's actions, using textual evidence to support their reasoning. These writing assignments weren't high stakes—I grouped the students by issue and gave them an opportunity to discuss the question before writing—nor were they expected to have the formality of an essay. I viewed them as a variation on what Elbow (1994) called a "think piece": "writing that is a bit more thought out and worked over—but not yet an essay; exploratory but not merely freewriting" (p. 2). My main purpose for these writings was to provide the students with opportunities to explore issues that mattered to them while giving me some insight into their abilities to read and write with competence and sophistication.

As for the placement and timing of these writings in the context of the unit, I was mainly guided by the written responses in Phase 1. As my students' interests came to light, I would usually give them a first discussion and writing prompt and then introduce a second one once we were further into the book when I could see how (or if) their interests were evolving. If their interests had changed, so too would the topic about which they would write. If their interests hadn't, I would provide them with a topic I hoped would extend and continue to develop the understanding they had demonstrated in the first. (For example, I might ask another question about plausible characterization for students who had answered my initial question about Mark Brittain's suicide attempt.)

Phase 3: Traditional, but Student-Centered

This phase is probably the least interesting in that it looks the most conventional. In my discussion of Phase 1, I mentioned that I would often have whole-class discussions immediately following the students' small-group conversations about their personal response writings and questions. Each group's members would report briefly on what they had discussed, what they were wrestling with, what they enjoyed,

etc., and I would attempt to tie up loose ends, clarify misunderstandings, and help answer their questions. It was also the place where I would introduce key issues I hadn't heard any group discuss. For instance, in any book told by a first-person narrator (as *Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes* is), I think it's crucial to discuss that character's reliability as a reporter, and this isn't usually something my students would notice until I brought it up. It became my job, then, to introduce the concept of the unreliable narrator, which students could then add to their developing lexicon for possible discussion later in personal responses. In this way, Phase 3 is the most traditionally "teacher-like" of all the phases, involving the kind of lecture and discussion that we usually think of when it comes to schooling.

It is important to note, however, that even though this takes a conventional form, the content of this phase is delivered in reaction to what the students discuss in their groups. My goal here was to create a real conversation about the literature, what Nystrand (1997) refers to as dialogic instruction, where there is conflict, tension, and negotiation in the discussion, and where the teacher incorporates student responses into subsequent questions. This stands in contrast to the traditional model, where teachers come to class with a scripted list of questions about which the students have no input and for which they will either have the answers or they won't. Rather than delivering a top-down lecture scripted in advance (where I would step in at the end of the class period and tell them what the previous night's chapter was *really* about), I would add my notes to the existing conversation, with any luck as a complement to what my students had already been discussing. I always hoped it would be more a matter of, "Hey, do you know what we call it when Eric said that?" as opposed to, "And today we're going to take notes on indirect characterization."

> **My main purpose for these writings was to provide the students with opportunities to explore issues that mattered to them while giving me some insight into their abilities to read and write with competence and sophistication.**

What I want to emphasize is the imperfect nature of this. In some ways, the three phases exist simultaneously (Phases 1 and 3 frequently happened in the same class period), and I never found one "right" way to incorporate all three with any text. But I *did* find that when my students were encouraged to engage with the text on the basis of personal relevance, talk about those interests, explore what they found personally challenging, and write about their understanding and interpretation in an exploratory way, their interest in reading increased, as did the quality of the writing and discussion in which they were involved.

Standing Our Ground in the Era of Accountability

As I mentioned at the start, education initiatives like the Common Core State Standards and intensified standardized testing are making it increasingly difficult for teachers to allow for student-directed learning. However, all of the preceding (and especially the discussion of figures like Hawkins and Rosenblatt) is written as a reminder that we teach students first and everything else second, and we shouldn't, as Dewey (1956) tells us, pit child against curriculum. We have a long tradition in education of keeping the student at the center of what we do, but the current push from those not in education seems to remove students from the conversation, reducing them to data points that can be used to evaluate teachers, schools, and colleges of education.

Such efforts regrettably ignore the rich day-to-day lives of teachers and students, and misguided initiatives created in the name of accountability reduce what is possible in the classroom. That is a shame. Now that YAL is even richer and more accessible, the opportunities to "Mess About" seem even more promising, especially considering what we now know about using YAL as a bridge to teach canonical texts (Herz & Gallo, 2005). Herz & Gallo even specifically endorse "helping students to become more responsible for their own learning—through self-selected goals, small-group assignments, cooperative learning activities, and the like" (p. 29), all of which is very much in line with what Hawkins was writing about in the 1960s. Also, with the canon seeming to take on even greater prominence in the Common Core, we have an increased responsibility to ensure our students are prepared to read complex texts. CCSS architect David Coleman seems to view reading challenging texts as a "sink or swim" proposition, but we have a rich tradition of effective strategies (many of which I discussed earlier) designed to help students become stronger and more sophisticated readers, and it is incumbent on us as a profession to stand up for what we know works while still looking for new ways to improve our own practice.

In this time of increased standardization, Hawkins's writing seems more essential than ever. Rather than push our students to ever-greater degrees of uniformity, Hawkins encourages us to remember that we often learn best when the subject matter is personally relevant. The need for relevance is often at the heart of the question, "Why are we doing this?" It is a student saying, "Make this useful. Make this something *I* find value in." It is a natural and reasonable question for them to ask, and when they do, it might be the very first clue that we as teachers need to cede some degree of control and allow our students to begin Messing About.

Rob Montgomery taught high school English for ten years and is currently an assistant professor of English Education at Kennesaw State University. He works with preservice teachers and teaches courses in methods of teaching writing and literature. For the last five years, he has been the co-director of the Kennesaw Mountain Writing Project Summer Institute. His current research focuses on the effect of education mandates on teacher identity and practice. Rob can be reached at rmontgo7@kennesaw.edu.

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Call for Nominations: James Moffett Award

NCTE's Conference on English Education offers this award to support teacher research projects that further the spirit and scholarship of James Moffett. Moffett, a great champion of the voices of K–12 teachers, focused on such ideas as the necessity of student-centered curricula, writing across the curriculum, alternatives to standardized testing, and spiritual growth in education and life. This award is offered in conjunction with the National Writing Project.

Applications for the Moffett Award should be in the form of a proposal for a project that one or more K–12 classroom teachers wish to pursue. The proposal must include:

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

Moffett Award winners receive a certificate designating the individual as the 2015 recipient of the CEE Moffett Award and a monetary award (up to $1,000) to be used toward implementation of the proposed project.

Submit proposals to CEE Moffett Award, NCTE, 1111 W. Kenyon Road, Urbana, IL 61801-1010 or cee@ncte.org, Attn: CEE Administrative Liaison. Proposals must be postmarked by **May 1, 2015**. Proposals will be judged on such criteria as the strength of the connection to James Moffett's scholarship and the perceived value and feasibility of the project.

James S. **Chisholm** and Bethany L. **Keller**

Making Connections during Transactional Discussions:

Adolescents' Empathic Responses to *Thirteen Reasons Why*

"The student's personal response to literary works will be primarily colored by his [sic] attitude toward the characters and situations they present. To attempt to ignore these student reactions would destroy the very basis on which any greater literary sensitivity could be built."

—Louise Rosenblatt, *Literature as Exploration*, 1938/1995, p. 225

Although the publishers of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS; National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010) call for an approach to reading that "focuses on what lies within the four corners of the text" (Coleman & Pimentel, 2012, p. 4), the CCSS for speaking and listening also invite high school students to engage in sophisticated discussions about complex texts; they are asked to "propel conversations by posing and responding to questions that relate the current discussion to broader themes or larger ideas" (CCSS.ELA—Literacy.SL.9–10.1c) *beyond* the "four corners of the text" and to "respond thoughtfully to diverse perspectives" (CCSS.ELA—Literacy. SL.9–10.1d) that emerge from students' lived experiences.

From the perspective of the CCSS, then, students seem to be asked to inhibit their intertextual, experiential, emotional, social, and multimodal responses to text in order to focus their meaning making solely on what is available within the text; however, as speakers and listeners, students are asked to make just such connections. This apparent contradiction does not seem to recognize the roles of speaking and listening in mediating reading comprehension. From a socio-

cultural and transactional perspective, readers learn to interrogate texts by speaking and listening in social interactions with peers. That is, discussions do not merely serve the function of exposing publicly previously comprehended insights from the four corners of a text; rather, discussions facilitate meaning making about texts and the world.

However, not all discussions are characterized by critical connections between the text and the world and/or thoughtful responses to diverse perspectives. To encourage the internalization of these discourse practices among young people, literature circles (Daniels, 2002) have been used in classrooms for quite some time and across grade levels to promote students' engagement with and comprehension, interpretation, and evaluation of texts. Typically, during literature circle discussions, students take on individual reading roles (e.g., "summarizer," "illustrator," "connector") from which they draw to help facilitate their talk during small-group discussions.

The literature circle role of "connector" provides an especially illustrative example of how personal experience can promote students' literary analysis. In this article, we demonstrate how the connectors in three different literature circle discussion groups drew

on their experiences to link events from their personal lives and interactions in ways that facilitated their meaning making about Jay Asher's (2007) young adult novel, *Thirteen Reasons Why*. In linking events from their lives with the situations described by Hannah and Clay, protagonists in Asher's novel, students empathized with characters and classmates by "relating to and collaborating with others" (p. 52)—one of the critical literacy practices that Beach, Thein, and Webb (2012) identify as paramount in promoting engaged learning in the age of the CCSS.

Furthermore, the enactment of literature circles grounded in transactional theory celebrates the social nature of learning about literature by emphasizing the role of language in facilitating thinking about text. From this perspective on learning, meanings are negotiated, situated, and co-constructed in the particular communities in which the literacy practice of discussion takes place. In fact, Rosenblatt (1938/1995) argued that

> [t]he literary experience may provide the emotional tension and conflicting attitudes out of which spring the kind of thinking that can later be assimilated into actual behavior. The emotional character of the student's response to literature offers an opportunity to develop the ability to think rationally within an emotionally colored context. (p. 217)

Engaging students' experiences and emotional or "expressive" responses to text (Soter, Wilkinson, Connors, Murphy, & Shen, 2010) is not only a prerequisite to the development of higher cognitive functions; such emotional investment *mediates* rigorous intellectual work.

Empathy: A 21st-Century Literacy Practice

Scholars have identified empathy as a necessary capacity for life in the 21st century: "Learning how to *relate to others* requires the ability to empathize with others' perspectives, share one's own feelings and perspectives, and negotiate differences of opinion" (Beach et al., 2012, p. 52, emphasis in original). Thus, taking on another's perspective and empathizing with others can be conceptualized as 21st-century skills that can be developed through the literacy practice of literary discussion. Adolescent readers, in displaying empathy, take on an individual's or a character's perspective as her or his own and respond to that

perspective in an affective and cognitive way, which Keen (2006) described as feeling what one believes to be the emotions of others. Beach et al. (2012) synthesized recent work by Davidson (2010) and Johnson and Johnson (2009) on the importance of taking on another's perspective as one's own during interpersonal interactions, noting that

> the success of a group does not depend on individual members' intelligence or skills; it depends on "collective intelligence"—group members' ability to empathize with each other's emotions, to honor individual differences in the members' diverse abilities, and to have other members acquire these abilities, as well as leaders who listen to and enact others' ideas. (p. 53)

Taking on another's perspective and empathizing with others can be conceptualized as 21st-century skills that can be developed through the literacy practice of literary discussion.

Indeed, responding empathically to others or to characters in texts might have the additional effect of promoting critical listening—a literacy practice that is necessary for fostering independent thought and action.

Furthermore, transactional discussions about literary texts can "transform imaginative occasions into productive insights" (Sumara, 2002, p. 5) as readers engage both affectively and cognitively with others, texts, and contexts. In addition to representing an authentic disciplinary practice, literary discussions characterize the literacy practices of lifelong readers and learners as they engage in dialogue with others in order to realize their thinking about a text. In what follows, we illustrate the ways in which adolescent readers engaged empathically during literature circle discussions about *Thirteen Reasons Why* (Asher, 2007) over the course of one academic trimester. We draw upon excerpts from literature circle transcripts to demonstrate the ways in which students leveraged their empathic responses during discussions to promote literary analysis of Asher's novel, which led to students critically connecting issues from the text to their own lives—the "actual behavior" (p. 217) that Rosenblatt (1938/1995) identified as central to literary transactions.

Methods

Instructional Context

Selected excerpts were drawn from literature circle discussion transcripts in one 10th-grade English classroom in a rural high school in Appalachia. At the classroom level, students were accustomed to engaging in literature circles as an integral feature of a thematic unit on bullying in their curriculum. The classroom teacher purposefully established five heterogeneous literature circle groups to promote multiple perspectives on the text (e.g., the teacher-created groups comprised both young women and young men who had diverse out-of-school interests). These groups met approximately once per week on seven occasions over the course of an academic trimester. Prior to each literature circle discussion, students completed literature circle role sheets (Burke, 2002), which provided them with a) directions on how to enact the role, b) space to jot down important points or questions about the text, and c) specific guidelines to prompt thinking and prepare for discussion. At the district and state levels, the high school was identified as a "persistently low-achieving" institution, meaning that its students' scores on standardized measures of achievement ranked in the lowest-performing 5% of all high schools in the state. Most of the students in the high school identified as white, and nearly two-thirds of the student population qualified for free or reduced-price lunches.

Twenty student participants read Jay Asher's (2007) young adult novel, *Thirteen Reasons Why.* This novel describes the cumulative effect of multiple and distinct instances with peers that lead the protagonist, Hannah Baker, to commit suicide. The story is told primarily through a series of audiotapes on which Hannah's voice can be heard as she addresses persons who played a role in the snowball effect that led to her death. Throughout these tapes, Hannah describes the emotional trauma she experienced as a result of various critical instances that led to her perceived objectification in the eyes of her peers. In this double-narrative text, readers also experience the story from the perspective of Clay Jensen, one of Hannah's close friends, as he listens to the audiotapes that reveal the 13 reasons why Hannah took her own life.

Data Analysis

We used techniques from grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006) and classroom discourse analysis (Rex & Schiller, 2009) to examine 35 literature circle discussion transcripts. After transcribing all 35 literature circle discussions, we read through all transcripts individually for each literature circle and engaged in initial, line-by-line coding. Next, we discussed our impressions of the transcripts for each literature circle before rereading all of the groups' transcripts collaboratively and engaging in focused coding by comparing our individual codes for each line. We noted, for example, the ways in which some students appropriated what we called a "teacher/didactic voice" as they attempted to (re)focus the group's talk on the literature circle task. Then, we generated a preliminary coding rubric based on the themes we identified in our data set (see Table 1).

We returned to our collaborative coding process with the newly constructed coding scheme and segmented the transcripts into interpretive episodes (a collection of thematically related turns by multiple members) based on the themes in the coding scheme. Reducing the data set to episodes instead of turns-at-talk allowed us to identify the ways in which students' empathic and analytic responses interacted across multiple student turns-at-talk.

Findings

Students' empathic responses (i.e., responses that reflected their appreciation of and willingness to inhabit another's experience) corresponded with their interpretive responses in which they analyzed text, projected themselves imaginatively into the text, and considered hypothetical plot structures that might have altered the events that took place in the text. These responses were almost without exception instances in which students "responded thoughtfully

> Twenty student participants read Jay Asher's . . . *Thirteen Reasons Why.* This novel describes the cumulative effect of multiple and distinct instances with peers that lead the protagonist, Hannah Baker, to commit suicide.

Table 1. Literature Circle Codes, Definitions, and Examples

Code Label	Definition	Transcript Example
Clarification of Comprehension (CC)	Student talk that promotes understanding of a meaning in the text.	Taylor: Ok, well, in the first part, the first thing I think that she's in love with Justin. But did somebody start a rumor because Clay thought that they did more than just kiss, so did somebody start rumors? David: I'm pretty sure Justin started it. I mean, it's bragging. Taylor: Ok. So Justin started telling people they did more than just kiss in the rocket ship slide thing? David: Pretty sure that's what it was. That's what I was thinking.
Clarification of Literature Circle Process (CLC)	Student talk related to understanding the roles of the group members or the evaluation system.	Ms. Johnston: Who's the summarizer? So you guys can either always have the summarizer give the grades, or you can work to negotiate that. Felicia: So I got a question. Since I was the connector and Robert was the connector, shouldn't me and Robert get to pick what we want so we don't have to be a connector again, [be]cause there was 2 of us. Ms. Johnston: That's fine with me. You and Bobby don't always have to have the same job. Sure, I think they'll let you pick first. Felicia: She's the connector this time. Or, are you the illustrator? Nick: She's the illustrator. I dibs the summarizer. Carrie: I think everybody was really good today. Danielle: I'll do the problem poser. Nick: You could do the problem poser. Felicia: I don't really know how to do that. Nick: Or you could do the applauder; you could applaud the author.
Curiosity/ Engagement (C/E)	Student talk that demonstrates interest in reading and responding to meanings in the literature.	Gayle: You guys are about to get into a really good part. Kayla: I've already finished the book. Gayle: Oh, it's good, isn't it? I cried on that one part at the party. Maggie: Wow. Gayle: I did. Maggie: Really? Gayle: Yeah, like it's really that sad. Maggie: So there's a party. Kayla: There's like 2 more. Kevin: So you all done finished the book? Kayla: Yeah. Kevin: What the hell? Kayla: I just sat down and started reading.
Hypothetical Plotting (HP)	Student talk that forecasts events that may or may not occur in various representations of the text and the hypothetical consequences that might follow such an event.	Haley: . . . what would have happened if somebody like the diner worker did something nice for Hannah like he did Clay? Cassidy: She probably wouldn't have killed herself. Haley: She probably wouldn't have felt alone. Melissa: Probably would have felt like she had at least one person there with her. Cassidy: Yeah. Haley: Then she probably would have drifted off anyway.
Literary Analysis (LA)	Student talk that examines a literary device employed by the author.	Felicia: Alright, I was the author applauder and I get nothing but Clay [be]cause I didn't read that [be]cause I wasn't here. But I did get something for Justin. I like how Jay Asher just put "Just relax" to tell us that whoever this was the person who grabbed Hannah's butt at the store in the beginning of the story. And that's all I have.

Table 1. Continued

Literature Circle Role Completion (RC)	Student talk that responds solely to the literature circle role sheet prompt.	David: Ok. My part was the illustrator, and for the first one, I drew a picture of a Butterfinger. Taylor: You drew a what? David: It's really good. A Butterfinger bar. Tom: Too bad it ain't real. I'd eat it. David: What? Tom: I said too bad it ain't real. I would have one right now. David: What are you gonna do? Taylor: Butterfinger David: He was at the blue liquor spot and he was down tying his shoes and he set the Butterfinger on his knee and in the story, she told Clay to go there and so that's why he was there.
Literature Circle Role Fulfillment (RF)	Student talk that extends beyond the literature circle role sheet prompt.	Haley: Well, I'll start off with my summary. You guys want me to read it to you? On cassette side B we learned what helped build up Hannah's snowball effect. There was a list of what, of who's hot and who's not. Hannah was mentioned on the Who's Hot for having the best ass of the freshman class. This set Hannah on fire knowing that this would only give everyone an excuse to look and touch. We learned her favorite store was the Blue Liquor Store where she bought candy and visited often. This is where the first incident happened. She was right about the list about giving people excuses to look and touch. A boy had forcefully grabbed her behind and intruded her. I thought I did pretty good. Melissa: Ok. And here's the connections I made. Text to movie: The movie *Cyber Bully*. Haley: Yeah.
Personal Projection (PP)	Student talk that proposes how the situation of a character informs the student's response to a comparable life situation.	Kayla: So if I were Clay, I'd probably feel probably pretty panicky in a way because I don't know what's coming next in the tapes, whether I get blamed for . . . Maggie: . . . If I were him, I'd kind of want to hear the tapes first before everybody else—even before Justin.
Text-to-Life Responses (TtL)	Student talk that draws on ideas from the text to relate to the world.	Samantha: I didn't make one of those in high school. Taylor: It was elementary school. Samantha: Yeah, 'cause I'm pretty sure I did. Taylor: And middle school. David: Yeah, and middle school. Taylor: I didn't exactly do that. I just circled parts in the yearbooks. Samantha: Yeah, the cute ones and stuff. Taylor: Or I'd put a star beside like the ones I kissed, too. Samantha: A kissed and not kissed list, I don't know. Taylor: Or put an "x" by the ones I hated. Samantha: Yeah, me too. Sorry, go on. David: In this story, the boys do the list. Boys don't usually make lists. Am I right? Boys don't usually make lists like this.
Non-literary Talk (NLT)	Student talk that is non-literary in nature.	Dusty: Deer! Who catches deer? Josh: I do. Jacob Smith. Dusty: Who's Jacob Smith? Is that like Katie Smith's brother? Shane: I do, but by hand and foot. Dusty: No you don't. Don't lie. Like a big buck? Like a 12-point buck? Josh: The woods are really thick, so it's harder to run through for deers.
Literary Critic Responses (LC)	Student talk that interrogates authorial intention.	Kayla: They make references to like when she's deciding how to commit suicide. She doesn't want to do that to her parents. Then it mentions in the story the whatever, Clay kept walking by the store. Gayle: Well, I think Jay Asher should have put Hannah's parents in the beginning saying, you know, she didn't quit being sad and all . . . they need to talk to her. They didn't do it. They don't care about her.

Note: Transcript excerpts come from selected coded episodes of talk (*N* = 303) during 35 literature circle discussions.

to diverse perspectives" (CCSS.ELA—Literacy.SL.9–10.1d). That is, as students spoke empathically, they made rhetorical moves that promoted inquiry and literary analysis. As students provided both supportive and critical reflections on various literary characters' circumstances, they "propelled conversations by posing and responding to questions that related the current discussion to broader themes or larger ideas" (CCSS.ELA—Literacy.SL.9–10.1c).

Moreover, students' empathic responses toward the characters in the text promoted their critical consideration of their own social worlds in which problematic peer interactions were interrogated in light of the snowball effect that so swiftly gained such destructive momentum in the novel. The three interpretive episodes below illustrate the compelling ways in which connectors in three different literature circle groups responded empathically by drawing on their personal experiences to leverage their understanding of the literary text and their own lives.

Promoting Literary Analysis through Empathic Responses

In this first interpretive episode, students considered one of the 13 reasons that led to Hannah Baker's suicide in the novel. At one point in the text, Hannah composes a poem, "Soul Alone," which represents a letter to herself. On the surface of the poem, Hannah's mother is portrayed as unaccepting; as Hannah reflects, however, she comes to the realization that it is, in fact, *she* who has failed to accept and appreciate herself.

In this literature circle, David, Taylor, and Tom (pseudonyms, as are all names of students and places) discussed a critical moment in the text in which one of Hannah's classmates steals her poem and claims sole authorship. When word gets out that Hannah wrote the poem, people begin to mock her and the ideas embedded in her writing.

1. Taylor: All right. Why do people make fun of Hannah's poem?
2. David: You know, I have no idea why they make fun of it. I thought it was pretty good.
3. Tom: I don't know. It didn't seem like it was . . .
4. Taylor: There was nothing wrong with it. I mean, it's sad. Why would you make

a parody? Why would you laugh at it? What's so funny about somebody feeling alone?
5. Tom: I don't know.
6. David: Then again . . .
7. Taylor: Maybe it was because why she wrote that. But she did say people were teasing her for telling why she wrote it or what it was about.

At the outset of this episode, Taylor and David questioned why Hannah's classmates would criticize and turn into a parody such a personal and vulnerable expression (lines 1 & 2). As students continued their response to this student-generated question, they sided with Hannah and empathized with her predicament (lines 2, 4, 5, & 7). Taylor's move in line 7 seemed especially important as she built on the empathic response of the group to explore text-based reasons why this event might have happened to the protagonist.

Taylor then posed a related question about Clay and his role throughout this chapter of the novel:

8. Taylor: Okay. One more question. Why didn't Clay stand up for Hannah?
9. David: Because of her reputation. He was scared. He was nervous.
10. Tom: Because he liked Hannah.
11. Taylor: But what was so bad about her reputation? I mean, he didn't believe it, did he?
12. David: No, he said he didn't.
13. Tom: But he didn't want to get teased by the other kids by hanging out with her.
14. Taylor: High school peer pressure. Stupidity. If he had known all this before, I'm pretty sure he would have gone out with her because he didn't know she was feeling this way.
15. David: What I'm saying is that he had strong feelings toward her, and he was too nervous to actually get up and go over there and help her. Just like if you wanted like the girl and you were too nervous to actually do anything about that, and somebody was over there talking to her, would you actually want to get up and go over there?
16. Tom: I don't understand it. Why do guys and girls got to be nervous about things like that?

17. Taylor: Are you up front, Tom?
18. Tom: I'm up front.
19. David: Clay is like a nerd. He has a perfect reputation; he's got good grades. In my picture, he's a nerd.
20. Taylor: He's afraid Hannah's reputation might drag all that down.
21. David: He thinks Hannah's reputation is just a bad girl, so he thinks, well no bad girl would want me. So that's what's going through his head, so he's nervous about that. And for us, come on, we're not nerds.

Taylor's question, "Why didn't Clay stand up for Hannah?" promoted an extended conversation in which Tom and David empathized with Clay's perspective (lines 9, 10, 12, 13, 19, & 21). Taylor, in line 11, took issue with this perspective, noting that Clay couldn't have believed the things he was hearing about Hannah. This led to students' deeper explication of their reasoning for why Clay might hesitate to support his friend, Hannah, during a time of need. These reasons centered around avoiding the social ramifications of associating with Hannah.

In considering Clay's perspective, students also critiqued Hannah's reputation in the novel as a "bad girl" (lines 11, 20, & 21). Empathizing with Clay and problematizing Hannah's unwarranted negative reputation catalyzed instances in which students reimagined hypothetical plot elements in the novel (line 14) and projected themselves into the text (line 15). As students tried on the protagonists' perspectives, they imagined themselves vicariously taking on Clay's role and how they would have reacted differently in the same circumstances, which led them ultimately to identify alternative possibilities within the plot. By following their own line of reasoning and the ways in which students would act in comparable situations in their own lives, David, Taylor, and Tom delved more deeply into their

> By following their own line of reasoning and the ways in which students would act in comparable situations in their own lives, David, Taylor, and Tom delved more deeply into their meaning making.

meaning making by understanding the consequences of their own behavior.

Transactional Responses That Promote Empathy and Analysis

In this second interpretive episode, students' empathic responses served to facilitate dialogue, comprehension, and their authentic use of literacy learning strategies. As members of this literature circle considered the theft of Hannah's poem, "Soul Alone," they recognized the power of characters' compassionate and cruel actions in the novel:

1. Haley: Well, for my question, I wrote, "What would have happened if somebody like the diner worker did something nice for Hannah like he did Clay?"
2. Cassidy: She probably wouldn't have killed herself.
3. Melissa: She probably wouldn't have felt alone.
4. Cassidy: Probably would have felt like she had at least one person there with her.
5. Melissa: Yeah.
6. Haley: Then she probably would have drifted off anyway. Then, I can't really . . . . I'm going to [go] back and look at my annotations. Why would Ron steal her poem?

Haley proposed an authentic and empathic question about a hypothetical plot element—the notion that, if a stranger had committed a random act of kindness for Hannah, as the diner worker had for Clay, that such an event might have altered the self-destructive path on which Hannah was traveling. Cassidy and Melissa both provided ways in which the plot would have been transformed if someone had intervened on Hannah's behalf (lines 2 & 3). Despite clear responses to Haley's original question in line 1, Haley talked back to this line of reasoning and provided an alternative response to her original question, suggesting that Hannah would have "drifted off anyway" (line 6). As Haley attempted to marshal evidence in support of this claim, she revisited the annotations she made while reading before she posed another authentic question about a character's behavior in the novel, "Why would Ron steal her poem?" Below, Cassidy took up this question before Haley provided a critical analysis that leveraged the literacy strategies the class

had been using in their reading of this text.

7. Cassidy: Oh, um . . . I really don't know why he stole it. I just think he put it in a magazine.
8. Haley: But he knew Hannah would know.
9. Melissa: Yeah.
10. Haley: Ok, and . . . And then I, on page 178, I mark where "and then I say my final words. Well, probably not my final words. But the last of these tapes . . . it's going to be one tight, well-connected, emotional ball of words." I was wondering why she wanted to write a poem and what the poem was going to say.
11. Cassidy: You could have also done where Clay didn't stick up for her when they were like making fun of her poem and stuff like that.
12. Haley: I tried to think of reasons for that.
13. Melissa: I know he was scared, but like it was just kind of mean.

In line 7, Cassidy provided a reason for why Ron might have stolen Hannah's poem in response to Haley's authentic question that focused on why anyone would do something like that to another human being. Cassidy's response, however, was not grounded in the text: "I really don't know why he stole it. I just think he put it in a magazine" (line 7).

To this response, Haley pushed Cassidy for elaboration on her reasoning as she took on Hannah's perspectives. Melissa chimed in during line 9 to agree with Haley's counterclaim. Haley then continued describing the questions that emerged from her annotation of the text to consider why Hannah would choose the genre of poetry to express what she had to say. Cassidy contributed another question that Haley could have included on her literature circle role sheet by reminding the group of Clay's lack of action when others made fun of Hannah's poem. Haley responded that she "tried to think of reasons" for why Clay didn't stand up for Hannah. Melissa, in line 13, empathized with Clay, recognizing that it would take a lot to risk one's own reputation for the sake of another, but wondered how Clay didn't realize just how "mean" others were being toward Hannah.

In the first two interpretive episodes reproduced above, students' empathic and personal responses to the characters' situations in *Thirteen Reasons Why* led to literary transactions that facilitated students' comprehension of the text. Furthermore, student reading, speaking, and listening extended well beyond the language contained within the text, which had the added effect of drawing out students' authentic uses of reading strategies (e.g., annotating text) and evidence to support their claims about literature.

> **As students empathized with characters in this young adult text, they often developed insights into their own lives.**

Finally, the novel provided for students compelling and divergent examples in which adolescents acted and failed to act in ways that had direct and powerful consequences for others.

Empathic Responses from Text to Life

As students empathized with characters in this young adult text, they often developed insights into their own lives, a move that we identified as a text-to-life connection. At the beginning of this third interpretive episode, another group of students discussed the impact one's own words and actions can have on others and the way that the text has helped them to develop that insight.

1. Felicia: Like this story [is] sayin'—like you'll sit here and you'll say something to somebody and you might be joking, but they might think you're not joking, so this book opens up people's eyes. It opened up my eyes.
2. Nick: It opens up your . . .
3. Felicia: Like certain things that you say to people might hurt them more than it hurts someone else.
4. Danielle: Even though you don't know it.
5. Nick: Things that you do, too.

During this part of the episode, students connected with the idea that words may affect people in different ways; individuals are unique, and so are their reactions. The students displayed empathy generally (lines 1 & 3) as they put themselves in another's shoes to realize that what one says to someone might affect

that person more than expected based on one's own or another's reactions. As the episode continued, students bridged the impact of other characters' actions on Hannah's suicide with the way students with special needs were treated at their own school and other schools in their region.

6. Carrie: Especially the way special ed kids get treated here.
7. Danielle: Yeah, that's sad.
8. Felicia: In my opinion, I think they get treated better than most schools because if you go over to Jewel County, all the kids stare at 'em. Like their eyes go from talking to their friends to right at them. Like my cousin, she's from Jewel County—they don't go anywhere, they don't do nothing for the special ed kids. And like when she walks in the hallways where she has like burns and stuff [*Authors' note: Felicia's cousin's condition made her difference visible to everyone in the school population.*]. Like people stare at her and she'll come home and tell 'em about it. Like people pick on her on the bus and everything.
9. Carrie: Aww.
10. Felicia: And it's sad. But like here it's better. Yeah, it's *way* better than most schools.
11. Nick: I'll beat 'em up for ya.
12. Felicia: Like some people even said they moved here, like one of my friends, her brother has autism and her mom moved back here 'cause they're better here with her son than they are where they used to live.
12. Carrie: Here they don't really say anything to them.
13. Felicia: People here treat 'em like people, like us. Like they don't try to treat 'em different.
14. Nick: We treat 'em like . . .
15. Danielle: Yeah, they get treated like people.
16. Carrie: Some people still make fun of 'em though.
17. Felicia: Yeah, like disrespectful people that don't . . .

18. Nick: Rude people.

As the students displayed empathic responses toward classmates with special needs (lines 6–9), they mediated their understandings of how their peers were treated and how it might have affected those students emotionally (lines 12, 13, & 15). Carrie initially connected the text to life by bringing up the similarities between the ways Hannah is treated in the novel with the ways students in special education were treated in her county. She indicated that, in both cases, people were potentially unaware of the ways in which their behavior had an impact on others. The other students jumped on board with this topic and continued to discuss ways in which the students in special education were treated "different" (line 13) in a neighboring county, not like "people" (lines 13 & 15). Carrie noted, however, that students with special needs were still persecuted because "rude" (line 18) people in their school treated these peers without respect.

Felicia's initial recognition of the gradual ways in which Hannah Baker was dehumanized in the novel led to a candid and critical extension of this insight into students' own communities, with a particular focus on an especially vulnerable population in their school. Hannah's experience with cruelty in the novel caused students to extend their emotional response in order to recognize, then criticize, the actions of young people in their own community. Through their discussion, Carrie, Danielle, Felicia, and Nick provided a voice for students with special needs in a way that paralleled the kind of support that Hannah could have used from her peers in the novel.

Implications for Practice and Policy

Students' affective and cognitive responses to *Thirteen Reasons Why*, as illustrated in these literature circle discussions, demonstrated how students' empathic responses mediated the analytical thinking, speaking, and listening that occurred (e.g., the talk of David, Taylor, and Tom), as well as the ways students grappled with the text and its possible meanings during transactional discussions as they built on others' ideas and incorporated their personal experiences (as with Cassidy, Haley, and Melissa). Crucially, students' analysis of the text led some groups (e.g., Carrie, Danielle, Felicia, and Nick) to critically read their own social worlds by problematizing their peers' dehu-

manizing behaviors—precisely the kind of conflict that arises out of literary experiences "that can later be assimilated into actual behavior" (Rosenblatt, 1938/1995, p. 217). Across these excerpts from the discussion transcripts, empathic responses co-occurred with students' engagement in transactional discussion practices. In other words, when empathy was present, so was dialogue-mediated literacy learning.

Student-led transactional discussions of young adult literature can create "interpretive sites" (Sumara, 2002, p. 8) that afford students opportunities for empathic *and* analytical responses toward texts. Practicing teachers might turn to Ingram (2003), who has adapted a theory for fostering empathy by combining personal response to texts with critical thinking and comprehension strategies. This model asks students to consider as readers a) their own feelings moments after reading the text, b) what the character (or narrator) states explicitly about how a character is feeling, c) the nonverbal cues in the text that represent the character's emotions, d) whether the student and character have shared similar lived experiences, e) how the reader engaged with the character positively, and f) how an empathy statement could demonstrate a character's lived experience.

It matters, therefore, that students' experiences be incorporated into their evidence-based discussions around texts in the literature classroom. Incorporating experience into literary discussions was not only natural and meaningful for students on a personal level, it also established the authentic context in which text-based evidence mattered in students' lives as it worked in support of argumentative claims about literary meanings they cared about. Students' lived experiences related to the text did not get in the way of rigorous intellectual work; instead, these empathic responses mediated analytical talk.

Speaking and Listening in the 21st Century

What is the value of students' personal experience-as-evidence given the language of the CCSS? What place might empathy have in discussing literature when empathic responses can't be cited? What is the cost of excluding empathic responses to literature when it appears that understanding another's perspective in literature and in life has never before been more impor-

tant in a 21st-century, globalized society (Beach et al., 2012)? These important questions deserve continued attention in research and practice. The adolescents in this study demonstrated how Jay Asher's novel roused their a) analytical and emotional connections to text, b) compassion for community members who have been disrespected, c) recognition of peers' complicit involvement in alienating others, and d) acceptance of the responsibility to act in situations in which others are being objectified and dehumanized.

The CCSS call for increases in the level of sophistication with which adolescents discuss complex literary texts. Although contestable, the speaking and listening Standards seem to aim to improve the ways in which students produce and respond to texts of various sorts. Our concern rests not so much in the particular rationale for these Standards as it does in the ways in which the Standards are received, interpreted, and carried out. In particular, we wonder how perspectives on the concept of complexity (as encoded by the selection of exemplar texts in Appendix B of the CCSS) will lead to further marginalization of young adult literature—a literary genre that has a long tradition of engaging diverse readers (Groenke & Scherff, 2010; Miller, 2014).

Although we recognize and value the use of textual evidence to support claims about texts, we also wonder how a focus on this particular disciplinary practice might push out of the curriculum the recognition of, appreciation for, and interpretive value inherent in students' real-world experiences. Waves of articles in literacy practitioner journals have uncovered the myriad and often conflicting messages that educators have received about the new "national curriculum" and how the CCSS will transform teaching and learning in literature classrooms (e.g., Botzakis, Burns, & Hall, 2014; Ohanian, 2013).

Nevertheless, students' inquiry and analysis responded well to the communicative and rhetorical challenges embedded in the Common Core State Standards for speaking and listening in this high school English classroom. We identified interpretive episodes throughout our transcripts in order to understand how students engaged in the literacy practice of Relating to and Collaborating with Others (Beach et al., 2012) as they read the complex text of *Thirteen Reasons Why*. These illustrative episodes in which students projected themselves into the context of the world of

the text and imagined alternative plot structures that might have transformed the action in the text were fueled by students' empathic transactions and vicarious experiences that are hallmarks of literary engagements. It is important to note that these empathic conversations also facilitated the sophisticated types of student-led dialogue that are features of the CCSS for speaking and listening. In fact, students exceeded the expectations for speaking and listening in the CCSS by demonstrating how their talk leveraged their meaning making about the text, which, in turn, leveraged their meaning making about the world. Far from being mutually exclusive concepts in this classroom's discourse, empathy shaped the "emotionally colored context" (Rosenblatt, 1938/1995, p. 217) in which "greater literary sensitivity" (p. 225) was constructed.

James S. Chisholm is an assistant professor in the College of Education and Human Development at the University of Louisville, where he teaches courses in the Literacy Education and English Education programs. He studies inquiry-based discussions of literature as well as adolescents' multimodal literacy practices in high school English classrooms. His research has appeared in outlets such as the Journal of Literacy Research, Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy, *and the* 60th Yearbook of the Literacy Research Association.

Bethany L. Keller is a third-year counseling psychology doctoral student at the University of Louisville. Her research focuses on relationship aggression (e.g., controlling behaviors, intimate partner violence, stalking) and maintenance of romantic relationships. Additionally, she is an advocate for LGBTQ issues and works with adolescents who are struggling with suicidal ideation and self-harming behaviors.

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Janette **Hughes** and Laura **Morrison**

At the Intersection of Critical Digital Literacies, Young Adult Literature, and Literature Circles

This article explores the impact on adolescents' learning when they are given opportunities to create digital texts for a wider audience and engage with social justice issues on a global scale. Students participated in literature circles based on important social issues such as the impact of war on children, the influence of media on body image, and bullying/cyberbullying. The work we have been doing in classrooms in Ontario, Canada, positions adolescents as agents of change as they produce digital texts to create awareness about these issues by sharing them with wider audiences.

Critical digital literacies (CDL) exist at the intersection of critical literacies and digital literacies, and we define CDL as the ability to read and create digital texts in a reflective way to identify and ameliorate the power, inequality, and injustice in human relationships. In order to encourage adolescents to become agents of change in their local and global communities, we used a variety of young adult literature, literature circles, and digital media.

Young adult (YA) literature has the potential to engage students through the writing style, high-interest content, and overall appeal to young readers. Furthermore, as the definition of literacy has changed to include that which is multimodal and digital (Coiro, Knobel, Lankshear, & Leu, 2008), it is necessary to include a technology element in many literacy activities—not only to engage the students, as these are part of their out-of-school practices, but also to refine their

skills and teach them how to critically navigate their increasingly digital worlds.

Finally, since research points to the efficacy of literature circles (Mills & Jennings, 2011), the quality of discussions they generate, and how they help students enter texts, identify with them, and make meaning, we used a combination of face-to-face and online literature circles. We wanted the students to engage in meaningful, reflective discussion and to benefit from the performative, collaborative, and multimodal affordances of online discussions. The classroom social networking site, Ning, connected the students and transformed their discussions and interactions, taking them beyond the classroom walls and hours and allowing the students to communicate with each other through a variety of textual, verbal, and semiotic tools.

We were specifically interested in exploring the following questions: 1) What is the relationship between digital media and adolescents' understanding of various issues while immersed in using digital media? 2) How does a critical digital literacies approach shape what students learn and how they view themselves and their roles in their community? 3) How do the public performances of students' digital texts reshape the relationship between educational stakeholders (students, teachers, parents, schools) and the wider community (both locally and globally)?

The role of community and the public sharing of knowledge and understanding is a key component of

the research. Although creating awareness of problems in the world around us is an important first step, it is not enough. As O'Neil (2010) asserts, "At the heart of social justice is the realization that things do not have to continue as they are but can be changed, and that this change occurs only when individuals act to create it" (p. 48). The performative potential of digital media (Hughes & John, 2009; Hughes, 2009) facilitates the exploration and creation of digital texts, lending voice to the local and global issues that adolescents are most concerned about. These texts can, in turn, be shared with others as a way of engendering social change. Emancipatory actions can encourage students to write, read, and re-write the world and the word, linking literacy to human agency and the power to "effect social transformation" (Janks, 2010, p. 161).

> **When students gain understanding of others using contemporary media texts, they are afforded the opportunity for agency and change in their own lives within school, the community, and beyond.**

The goal of the research was to give students voice and agency in the context of community and thus provide opportunities for students not only to explore relevant issues in their lives through the kind of book talk generated through literature circles, but also to explore ways they might effect change in their own lives and communities. The research project extended the use of digital media beyond the classroom and immersed students in the act of producing digital media texts on critical issues in their local and global communities. When students gain understanding of others using contemporary media texts, they are afforded the opportunity for agency and change in their own lives within school, the community, and beyond. Creating digital texts for a wider audience encourages students to become leaders on the world stage. The target audience of their text production shifts from an audience of one (their teacher) or a few (their classmates) to a great many.

Using Young Adult Literature and Literature Circles

The field of young adult literature has been flourishing over the past few years despite a slumping economy,

and this growing collection of books offers adolescents vehicles through which they can explore important societal issues and themes of social justice (Glenn, 2008; Groenke, Maples & Henderson, 2010; Wolk, 2009). Between the covers of much young adult literature exist stories that can create awareness, stir emotions, and provoke change. Wolk (2009) suggests, "Teaching for social responsibility with good books does far more than encourage civic participation; it redefines the purpose of school and empowers all of us—students, teachers, administrators, parents—to be better people and live more fulfilling lives" (p. 672). As Mills and Jennings (2011) point out, literature circles can be a powerful way for students to both reflect on what they are reading and become reflexive about their own personal growth.

Features of the Study

Methodology

Our study examines how literacy activities such as the ones described below might enhance global consciousness of adolescents and help them to develop a greater awareness of social justice issues. This three-year qualitative case study involved five classes of middle school students (grades 6–8) and their teachers in an elementary school (Year 1: 3 classes; Years 2 & 3: 1 class) located in a relatively affluent area near Toronto, Ontario. In each year of the study, the students used a variety of hardware (e.g., iPod Touch technology, iPads, and Smart Phones) and software to read, write, view, and represent a number of digital texts beginning with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. They engaged in literature circles as they read young adult literature related to one of the issues of concern: Year 1: Children & War; Year 2: Body Image & the Media; Year 3: Bullying & Cyberbullying. They engaged with their peers in this book talk both during face-to-face meetings and through an online social networking site, Ning. Finally, they created their own digital and multimodal texts, which were shared with their wider community as a way of taking action.

Prior to the introduction of the project activities, the research team met with the teachers of the classes to: 1) discuss and clarify the research project's goals and methods and 2) assist with the planning of the activities. The work was inquiry-based and the adolescents in the study were given the challenge of creating their own digital texts using digital software such as

PhotoStory, MovieMaker, ComicLife, Frames 4, Glogster, and Scrapblog to represent their learning. The research team also met with the teachers after the unit to: 1) review and discuss the digital texts produced by the students and 2) reflect on the activities used with the adolescents. Throughout the implementation of each research phase, teaching methodologies were tracked and reflected upon at the end of each week to help determine best practices in teaching using a CDL pedagogy.

Data sources included our detailed field notes based on classroom observations, open-ended focus groups and interviews with students and teachers, and the digital texts students produced. These data were coded for various themes that emerged. The multimodal texts created by the students were analysed within a framework of semiotic meta-functions (Burn, 2008; Jewitt, 2008; Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001) using a digital visual literacy analysis method of developing a "pictorial and textual representation of [the] elements" (Hull & Katz, 2006, p.41). The analysis focused on the various modes of expression (i.e. visual image, gesture, movement) that students used and how these worked in concert to create meaning. We were particularly interested in moments that might be interpreted as "turning points" (Bruner, 1994) in the representation of their conceptual understandings of social justice and equity issues.

Year 1: Children & War

Our Year 1 theme was chosen in consultation with the teacher and students, who were surveyed about the global issues that concerned them most. At the time, Kony 2012, a documentary about a Ugandan warlord, had just gone viral, and many of the students had questions about child soldiers. Eighteen million children worldwide have been forced to flee their homes because of war, while 300,000 children have been conscripted into armed forces around the world (http://www.warchild.ca/). We, therefore, felt this was a pressing and relevant social justice issue to bring into the classroom, especially as the students were of a similar age to those about whom they were reading.

The students were involved in literature circles with four to five peers in each group. After the teacher gave a brief book talk on each text, the students selected their first, second, and third choices. In order to expose the students to a variety of writing styles and genres, the texts consisted of both fiction and nonfiction titles. Some of the more challenging texts in terms of mature content and/or writing style included: *A Long Way Gone* (2007) by Ishmael Beah, *They Fight Like Soldiers, They Die Like Children* (2010) by Roméo Dallaire, *Chanda's Wars* (2008) by Allan Stratton, and *Children of War* (2010) and *Off to War* (2008) by Deborah Ellis. Some of the more easily accessible texts included *The Shepherd's Granddaughter* (2008) by Anne Laurel Carter, *Breadwinner* (2000) by Deborah Ellis, *Shattered* (2006) by Eric Walters, *Shooting Kabul* (2010) by N. H. Senzai, and *The Photographer* (2009) by Emmanuel Guibert.

> **The students' engagement with the texts and the subsequent conversations meant that these meetings were highly active, creative, and collaborative.**

The students engaged in regular literature circle meetings, both face-to-face and on a Ning, where they were assigned rotating roles that included: advice columnist, news reporter, summarizer, dream weaver, and illustrator. The literature circles were an important way for the students to engage deeply with the texts, not only on their own, but also with their peers who brought their own perspectives, experiences, and ideas. The students' engagement with the texts and the subsequent conversations meant that these meetings were highly active, creative, and collaborative. As a result, the students appeared to identify deeply with these YA texts and their content, and they took ownership of their learning.

As part of the literature circle activities, the students read selected websites and viewed various video clips related to children and war and discussed how these informed their literature circle books. Each week, they focused on one of the following topics: Sharing stories: Life as a refugee; Conventions on the rights of the child; Child labour: Rights forgotten; Global issues: A call to answer; Working against poverty; Human rights: Respecting others; Rights of children in Afghanistan; and Global citizens: Responding to need. For each of these topics, the students were required to draw on their reading, writing,

viewing, representing, speaking, and listening skills as they explored digital and print texts (e.g., articles, books, websites, video clips related to the topic). For each topic, they also had to engage in a critical reading of the texts as well as produce a digital text of their own in response to the topic. These included creating word clouds summarizing the main ideas, digital collages representing the big ideas of the topic, sequential art panels (or comics) using Bitstrips or Comic Life, and more.

As a way of synthesizing and consolidating all of their learning, the students had the option to create a digital story or visual essay using MovieMaker or Photostory; a digital children's story on the Rights of the Child; a digital poetry anthology; a graphic novella using ComicLife, Frames4, or Bitstrips, or a scrapblog based on war art or another topic (see Fig. 1).

They also had the option to deconstruct a war video game (using Jing if the game was hosted online, or with a handheld video camera if the game was hosted elsewhere); create lyrics/music and make a music video to accompany it; or create a video-recorded docudrama. They shared their digital texts at two large assemblies at the school, and the community was invited in to listen to them share their experiences. As part of the project, the students also had organized fundraising events at the school (e.g., gum day, hat day) and raised over $500, which they donated to War Child Canada to assist with the rehabilitation of child soldiers.

They also shared their new learning with their reading buddies in grade two by reading a number of

Figure 1. Bitstrips comparison between Afghanistan and Canada

picturebooks that reflected the theme of the impact of war on children. These books included: *Give a Goat* (2013) by Jan West Schrock and Aileen Darragh, *Why War Is Never a Good Idea* (2007) by Alice Walker and Stefano Vitale, *Four Feet, Two Sandals* (2007) by Karen Lynn Williams and Khadra Mohammad, and *Brothers in Hope: The Story of the Lost Boys of Sudan* (2005) by Mary Williams and R. Gregory Christie.

Year 2: Body Image & the Media

Body image and the media is an important topic in general, especially for adolescents who are undergoing an intense period of psychological, emotional, and physical development. They are susceptible to underlying and often unrealistic messages of what it means to be attractive, and they are exposed to stereotypical notions about the roles of males and females in society. In Year 2 of this study, the students themselves chose to focus on the influences of the media on body image for adolescents, culminating in the creation of a digital poem based on their personal experiences with media messages and the impact these have on their own body images.

In literature circles, the students read a range of YA novels that dealt with themes of body image and the media such as *Speak* (1999) by Laurie Halse Anderson, *Stargirl* (2000) by Jerry Spinelli, the *Uglies/Pretties/Specials/Extras* series (2005–2007) by Scott Westerfield, and the wildly popular *Divergent* series (2011–2013) by Veronica Roth. In addition to traditional literature circle discussions, the students also completed a wide range of digital activities. They created original digital poetry, remixed song lyrics and added images, and created a mock broadcast of a TV talk show containing song performances, advertisements, and interviews on the effects of media. They developed online magazines, deconstructed advertisements and articles, and created online posters using Glogster and Tagxedo. In addition, the students were engaged in blogging and posted their work and feedback to peers on the class Ning.

The students represented their learning by creating digital poems about the media messages in their lives and how they try to resist them. The poems were from the students' perspectives, which positioned them as media consumers who are negatively affected by the messages they receive.
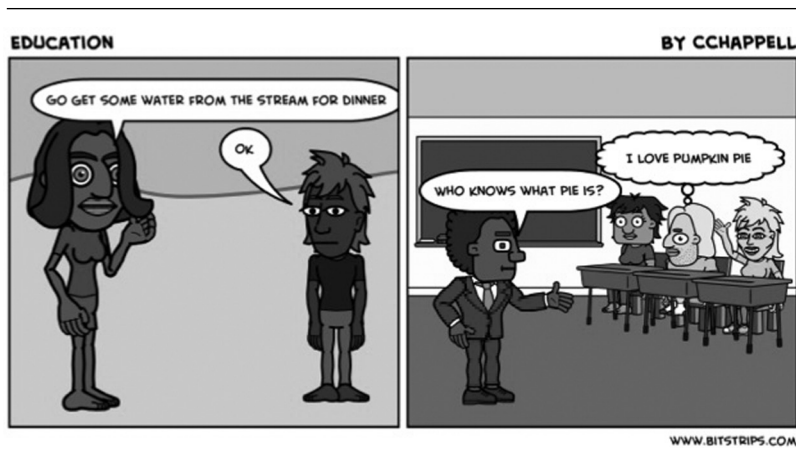
However, the project simultaneously challenged the students to respond as critical producers of media, not only reflecting on the messages, but also identifying their purpose and effect and, with agency, exposing them in a digital poem to minimize their power.

The poems showed great complexity based on the images, text, and music the students chose to complement their messages. When the poems were complete, each student presented his/her poem and explained all of its design features, including why each of the images, text, sound/music, transitions, colors, and types of fonts were selected on each slide. The poems very clearly demonstrated the students' ability to deconstruct the media's messages, and as a result of the process, they began to explore how they might resist the influence of media on their perceptions of themselves. The poem in Figure 2 was rich with complexity, as shown in the images chosen, the text, and the music, all of which complement the message of feeling pressure from the media to fit a narrowly defined mold of perfection.

Year 3: Bullying & Cyberbullying

A class of 24 seventh and eighth graders were provided with a selection of novels, all of which centered on bullying/cyberbullying themes, and which were downloaded to tablets. As in the previous two years, the theme was chosen based on student feedback about the issues that concern them most.

The books we chose were *Freak* (2007) by Marcella Pixley, *Bystander* (2009) by James Preller, *The Reluctant Journal of Henry K. Larsen* (2012) by Susin Nielsen, and *The Bully Book* (2011) by Eric Kahn Gale. These novels were selected because the characters are relatable to students of middle school age, they have strong literary merit, they are relatively current, and they examine the phenomenon of bullying or cyberbullying from varying perspectives. Giving the students an opportunity to read some or all of these books allowed them to analyze a variety of bullying situations and discuss in detail the positive and negative ways in which the characters dealt with their situations.

Figure 2. Sample body image digital poem

In addition to a traditional literature circle structure, the students used a variety of digital tools to address the topic of bullying and bullying prevention as a way of providing common ground among the books for whole-class discussion. For example, using Web-based multimodal tools such as Glogster, Tagxedo and Wordle, students created and presented their own online posters to describe their feelings towards bullying based on their own experiences and made connections to the book they had chosen to read (see one example in Fig. 3). In the ensuing class discussion, they deconstructed their work to illustrate their impressions about bullying and its effects as well as how they have been impacted by bullying in their own lives.

As the literature circle activities concluded, the students created their own original multimodal digital stories from the viewpoint of the bully, the bullied, or the bystander, which they presented and deconstructed with their classmates. As part of the process, students viewed the viral video "To This Day," a poem by Canadian spoken-word artist Shane Koyczan, which is available on YouTube and as an iPad app. The piece is a highly creative, emotionally charged, and visually impactful digital poem based on the author's experiences with bullying and how it affected his life and the lives of others. Watching this video had a noticeable impact on many of the students and led to a conversation about the powerful messages that can be embedded and delivered through digital media.

The final task of the unit was the planning, construction, performance, and discussion of student-generated digital stories. Each story was told from the perspective of the bully, the bullied, or the bystander and was meant to evoke emotion, empathy, and understanding in both the performers and the audience. Through the narrative power of digital storytelling, students were able to both identify the emotional effects of bullying and reflect upon their consequences (Tsai, Tseng, & Weng, 2011), which could ultimately lead to a reduction in or prevention of future bullying events. The performance of the digital stories was followed by an in-depth deconstruction process during which the creators explained their choices of storyline, character, music, image, and other multimodal components of their stories. Then, as a class, we discussed the effectiveness of each element of the stories in conveying the desired message.

Understanding Local and Global Issues through Digital Media

In all cases, the students' engagement with the print and digital texts—as both consumers and producers—encouraged a more critical understanding of local and global issues. The students were able to enter texts and connect with them in new and exciting ways, and they were able to take ownership of their learning by making meaning through creation. All of this helped the students get to deeper, critical levels with the content and make personal connections. After deconstructing their own ads and listening to their peers explain the media messages in their ads as well, one of the students in the Year 2 Body Image & Media project noted that she could no longer look at anything the "same way," and even outside of school, she viewed everything with a "more critical eye than average consumers, even my parents."

The study also points to a notable increase in student engagement in the classroom with the use of the digital tools, the Ning, and YA fiction. This engagement was the result of ubiquitous access to current digital texts, which provided immediate and relevant content related to the topic of study. Another important benefit was the development of students' research skills (due to this accessibility of information on the devices) and their digital literacy skills (through the use of such programs and platforms as Glogster, Ning and iMovie). Students also learned not only how to use various digital programs, but also how to critically understand digital media content and its applications

Figure 3. Student-generated bullying using Tagxedo

for specific purposes. The students learned about the various affordances and constraints of different digital tools and how to be both critical consumers and producers of digital texts.

Using a CDL Approach to Explore Personal and Community Identity

The shift to a critical digital literacies pedagogy improved collaboration among the students and increased the amount of inquiry-based learning in the classrooms; students shared resources and roles and became active agents in their own learning processes. As this happened, the teachers' role began to shift away from authoritative and toward facilitative. One of the teachers observed that the students began to take on the role of the expert when it came to technology: "If there was an issue, there was always someone to go to, maybe five or six people to go to, so that was really exciting to see them helping each other and coming up with great solutions to technological problems."

Students used the Ning, a closed, secure social networking platform, which enabled them to add profile pictures, update statuses, and upload photo and video files. They also embedded links to other websites, "friended" and chatted with other members, created special interest groups, maintained a blog, and/or conversed with other members using discussion threads. Ning-facilitated collaboration and knowledge construction among the students through the various communication tools, along with the discussion-thread feature, allowed the students to comment on each other's work and engage in online conversations, thus building classroom community. The similarity of the site to other social networking sites, such as Facebook, appealed to the students and increased their level of engagement and enthusiasm for learning the material by bringing an element of their digital culture into the school.

A CDL pedagogy responds to the capacity to effect change by embracing a collaborative learning and teaching community. This allows participants to recognize the pluralities in literacies and learning within our global and digital society. Furthermore, using mobile devices and social networking platforms can give students voice and agency in the context of their learning communities and thus provide opportunities

for them not only to learn subject matter but also to explore their world and issues meaningful to them. Our experiences suggest that the use of this pedagogical approach, with its emphasis on community engagement, helped educators to see how literacy instruction with young adult literature and digital tools, including a social networking site, could become a transformative practice for educators and students.

Taking Action through Public Performances

The students shared their work in a variety of venues including the class Ning, a community art gallery, schoolwide/community assemblies, the project website, and YouTube. The publication of student work has a long history in the teaching of English language arts, but it has been only recently, with the advent of digital media and the Web 2.0 technologies, that adolescents have enjoyed the possibilities of sharing their writing with wider audiences.

We argue that the materiality and performative value of digital texts need to be understood as an intricate part of a critical digital literacies approach by the producer, viewer, and educator. Each year, the students shared their digital texts with a wider audience as a way of promoting awareness of the issues and taking action in their own local schools or communities. One of the teachers noted that her students were "more motivated by social activism as a result of this project," and another teacher noted, "It is amazing to me how engaged eleven-year-olds become . . . . you think that those little bodies and minds won't get the big picture, and they always do. More so than some of the adults we know."

YA fiction, combined with a critical digital literacies approach, provides the vehicle for this kind of

> **The use of this pedagogical approach, with its emphasis on community engagement, helped educators to see how literacy instruction with young adult literature and digital tools . . . could become a transformative practice for educators and students.**

civic and community engagement, which goes beyond learning how to be a "good citizen." Our students need to engage in the kind of critical and civic discourse that is made possible through well-developed literature circle activities and book clubs. These "rehearsals for social change" need to be developed early and often (O'Donnell-Allen, 2011, p. 17). Challenging our students to be "justice-oriented citizen[s]" (Lewison, Leland, & Harste, 2008, p. 4) requires the development of a literacy community that focuses on open communication, the exchange of viewpoints, and the sharing of opinions, as well as the ability to listen attentively to others and demonstrate empathy. Understanding how positive choices contribute to a social consciousness and how negative choices lead to misunderstandings and conflict, we can help adolescents to embrace our global society.

Dr. Hughes is an associate professor in the Faculty of Education at the University of Ontario Institute of Technology. Her research focuses on the role digital literacies play in adolescent identity development and civic engagement. She is the recipient of the Ontario Ministry of Research and Innovation's Early Researchers Award (2011–2012), the UOIT Excellence in Research Award (2012–2013), and the National Technology Leadership Initiative Fellowship (2013–2014). Dr. Hughes's work has been published in a variety of prestigious journals, including the Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy *and* English in Education. *She has presented her research at conferences around the world. She is the recent coauthor of* The Digital Principal, *a book to support school leaders in technology innovation in schools. This research is generously funded by the Ontario Ministry of Research and Innovation—Early Researcher Award.*

Laura Morrison is an MA candidate in the Faculty of Education at the University of Ontario Institute of Technology. Her areas of research currently include adolescent literacy, identity development, and the role of a critical digital literacies pedagogy in the development of both. Her work with Dr. Janette Hughes on the role of Facebook and the development of adolescents' literacy skills and identity was published in March 2013 in the International Journal of Social Media and Interactive Learning. *She recently presented this work at the 2013 Poetic Inquiry conference in Montreal, Canada, and at the 2014 Korean Association of Multicultural Education international conference in Seoul, Korea.*

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Cammie Kim **Lin**

Queer(ing) Literature in the Secondary English Classroom

Like many English teachers, I came to the profession in no small part because of a belief that literature is one of the most meaningful ways to explore and make sense of the human experience. That exploration and sense making was an endeavor I was eager to undertake with young people. I felt fortunate that I was teaching when, in the late 1990s and early 2000s, the field of young adult literature seemed to be exploding. For many years preceding that period, the rate at which so-called multicultural young adult literature was being published had been steadily—if a bit slowly—increasing. But amidst this explosion were numerous titles that addressed a very real part of the human experience that had been largely neglected in the past: the diversity of human sexuality. And, whereas most of the early YA novels with gay and lesbian content tended to present a tragic view of gay or lesbian teens, these newer titles began to flesh out the genre, introducing gay and lesbian protagonists not only to root for, but to be inspired by; young people unsure of their sexual identity, and okay with that; characters who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer or questioning (LGBTQ), as well.

Take, for instance, David Levithan's (2013) *Two Boys Kissing.* Narrated by a Greek chorus of souls from an earlier generation of gay men who died of AIDS, the novel tells the story of two boys who set out to break the Guinness World Record for the longest kiss. Revolving around these boys and their record-breaking, 32-hour kiss are the stories of numerous other gay and transgender teens navigating a broad spectrum of experiences with their sexuality—some

with joy, others with fear, some with confidence, others with confusion, some with loving support, others in isolation. The narrative chorus creates an interplay between a tragic past and a hopeful present, while simultaneously illustrating that continued work needs to be done to eradicate homophobia and heterosexism. The extensive range of experiences highlights the fact that there is no singular "gay experience." To the extent that it disrupts that idea, the novel works to *queer*, or disrupt, common understandings and assumptions about sexual identity.

This newer genre, then, could be called *queer literature,* rather than gay and lesbian literature. If the latter term grew out of the field of gay and lesbian studies, and suggested an exploration or representation of "the gay and lesbian experience," the former grows out of queer theory, which casts a critical lens on sexual and gender binaries such as gay/straight, male/female, masculine/feminine. Queer theory also pushes the exploration of hegemony and, in queer pedagogue Elizabeth Meyer's (2007) words, "the function of traditional heterosexual gender roles in reinforcing and maintaining harmful power dynamics in schools and society" (p. 17). As such, the term queer literature can be used to describe texts that lend themselves to this exploration, or to the body of literature that includes the great diversity of LGBTQ characters, narratives, and themes.

The reasons for including queer literature in our classes—or, said differently, for queer*ing* the literature we teach—are many: adolescence is a time when young people are making sense of what human sexu-

ality means, so to neglect its diversity is to marginalize it; we know well that among our students we always have a number who themselves may, now or eventually, identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer; we also have students whose families include LGBTQ persons; and we know well the prevalence of homophobia in our schools (Kosciw, Greytak, Bartkiewicz, & Palmer, 2012), as well as its damaging effects. These reasons sound out a call for social justice to all teachers of literature, as queer-inclusive teaching has the potential to address all of these concerns. However, there is another compelling reason to read it: to answer the call that brought so many of us to the profession—to engage with young people in exploring and making sense of the human experience, in all of its diversity. By doing so, we have the potential to couple social justice concerns with deep, complex, emotional, and intellectual literary work.

As part of a research study examining queer pedagogy and queer-inclusive teaching in secondary English classrooms, I conducted multiple case studies of teachers engaging in this work. These case studies, in addition to my own middle and high school teaching experiences, led me to believe in the critical importance of a solid theoretical and pedagogical foundation for the inclusion of such literature in our classrooms. To that end, let me take a moment to argue for the explicit inclusion of sexual identities within the purview of critical multiculturalism.

Theoretical and Pedagogical Foundations: Queer-Inclusive Critical Multiculturalism

Such a conceptualization—a queer-inclusive critical multiculturalism—could provide a framework for the teaching of queer literature. Critical multiculturalism and queer pedagogy share a fundamental impulse: both seek to challenge the status quo and disrupt hegemonic understandings of identity, experience, and perspective. In this way, queer-inclusive critical multiculturalism urges English language arts educators to develop a pedagogy that treats literacy not only as reading and writing, but as a critical tool for understanding—and transforming—oneself and the world.

As the English classroom is often given the "task" of meeting the multicultural needs of schools, literature is frequently thought to be the means to do so.

An analogy can be made between efforts to make booklists more multicultural and efforts to make booklists less heteronormative. Both efforts seek to disrupt the status quo in favor of inclusivity. When we discuss disrupting booklists in such a way, what we are talking about, in essence, is *queering* (or disrupting) them. Queering literature instruction, then, could be done by reading existing works through a queer lens or by adding literature with LGBTQ content.

In what could be called a traditional multicultural curriculum, literature is positioned as if it were representative of the particular culture from which the author writes. Particularly if the author is not White, race tends to trump all other social categories. A checklist mentality is often employed; if you have already "covered" the Black, Asian, Latino, American Indian, or perhaps European immigrant experience, there is no need to take up any more time or space with another. The books are presented as cultural artifacts that will allow students to "know" and "experience" Others. There may be some value in this; students are *potentially* able to "interrogate different readings of cultural texts and address critically the signifying power of such texts to create and affirm particular social identities" (Giroux, 2000, p. 495). Yet, such an approach also carries the ill-effect of being *essentializing* and *minoritizing.*

Giroux points out that "removed from broader public discourses and analysed outside of a whole assemblage of other cultural formations, texts either become the reified markers of a narrow version of identity politics or pedagogical resources for uncovering the attributes of specific identities" (pp. 495–496). Critical multiculturalists, in contrast to more traditional multiculturalists, eschew the emphasis on cultural representation and identity politics in favor of an exploration of the intersection of experience, power, culture, and identity construction—an exploration shared by queer pedagogues. Britzman (1995) asks, "What sort of difference would it make for everyone in a classroom if gay and lesbian writing were set loose from confirmations of homophobia, the after-

> **We have the potential to couple social justice concerns with deep, complex, emotional, and intellectual literary work.**

thoughts of inclusion, or the special event?" (p. 151). A truly diverse, truly multicultural body of literature provides a rich and varied landscape for such a critical multicultural exploration, including literature that queers our common understanding and expectations about human sexuality.

Critical multiculturalism by nature, with its critical postmodern and poststructuralist tendencies, *complicates* pedagogy, requiring its constant deconstruction and reconstruction. As Nieto (1999) articulates it, critical multicultural education "challenges teachers who are interested in transformative education to re-think what and how they teach, and to constantly question their decisions" (p. 207). Critical multicultural education is not a pedagogy. It is a framework for the analysis, understanding, and development of all aspects of education, including but not limited to pedagogy. So what can we say about how to *do* queer pedagogy within a framework of critical multicultural education?

> **Critical multiculturalism by nature, with its critical postmodern and post-structuralist tendencies, *complicates* pedagogy, requiring its constant deconstruction and reconstruction.**

Theory into Practice

Perhaps most important are the overall climate and approach taken in the classroom and, in regard to literature instruction, the way the literature is positioned by the teacher. In a queer-inclusive critical multicultural classroom, it would be positioned neither merely as "another good story" just like those with only perceived heterosexual content (analogous to a "colorblind" approach to race and ethnicity), nor as representative of "the" LGBTQ experience (as with essentializing literature by writers of color). It would be presented as an opportunity to critically explore that complex intersection of experience, power, culture, and identity, particularly as related to sexuality. There are myriad pedagogical strategies for doing this.

Blurring Boundaries
As Greg Hamilton (1998) describes after reading A. M. Homes's *Jack* with his middle school students,

one approach might be to blur the boundaries between reading for academic purposes and reading to explicitly examine and better understand life, namely, "the implications of social, cultural, and historical influences on one's sexual orientation" (p. 97). In his description of teaching *Jack,* a novel about a boy struggling to come to terms with the revelation that his father is gay, Hamilton illustrates his teaching moves to get students to "examine their own positioning" (p. 29). He concludes by suggesting three themes that might guide literature instruction: that adolescents like and need to have their opinions, assumptions, and responses challenged; that adolescents need literature that represents "real people in real situations going through some kind of a change" (p. 38) in order for them to practice coping with change themselves; and that we need to create space for a variety of worldviews and perspectives. Hamilton, in contrast to most of the other educators writing about teaching gay-themed literature, does not emphasize explicitly anti-homophobic or queer-inclusive goals, even while he chooses to teach *Jack* as a result of the homophobia he saw at his school. Instead, he uses his teaching of *Jack* as an example of how literature can be used to address the specific needs of adolescents.

Teaching Queer Theory
Another powerful approach might include teaching students about queer theory so that they might develop another lens to read not only the literature at hand, but all texts. One of the teachers I studied in depth, conducting extensive interviews and reviewing teaching materials, is Jennifer, a high school English teacher in a large, suburban public school. Much of her work calls to mind Deborah Appleman's *Critical Encounters in High School English: Teaching Literary Theory to Adolescents* (1999). Jennifer engages students in learning about critical theory so that they may learn to read literature and the world through multiple lenses and understand their own and others' situatedness. She asks students to consider, "How can theory allow us to see from various perspectives in order to understand the complexity of human experience, to be in dialogue with the past and present? How can theory help us enter new dialogues to create different paradigms?" In this sense, her pedagogy seems to be decidedly queer—in the sense of disrupting what is commonly thought to be normal and

challenging hegemony—irrespective of the literature she uses.

Indeed, one of the lenses she explicitly teaches in some of her classes is that of queer theory. As with the other theories they study, students learn about queer theory through the direct study of theoretical texts—some primary sources and some written by Jennifer. Then they are asked to read a piece of literature through that lens. For a unit specifically on queer theory, students read Jeanette Winterson's (1985) queer coming-of-age novel, *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*. Throughout their reading, they keep a journal and respond to writing prompts, including many designed to get them to apply their understanding of queer theory to their reading of the novel.

Oranges was, for Jennifer, "a life-altering text," one that "saved" her as a young adult struggling with her own sexuality as she became an adult herself. As she describes it in her unit introduction, *Oranges* is

> . . . an autobiographical novel which is a story of a young girl (the author) who begins to realize at a young age that she is not heterosexual. She is growing up with a mother who has a very strict and literal interpretation of her religion and abides by it even though it pains her daughter. As a means of re-writing the world she has been told about, the character (Jeanette) reconstructs her life by reinterpreting the constructs handed to her. She recontextualizes the books of the Old Testament in order to encompass her own life. She enters in and plays with the world of fantasy and myth and through her imagination is able to construct a vision of what her life could look like out of the ashes of the only one she knew. Her life has been storied. She realizes that in order to survive (physically, psychologically, spiritually, and emotionally), she must story her own life. It is her re-writing of history. In a way, the impulse of this course has been similar. By applying multiple perspectives and theories to texts, we are able to discern what we believe needs to be reenvisioned in our own lives and in the world. We, I believe, are called to rewrite the books of our own lives. Sometimes this means arriving at a deeper understanding of the world we have known. Sometimes it means leaving that world, that space, in order to create a new one. We will read the book applying all of the theories we have learned this semester, and we will apply the last theory we have not worked with yet—Queer Theory.

Unrealized Concerns

Part of the reason Jennifer has worked so hard to introduce the book clearly and to frame it carefully within the larger context of the course is because of her worries—from the first time she taught the unit—about what kind of reaction to expect from her students, particularly considering the large population of religious and conservative families at her school. Part of her concern was that people—students, colleagues, parents, all—would think she was pushing a personal agenda because she is a lesbian. However, in her years teaching and refining the unit, she has never faced objections—not from parents, colleagues, or students. Of her concerns, she says, "The students really helped me get over it fast."

While the novel is indeed a coming-out novel, Jennifer says, it is "more of a coming-of-age novel." It is mature and challenging, to be sure, but it is not sexually graphic or explicit—a fact that Jennifer says allows her to feel more comfortable teaching it than, for example, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (Angelou, 1969). If she were to face a challenge to teaching queer theory or *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*, she says, she is prepared for how to respond:

> I would explain how queer theory fits into the larger discourse of my course, which is examining how, by coming to an understanding of the human experience through dialogue, newer voices come into the dialogue. And I always say, you may not agree with that character or you may agree with parts of him or her, but not others, but I want you to understand other people's perspectives because it gives you a deeper understanding of the human condition.

Through rigorous and meaningful teaching, Jennifer creates the conditions for her students to learn not only how to read literature from multiple perspectives, but to read the world from multiple perspectives, as well.

> **Through rigorous and meaningful teaching, Jennifer creates the conditions for her students to learn not only how to read literature from multiple perspectives, but to read the world from multiple perspectives, as well.**

Queering the Literature We Teach

Literature does not need to have central LGBTQ content to be engaged in the endeavor to queer the English classroom. The implied (or explicit) *hetero*sexuality in most stories would be acknowledged and explored in queer pedagogy, as well. And, in stories

that contain what might be seen as peripheral LGBTQ content, a queer-inclusive class would acknowledge and explore that content, rather than gloss over it. *The Color Purple* (Walker, 1982) comes to mind; how many of us know teachers who, when teaching the novel, gloss over the sexual relationship—if acknowledging it at all—between Celie and Shug? Guided by a queer-inclusive critical multicultural framework, *The Color Purple* could instead become a rich site for investigating the implications of the characters' relationships and sexualities, particularly as they intersect with gender, race, and class, and as they relate to power in the novel.

> Alexie, through the narrator, calls out casual homophobia, but he doesn't reject and demonize the characters for it—a significantly different approach from much of the other young adult literature.

Queer(ing) Literature: *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*

An excellent example of a young adult novel that would not likely be considered queer literature, but that provides ample opportunities to work as queer*ing* literature, is Sherman Alexie's (2007) *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*. The narrator, Junior, is a high school freshman who transfers from his reservation school to Reardan High, a "White school" that lies 20 miles outside the reservation. His best friend calls him a traitor for leaving the reservation, and others there think he is an "apple"—red on the outside and white on the inside. Meanwhile, Junior's new classmates treat him as an oddity and outcast. Junior's struggle is well summed up by his new friend, Gordy, who tells him, "Well, life is a constant struggle between being an individual and being a member of the community" (p. 132).

The novel explores race and class identities quite explicitly. It gives attention to ableism, as Junior has a variety of medical problems attributable to a congenital neurological disorder. It also explores homophobia and social norms about what is acceptable behavior for males, including behavior between two male friends. We don't find Junior with any struggle about

his own sexual identity; the story suggests he is heterosexual. However, his male friends are constantly making homophobic remarks and rebuking Junior for being too sensitive or intimate. Part of the appeal of the book is the authenticity of voice in all of the characters, including the constant jabs they take at one another. Alexie manages to suggest homophobia is wrong—through Junior's comments about boys being "afraid of their emotions" (p. 132) and his esteemed grandmother's remarks on the topic—without contriving a sexual identity crisis to center it on. While there is certainly a place for literature that depicts and explores the often violent and horrific effects of homophobia, Alexie does something different; he illustrates homophobia as it is perhaps more commonly expressed today—in a half-joking manner. Take this excerpt as an example:

> A few days after basketball season ended, I e-mailed Rowdy and told him I was sorry that we beat them so bad and that their season went to hell after that.
>
> "We'll kick your asses next year," Rowdy wrote back. "And you'll cry like the little faggot you are."
>
> "I might be a faggot," I wrote back, "but I'm the faggot who beat you."
>
> "Ha-ha," Rowdy wrote.
>
> Now that might just sound like a series of homophobic insults, but I think it was also a little bit friendly, and it was the first time that Rowdy had talked to me since I left the rez.
>
> I was a happy faggot! (pp. 197–198)

Alexie, through the narrator, calls out casual homophobia, but he doesn't reject and demonize the characters for it—a significantly different approach from much of the other young adult literature that tackles the topic. Junior's perspective, juxtaposed with Rowdy's casually homophobic comments, provides rich material for discussion, and meets critical multiculturalism's commitment to rejecting easy assumptions and representations of identities and issues. Junior's grandmother, whom he respects immensely, could be given credit for Junior's comfort with queerness. He tells us:

> My grandmother's greatest gift was tolerance.
>
> Now, in the old days, Indians used to be forgiving of any kind of eccentricity. In fact, weird people were often celebrated.
>
> Epileptics were often shamans because people just assumed that God gave seizure-visions to the lucky ones.
>
> Gay people were seen as magical too.

I mean, like in many cultures, men were viewed as warriors and women were viewed as caregivers. But gay people, being both male and female, were seen as both warriors and caregivers.

Gay people could do anything. They were like Swiss Army knives!

My grandmother had no use for all the gay bashing and homophobia in the world, especially among other Indians.

"Jeez," she said, "Who cares if a man wants to marry another man? All I want to know is who's going to pick up all the dirty socks?" (p. 155)

The novel illustrates material that is ripe for the exploration of critical reading—material that will help readers to explore how characters come to inhabit particular, and varied, perspectives, and also to explore the interplay between the various characters' perspectives, as well as with their own. The intersections of race, class, gender, dis/ability, and sexuality are so salient, the novel possesses extraordinary potential for queering readers' assumptions about identity and experience, particularly when guided in that exploration.

It is worth noting, too, that *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part Time Indian* received the 2007 National Book Award for Young People's Literature, among other high literary honors, and has appeared on numerous library industry "best books" lists. We must acknowledge, however, that it has been challenged by parents and banned by numerous school districts across the country, seen as too mature and too vulgar, with opponents highlighting a reference to masturbation, the use of profanity by the teenaged protagonist, and for what some see as an anti-Christian perspective. Alexie (Drake, 2008), who says the book is largely autobiographical, counters:

Everything in the book is what every kid in that school is dealing with on a daily basis, whether it's masturbation or racism or sexism or the complications of being human. To pretend that kids aren't dealing with this on an hour-by-hour basis is a form of denial. . . . The world is an incredibly complicated place, and our literature must match that, especially literature for our kids.

Defenders, including Pam Juel, a library coordinator in an Idaho school district where the title was removed from a supplemental high school reading list in response to parent opposition, have stood up against censorship of the book, asserting that "[e]ducation is not about confirming what we already know and believe. Instead, education should be about increasing

our capacity to understand, problem-solve, explore, create, and contribute to a complex world" (Sun, 2014).

In Practice

The Absolutely True Diary of a Part Time Indian is a favorite of students in the classroom of one urban high school teacher I studied, Cecile. In addition to teaching this and other queer(ing) novels, her practice illustrates another site for queering the English classroom—the reading workshop, where she works to integrate queer texts as often as possible. She describes the evolution in her approach this way:

> **Her practice illustrates another site for queering the English classroom—the reading workshop, where she works to integrate queer texts as often as possible.**

I think that before, when I'd introduce books or tell kids about them, I might have highlighted if there were sexuality issues in them, as if to warn them or something. Like I'd make it a big deal, which probably contributed to them responding in a big-deal kind of way. But now I'm as comfortable talking about books' sexuality content as any other content. For example, I often do little book talks to the class, just to get them excited about books and help them find something they would like to select for themselves for reading workshop. I bring in a bag of titles that are high interest, and I try to include a really good variety. It's very fun, actually. I love doing it, and the kids love it, too. I'll just sit there and hold up each book, saying a little something about it. Maybe I'll read a page or two if I think that might hook someone, or I'll just talk about what it's about or how great it is. And I'll usually have a book or two in the bag that has some sexuality issues in it.

Some favorites for me and for students have been Garret Freymann-Weyr's *My Heartbeat,* Julie Anne Peters's *Luna*, Francesca Lia Block's *Weetzie Bat,* and Alex Sanchez's *Rainbow Boys.* When I am doing the little book talks, I might or might not mention that there's any queer content, depending on the story, but even if anyone has a bit of a "Whoa!" response, I just blow by it like, "The book's really good. Anyone want it?" A bunch of kids would raise their hands, I'd toss it to someone, and just move on to the next book. I'd like to think I was more savvy than this a few years ago, but I might have been like, "This is a book about a gay kid who is having a hard time coming out. If you'd like to read this, would you please raise your hand in front of the whole class?"

Cecile works against heteronormativity by ensuring that her classroom library has numerous books with LGBTQ content and characters in it, and by working hard not to shy away from them—and consciously working to make her classroom a place where students don't shy away from them, either. Rather, she

works to give the books a comfortable presence alongside their heteronormative counterparts.

In some cases, she has no agenda except to interest students in the books like any other, and in other cases, she says, she angles to get particular students connected with the books, because she believes they might be helpful for them in thinking about their own or others' experiences. In this way, she treats the topic much as she would with, say, a book about death or bullying or any other issue with which her adolescent students may be particularly concerned. She is careful not to "out" students with these books. In the past, she says, students (and many adults) might have assumed that if someone chooses to read a "gay book," that must mean that she or he is gay. But by positioning queer books as merely interesting books like any other, she creates the space for all students to choose them without stigma.

Blackburn (2012) discusses research in which students point out that when teachers take the approach of just letting students self-select queer texts, they set the stage for students to self-censor for fear of peers' homophobic reactions. Blackburn's students argue that teachers need to assign the titles as whole-class texts to avoid this. Gonzales (2010) agrees, though he makes the argument for different reasons. Building on Winans's (2006) argument that simply including nontraditional texts does nothing to disrupt hegemonic pedagogy, he argues, "Allowing students to change the content [of our curricula] does not necessarily affect our pedagogy either" (p. 85). But observation would suggest that Cecile's intentional work to create an environment in her class where queer texts are seen as normal, coupled with her specific recommendations to the class as a whole and/or to individual

students, seem to achieve a significant step beyond simply adding the books to a classroom library where students can self-select them. Indeed, the increasing enthusiasm with which her students self-select queer literature seems to indicate that, at least with many students, self-censorship does not trump interest.

Becoming Agents of Social Change

In graduate teacher education courses where I have taught or lectured, I have found that most pre- and inservice teachers hesitate to teach queer literature primarily for fear of protest by administrators, parents, and students. However, neither Cecile nor Jennifer seeks approval from superiors, colleagues, or parents for their use of queer literature. Their attitude toward this is similar: such literature is in fact normal and appropriate, so there is no need to position it otherwise. Essentially, they rule out the likelihood of censorship or reprisal and do not feel any need for specific approval.

Cecile teaches at a progressive, urban high school where queer issues are commonly addressed. She has never encountered disapproval or resistance from parents or other educators, though she certainly has from students—ranging from homophobic outbursts ("This is some gay shit!") to more tempered discussions in which students express disapproval of LGBT identities and "lifestyles." Earlier in her career, she responded to such homophobia by telling students that it simply would not be tolerated because it is hurtful and disrespectful; essentially, she worked to silence homophobic students. Though such incidents were challenging, they never stood in the way of her continued commitment to queer-inclusive teaching.

As she gained experience, she developed more skill at focusing on the texts at hand and facilitating discussions where students could express themselves honestly without hateful outbursts. Like Junior in *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian,* she does not demonize homophobic students. Instead, she engages them—through the literature she teaches, her pedagogy and methods, and honest dialogue—thus creating the conditions for transformation. She notes that every year, homophobic resistance seems to decrease, a fact she attributes to increased visibility and changes in attitudes about sexuality in youth pop culture, in addition to her continued work creating a

positive, queer-inclusive classroom environment. In fact, increasingly, she finds that homophobic remarks are addressed and challenged by other students before she even feels the need to respond. Not only is Cecile an agent of social change, but her students are, as well.

By expanding the body of literature we teach and by positioning literature as artifacts of and sites for the exploration of social construction and interaction, we make moves toward more adequately meeting all students' academic and social needs. As important, we create for students the conditions under which they may explore their own and others' shifting identities and perspectives, enabling them to become agents of social change. It is only by recognizing and exploring queerness that we may heed the call to explore with our students the extraordinary diversity of the human experience.

Cammie Kim Lin *worked as a middle and high school English teacher and literacy coach in New York City public schools for eight years and was an adjunct instructor at Teachers College, Columbia University, where she completed her Ed.D. in English Education. Her dissertation, entitled* Queering the Secondary English Classroom or, "Why are we reading gay stuff?" *explores LGBTQ issues and content in the classrooms of three secondary English teachers and develops principles for enacting queer-inclusive critical multiculturalism. She regularly lectures and writes about LGBTQ issues in K–12 education and is particularly interested in queer-inclusive children's and young adult literature. Her other research interests include education equity issues and parents' decision making about their children's educations.*

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Kristine E. **Pytash,** Katherine E. **Batchelor,** William **Kist,** and Kristen **Srsen**

Linked Text Sets in the English Classroom

L iterature provides students with powerful experiences in which they can reflect on their lives, imagine future scenarios, and consider diverse cultures, time periods, and experiences. These experiences might be even more powerful for readers of young adult literature, which focuses most especially on the various, intense life experiences of adolescents (Caywood, 1995; Greinke, 2007). Educators have found that through reading YA literature, young adults can reflect on life experiences, develop empathy, make independent decisions while avoiding peer pressure, and learn about important social issues and social responsibility (Caywood, 1995; Greinke, 2007; Kist, 2013; Pytash, 2012; Wolk, 2010).

English educators know the potential value of literature, particularly young adult literature, in students' lives, and yet, unintentionally, we often diminish the power of reading in our secondary classrooms by focusing on one text at a time. In one academic year, students might read two or three novels, while the rest of the curriculum contains individual units on short stories, nonfiction, poetry, and dramatic works, such as Shakespearean plays (Applebee, 1992). Often these units are not integrated, but rather taught as separate components of English curricula. We worry that while students might be able to discuss the themes within *Of Mice and Men* (Steinbeck, 1937/1993) or symbolism in *The Scarlet Letter* (1850/1965/1986), they often miss the larger thematic connections between multiple texts and the world around them. Indeed, in many traditional high school English classrooms, young adult literature and other kinds of texts might not have a place at all, as

teachers may feel that the literary canon must take precedence.

Reliance on reading one text at a time might serve a specific purpose in curricula; however, it not only limits the amount of reading students do, but it also precludes a rich and diverse reading experience. Many teachers are currently concerned about "close reading" and "text complexity"; however, it should be noted that the emphasis in the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) on close reading and text complexity does not by default mean that the teaching of close reading must be accomplished by using one text at a time or just one kind of text at a time (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices and Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010).

Instead of just focusing on the thematic development or interpretation in one text, we should want students to interpret how several authors across several media interpret the same theme or topic (CCSS—RL.9–10-7; CCSS—RL.11–12.7). Students should be able to see how broader themes speak across multiple texts—from information-based, to poetry, to fiction, to film—so they can connect these themes to issues in their worlds. By providing students with teaching units that include a variety of text sources, both canonical and YA literature, including print- and screen-based, students can gain even more powerful reading experiences and insight about multiple perspectives and experiences, and in turn, become critical readers who can analyze as well as make connections across different kinds of texts. Of course, as people are doing more reading from a screen, with all of the multimodal elements therein, another benefit of this

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kind of exposure to a broad variety of texts in English classrooms is the enhancement of the increasingly screen-based reading experience—one that is increasingly intertextual in nature (Semali, 2002).

Furthermore, as many teachers are reexamining their English curricula in light of the Common Core State Standards, we hope a dialogue begins that includes certain questions: How do some texts become privileged in schools? How can we incorporate YA literature into the "traditional" English language arts curriculum? How can we provide students with robust reading experiences? How do we create intertextual connections in the English language arts curriculum? How can we challenge students, both individually and collaboratively, to consider multiple perspectives and interpretations of themes across different modes of communication?

Addressing these questions and creating meaningful reading opportunities in middle and high school classrooms are not new. Educators such as Harvey Daniels, Joan Kaywell, Don Gallo, Sarah Herz, and Daria Plumb have been integral voices in establishing the foundation for this work. These authors have long argued for the importance of literature being relevant and meaningful to young adult readers. They have also provided insight into pedagogical practices that support engagement and motivation as students grow as readers. For example, Harvey Daniels's work (2002) surrounding literature has been integral in helping teachers understand how to include multiple texts through instructional approaches, such as literature circles. He has demonstrated how literature circles can foster collaboration, stimulate critical thinking, and help students comprehend literature.

Other educators have authored professional books to promote student engagement with canonical literature using young adult literature as a bridge, and they have provided pedagogical practices that support these connections (Beach, Appleman, Hynds, & Wilhelm, 2011; Bucher & Hinton, 2010; Bushman & Haas, 2006; Herz & Gallo, 2005; Kaywell, 1997; Nilsen & Donelson, 2009). Sarah Herz and Don Gallo's (2005) book, *From Hinton to Hamlet*, provides a theoretical overview and specific instructional practices for thematically connecting young adult literature and canonical literature. And, of course, there are also many recent works demonstrating the motivating power of allowing students to read and write using a variety

of new media (see Calo, Woolard-Ferguson, & Koitz, 2013; Castek & Beach, 2013; Day, 2010; Kist, 2005 for just a few examples).

Despite this work, many high school English language arts classrooms still rely on teaching one paper-based text at a time. With the current emphasis on text complexity, close reading, and rigor, we are concerned that many teachers feel pressured to focus solely on the instruction of a few canonical texts throughout the school year. And yet, we encourage educators not only to continue to implement sound pedagogical practices but also to find room within the Standards to support the instructional practices they know will continue to develop young adults as readers. We remind educators that while implementing the Common Core State Standards, there is also a need for middle and high school students to make connections across texts. Preparing students to be career- and college-ready means teaching them how to be critical readers of many kinds of texts.

> **How can we challenge students, both individually and collaboratively, to consider multiple perspectives and interpretations of themes across different modes of communication?**

As teacher educators, we believe one way to negate the overuse of the traditional canonical literature unit is to prepare our preservice teachers with experiences and knowledge about pedagogical practices that include multiple texts and reading opportunities for students. In our methods courses, we introduce Linked Text Sets to provide preservice teachers with firsthand knowledge about how to create instructional units encompassing a range of both print and non-print texts for use in their future classrooms (Elish-Piper, Wold, & Schwingendorf, 2014). Although our work is focused on preservice teachers, we believe that there are implications for inservice teachers who would like to incorporate Linked Text Sets in the high school English language arts classroom. With the ever-increasing requirements, such as Standard Growth Measures (SGMs) and CCSS requirements, Linked Text Sets provide K–12 language arts instructors with opportunities to link literature analysis and writing samples from a wide range of media into one

assignment. Through the use of Linked Text Sets, we can assess several of our SGMs in an efficient manner that is also extremely relevant to the variety of ways people read and write today.

Linked Text Sets

A text set is a collection of texts (usually 5–15 texts) that connect in some way (Short, Harste, & Burke, 1996). Traditionally, text sets have been print-based; however, Linked Text Sets expand the notion of "text" by encouraging both print (written) and nonprint (e.g., music, movie clips) (Wold & Elish-Piper, 2009). This extension allows readers to experience a multimodal range of texts (CCSS—R1.11–12.7), such as websites, video, music, art, graphic novels, young adult novels, nonfiction, plays, poetry, and picturebooks (Mathis, 2002; Wold & Elish-Piper, 2009). In addition, the students can receive ongoing feedback about their writing and interpretations (CCSS—W11–12.6) from the teacher using multiple forms of representation.

> **The goal is for each text to address the particular theme or question, thus providing students with multiple kinds of texts that invite them to explore universal issues.**

Linked Text Sets address themes and essential questions and can relate to a single theme (e.g., the American Dream), a topic (e.g., identity), or seek to answer a particular question (e.g., What defines a hero?). In addition to focusing on thematic elements, the teacher and students can also look at the ways in which each medium provides different opportunities to address the theme or question.

In order to create Linked Text Sets, teachers must first consider the purposes for students' reading. This becomes the organizational framework for units, allowing the teacher to design the Linked Text Sets. First, teachers select an anchor text, which all students read. This text can be fiction or nonfiction, canonical or young adult literature. Second, students should have the opportunity to select a book that provides insight into the essential question or theme (CCSS—RI. 9–10.2; CCSS—RL 11–12.2). Similar to the anchor text, these can be canonical or young adult

titles. It is important for students to select books they want to read. Depending on the essential question or theme, teachers might have lists of suggested readings. The goal is for students to have books based on interests and reading levels and related to the theme. Third, teachers find relevant screen-based texts, including movies, television, YouTube clips, and social networking sites (CCSS—RL. 9–10.7; 11–12.7; CCSS—SL. 9–10.5; 11–12.2). Fourth, teachers should select supplemental informational or nonfiction texts that are of high interest, short, and accessible (CCSS—RI. 9–10.7; 11–12.7). These might include news articles, commentaries, speeches, opinion editorials, and excerpts from biographies, as the inclusion of nonfiction texts is, of course, a major thrust of the Common Core. Finally, additional sources might include theatrical pieces, visual art, political cartoons, and charts or graphs.

It is important to remember that none of these texts should be privileged over others because each text has a specific purpose for its inclusion into the Linked Text Set. The goal is for each text to address the particular theme or question, thus providing students with multiple kinds of texts that invite them to explore universal issues.

Benefits of Linked Text Sets

Linked Text Sets offer numerous benefits and are certainly appropriate with the implementation of the Common Core State Standards.

Reading and Writing Are Now Increasingly Multimodal in Nature

Students need to acquire skills in reading and writing in multiple forms throughout their school careers, both on screen and on paper, and using Linked Text Sets encourages students to go back and forth across various texts, emphasizing intertextuality (McCormick, 2011). Intertextuality refers to the process of making connections between other texts to facilitate the construction of meaning of new texts (Semali, 2002). Situated within a multimodal (multiple sign system) framework, a "text" can mean any mode of communication, such as a play, a song, a piece of art, a poem, or a dance. Working within a multimodal framework encourages intertextuality because students must make connections between multiple texts.

It also helps students construct new meaning through transmediation, which is the translation between and among sign systems (Suhor, 1984). Transmediation helps students think generatively and reflectively because it provides multiple opportunities for students to create connections that might not have been there while learning in a single sign system (Siegel, 2006). Transmediation also assists students in finding continuity in meaning (Smagorinsky & Coppock, 1994), represented holistically in Linked Text Sets.

Student Choice and Voice Need to Be Honored in English Classrooms

Using whole-class texts seems to ignore recent studies that find a link between textual variety and increased student engagement (see above and also Gibson, 2010; Gomes & Carter 2010; Vasudevan, 2010); improved comprehension of complex content (van der Veen, 2012); and even enriched capacity for performing literary analysis (Lewis, 2011). Although all students read the same anchor text in a Linked Text Set, there are many opportunities for students to have choices in reading materials. With choice, students are able to engage in content at a deeper level through their chosen medium of reading.

Ultimately, variety is a key tenet of Linked Text Sets. With access to a variety of texts, students repeatedly encounter universal issues and themes found in these texts. By connecting texts to universal themes, student interest piques, since the reading is not so focused on one text, but rather centers on the bigger picture, thus connecting the texts to students' lives. This connection is what is often missing in classrooms, which is surprising considering evidence that substantiates the value of personal relevance for students (Gallagher, 2009; Wilhelm, 1997). Intertextual relationships can help students notice similarities and hone in on what is not shared between titles, which allows them to recognize different perspectives and limitations of texts centered on a theme or topic (Berg, 2011).

CCSS Require Students to Be Adept at Deep Analysis across a Variety of Media Texts

According to the Common Core State Standards, in order for students to become college- and career-ready, various works of literature should be introduced throughout their education (although it's worth noting that the Core does not prescribe a list or a certain order of texts). As students read YA literature or canonical texts in their classes, they should have access to accompanying texts to help build, center, and showcase common themes between these books and other media. By making connections with these accompanying texts, students can better "analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take" (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices and the Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010). Linked Text Sets also offer opportunities for students and educators to help develop and probe underlying themes that might be complex and unavailable through a single reading of a canonical classic. If students can build schematic background and link their understandings of what is in the canon to their own interests and lives, it might make the classic piece of literature more accessible and provide an overall deeper, more powerful learning experience (Kist, 2013).

> **Variety is a key tenet of Linked Text Sets. With access to a variety of texts, students repeatedly encounter universal issues and themes found in these texts.**

Embracing Multiple Texts Impacts Cognitive and Sociocultural Elements of Learning

Not allowing students to read and write in multiple forms has a negative cognitive impact in that it limits human thought (Eisner, 1997; Tishman & Perkins, 1997). There have also been sociopolitical rationales for embracing a broad spectrum of texts in classrooms. From the onset of the "new" literacies, many have argued that a broader palette of literacies is an essential component to creating a student-centered, democratic classroom (Willinsky, 1990). More recently, the provision of a variety of modes of communication has been championed as essential to bridging the divide between out-of-school and in-school literacies (McLean, 2011). Using Linked Text Sets encourages students to foster independent thought and action, "avoid stereotypical thinking, get exposure to non-dominant views, and hear voices often silenced in the

school curriculum" (Moss, 2011, p. 46).

Linked Text Sets in Action

We have seen the power of Linked Text Sets in our work as former middle and high school English teachers and in our current work with preservice teachers. Linked Text Sets are a priority in our teacher education program. During their junior year, our students take two courses—Teaching Literature in Secondary Schools and Multimodal Literacies—in conjunction with a five-week field experience. Our preservice teachers create Linked Text Sets to be used during their field experiences or future student teaching placements. The preservice teachers often select texts that have been taught in classrooms they observed or texts they plan to teach in the future.

To create their Linked Text Sets, the students select a topic, theme, or essential question as a way to frame their reading of the texts and facilitate connections between texts. Then they select young adult literature, multiple digital media sources, nonfiction works, and visual arts that also address the topic, theme, or essential question. Over the past two semesters, we have been impressed with the richness of intertextuality that our preservice teachers are able to achieve. They were able to share and discuss thematic concepts through an array of multiple sign systems, such as music clips, movie segments, YouTube links, and novel excerpts.

The following sections highlight Linked Text Sets created by two of our preservice teachers as potential models for inservice teachers and students. We provide an overview of their frameworks and the variety of texts they selected. We also highlight their learning during the creation of their Linked Text Sets. As teacher educators, our goals are for preservice teachers to experience instructional approaches that they will implement in their teaching. Our objective for the following examples is to provide models for topics, themes, and essential questions and an overview of the variety of texts that can be incorporated into a Linked Text Set.

The Bonds of Friendship
The first Linked Text Set (see Fig. 1) was framed around the idea that unlikely friendships can form strong bonds. James wrote, "It's hard not to think

Canonical Text
Steinbeck, J. (1937). *Of mice and men*. London, England: Penguin Books.

Young Adult Literature
Philbrick, R. (1993). *Freak the mighty*. New York, NY: Scholastic.

Nonfiction
Fowler, A. M. (n.d.). True friendship. *Teen Ink*. Retrieved from http://www.teenink.com/nonfiction/all/article/7835/True-Friendship/.

Destinyz, T. (n.d.). Online friendship—Latest norm of the century. *Teen Ink*. Retrieved from http://www.teenink.com/opinion/all/article/610614/Online-Friendship—Latest-Norm-of-The-Century/.

Moore, A. (n.d.). Teenagers and the importance of friends. *Global Post*. Retrieved from http://everydaylife.globalpost.com/teenagers-importance-friends-6135.html.

Digital Media
Birnbaum, R., & Mark, L. (Producers), & Johnson, M. S. (Director). (1998). *Simon Birch* [Motion picture]. Hollywood, CA: Hollywood Pictures.

Varrato, R. (2013, March 30). *Friendship in the age of Facebook: Rory Varrato at TEDxGrandviewAve* [Video file]. Retrieved from http://tedxtalks.ted.com/video/Friendship-in-the-Age-of-Facebo;search%3Atag%3A%22tedxgrandviewave%22.

Cjhhh93. (2013, July 26). *Video number fifty-one: The importance of friendship*. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nAeagnGnuMI.

King, C. (1971). You've got a friend [Recorded by James Taylor]. On *Mud slide slim* [CD]. Burbank, CA: Warner Bros.

Withers, B. (1971). Lean on me. On *Still Bill* [CD]. Los Angeles, CA: Sussex.

Stewart, C., Nash, T., Harrell, T., & Carter, S. (2007). Umbrella [Recorded by Rihanna]. On *Good girl gone bad* [CD]. New York, NY: Def Jam.

Brel, J., & McKuen, R. (1961). Seasons in the sun [Recorded by Terry Jacks]. On *5* [CD]. New York, NY: Bell Records.

Figure 1. Linked Text Set for the theme "Friendships"

about this statement while reading *Freak the Mighty* (Philbrick, 1993) or *Of Mice and Men* (Steinbeck, 1937/1993), two stories that follow the friendships between two very different people." James not only saw a thematic connection, but also noted both novels have an "emotional" ending, which is why he also included the film *Simon Birch* (Baldecchi, Birnbaum, & Mark, 1998) in this Linked Text Set. James highlighted that three of the main characters pass away at the end of each text: George shoots Lennie, Freak passes away from a medical condition in which his heart is too big for his body, and Simon dies while saving a student from drowning during a bus accident. James explained, "These texts are centered around what it means to be a friend. You go through their struggles and triumphs. And you accept their flaws." He noted that the tragic ending of these characters' lives might help young adults consider what it means to value the important people in our lives and the daily acts we do to let them know they are valued. He wrote, "These books reinforce the idea that even though someone passes, they are not truly gone from your life."

In addition to these three texts, James selected the songs "You've Got a Friend" by James Taylor (King, 1971), "Lean on Me" by Bill Withers (1971), "Umbrella" by Rhianna (Stewart, Nash, Harrell, & Carter, 2007), and "Seasons in the Sun" by Terry Jacks (Brel & McKuen, 1961). He reasoned that music is an important part of many people's lives and explained, "During my field experience, I would always hear kids singing and rapping in the hallways, so I really think including music would appeal to high-school-aged students." James also discussed creating an 8Tracks (www.8Tracks.com) collaborative playlist so that each of his students could contribute music for a complete class playlist.

In order to incorporate nonfiction, James found pieces from *Teen Ink*, a literary magazine written by and for young adults. He selected two pieces: "True Friendship" by a young adult named Amanda who describes an emotional conversation between two friends, and an opinion piece, "Online Friendship— Latest Norm of the Century," which describes how friendships are forged with social media. He included these pieces because he thought they not only contributed to the Linked Text Set's theme, but he also liked the idea of including pieces written by young adults. Finally, he explored how the Ted Talk "Friendship

in the Age of Facebook" could be used to explore the nature of friendships and how we engage with friends both face-to-face and in social media (Varrato, 2013).

Developing and sustaining friendships are critical experiences and are particularly important during adolescence. James's goal was for students to "look deeply inside of themselves" to consider who they are as friends and how they create and maintain friendships. He hoped this would lead to an in-depth discussion surrounding relationships and friendships.

Outcasts

Sara began her Linked Text Set (see Fig. 2) by making an initial connection between the canonical text *The Scarlet Letter* by Nathanial Hawthorne (1850/1965/1986) and the modern-day young adult novel *Speak* by Laurie Halse Anderson (1999). Sara believed that, at their core, both novels dealt with the central premise: What does it mean to be an outcast?

She chose the theme of being an outcast because it connected well with the texts and is applicable to high school students, many of whom might have experienced being an outcast at some point in their lives. Initially, she began by marking direct connections between the two main characters—Hester Prynne (*Scarlet Letter*) and Melinda Sordino (*Speak*)—and this thematic concept. For example, Sarah noted that Hester's feelings of "misery upon the heap of shame" (Hawthorne, 1986, p. 54) for her "crime of adultery" were very similar to Melinda's feelings of despair when she was hit with "a lump of potatoes and gravy" (Anderson, 1999, p. 8) on the first day of school—a penalty for contacting the police about a class party. Sara acknowledged that the way these characters experience "isolation and embarrassment from society" was something to which most high school students could relate.

To expand the list, Sara found informative, short, nonfiction resources on the PBS website (see PBS, "Gossip and Rumors," 2012), including an article about why people gossip and strategies for handling rumors. She also found a feature article written by a teenaged reporter about his experience with cyberbullying. Sara chose these resources because they were specifically written for young adults. She also reasoned that since the pieces were short, students could read both pieces and engage in a discussion framed around the question: "What should be done about

Canonical Text

Hawthorne, N. (1986). *The scarlet letter* (3rd ed.). Boston, MA: Ticknor, Reed, & Fields. (Original publication 1850).

Young Adult Literature

Anderson, L. H. (2003). *Speak.* New York, NY: Scholastic.

Brown, J. (2009). *Hate list*. New York, NY: Little, Brown Books for Young Readers.

Nonfiction

Rinaldo, D. (2011). Bullying takes center stage. *Choices Magazine, 27*(1), 4–7.

Articles about Bullies:

New York Times website— http://topics.nytimes .com/topics/reference/timestopics/subjects/ b/bullies/index.html.

Cloud, J. (2010, Oct. 24). When bullying turns deadly: Can it be stopped? *Time Magazine.* Retrieved from http://content.time.com/time/ magazine/article/0,9171,2024210,00.html.

Poetry

Dickinson, E. (1976). The loneliness one dare not sound. In T. Johnson (Ed.), *The complete poems of Emily Dickinson* (p. 379). Boston, MA: Little, Brown.

Digital Media

http://pbskids.org/itsmylife/friends/rumors/index .html

Anderson, L. H. (2009). *Speak* poem. New York, NY: Penguin Young Readers. Retrieved from http://www.youtube.com/watch?v = ic1c_ MaAMOI.

Lucy Political Cartoon. (2012, May 14). "Bullying." Retrieved from http://neveryetmelted.com/ 2012/05/14/bullying/.

Cypress Ranch High School Anti-Bullying Lip Dub. (2012, March 29). Who Do U Think U R? Retrieved from http://www.youtube.com/ watch?v = waAqJ6727Hk.

The Bully Project. (2010, May 30). Bully. *YouTube.* Retrieved from http://www.youtube.com/ watch?v = PBymTVjBYHg&feature = related.

Figure 2. Linked Text Set for the theme "Outcasts"

cyberbullying?"

Also included were video clips, such as the YouTube clip from Cypress Ranch High School that features the entire school participating in a video about anti-bullying. Sara thought the videos would not only be engaging, they might also spark conversations about particular policies that schools should have in place regarding bullying. Knowing the power of music in many young adults' lives, Sara found a website that connects popular music to canonical literature (corndancer.com). She noticed bands like Mudvayne and Tool have songs that reference *The Scarlet Letter* (1850/1965/1986). Finally, poetry was explored as a complement to the Linked Text Set. For example, she connected Laurie Halse Anderson's work with Emily Dickinson's poetry. She thought Anderson's poem "Listen" (2010) would provide a powerful glimpse into how other adolescent readers have connected to the book *Speak,* and then she considered comparing Anderson's "Listen" to Dickinson's poem "The Loneliness One Dare Not Sound" (1976) to emphasize not only feelings of isolation and pain but also hope and resilience. These discussions led to considerations about how certain people find resilience and strength even when considered outcasts in society.

In addition to using Linked Text Sets to make connections from canonical literature to modern-day texts and societal issues, Sara also brainstormed how multimedia links could be used for middle and high school students to demonstrate their understanding. For instance, she shared that Sketchfu is a resource that would "allow students to draw ideas as they come to them and then publish the drawings so that the other students can see the way that the idea grew" (it should be noted this site is no longer active). She also considered how students might create video projects similar to the Cypress Ranch High School video.

In the end, preservice teachers recognized how Linked Text Sets could benefit middle and high school students with different learning styles. In addition, using multimodal instruction gave preservice teachers the ability to hone in on their creativity and ingenuity.

Ways to Implement Linked Text Sets in the English Classroom

To incorporate Linked Text Sets into the curriculum, we suggest teachers first model the process of how

to connect universal theme topics across different media. For each section of the anchor text, the teacher will model how to find the theme topics or universal questions. For example, for the play *A Raisin in the Sun* (Hansberry, 2009), the teacher could begin by teaching students how to find central theme topics or universal questions in the play. As the students read through the play, the teacher could begin each daily lesson with a different text set that highlights a theme topic from each act.

For instance, the teacher might start an Act I lesson about the theme topic of Dreams with the poems "I Hear America Singing" by Walt Whitman, "I, Too," by Langston Hughes, and "Harlem [Dream Deferred]" by Langston Hughes. For an Act II discussion on the theme topic of Racism, the teacher might show clips from movies like *The Great Debaters* (Washington, 2007), pictures from the Jim Crow era, slave narratives, or newspaper articles. Finally, for Act III, the teacher might start with the TED talk by Angela Lee Duckworth: "The Key to Success? Grit" (Duckworth, 2013). After the students watch the clip, they can compare and contrast how Ms. Duckworth's interpretation of perseverance compares to Lorraine Hansberry's depiction. After the students analyze each text set, they should be able to interpret, analyze, and write about how the linked text and core authors discuss the theme topics in their works and the similarities and differences across types of media.

Once students have experience thinking about how to make thematic connections, they can begin forming their own Linked Texts Sets. It is important to note that although we suggest teachers select the anchor text and theme, topic, or essential question, we encourage teachers to allow students to select the remaining texts included in the Linked Text Set. Once students

have read the class- and self-selected novels, they can work in groups to brainstorm and research other media that highlight the central theme topic. See Figure 3 for a scoring guide that assesses the Linked Text Set.

Once these Linked Text Sets are uploaded to a teacher-approved online platform (perhaps a learning management system such as Moodle or Edmodo, or even a teacher-created wiki), the students can spend the final days of the unit writing an analysis of how these texts all connect together around the thematic elements. Students might choose to write their interpretations in blog posts, journal entries, or formal expository writing. Whichever writing style is selected, students should remember to include direct quotations

Name(s):	/100
Class Novel:_____ **Companion Novel:** _____	/10
Theme Topic/ Universal Question: _____ **3 direct quotations connected with theme/question in class novel:** **3 direct quotations connected with theme/question in companion novel:**	/10
3 additional texts: **(10 pts each)** _____ movie clip(s) _____ poem(s), music (lyrics and audio) _____ speech(es) (TED talks, political debates, etc.) _____ art (sculptures, graphic art, historical pictures, etc.) _____ information-based texts, reviews, critiques _____ other (check first!)	/30
Analysis Demonstrating How Texts Fit with Theme/Essential Question: **(10 pts each)** _____ Strong Support/ Clear Rationale _____ Mechanics, Usage, Grammar, and Style (MUGS) _____ Clear Theme Statement/ Universal Question	/30
Evaluation: **(10 pts each)** Survey/Peer Review of other Groups	/20
Comments:	

Figure 3. Scoring guide of Linked Text Set

from each text set. After the projects are complete, the teacher might provide time for the students to present their findings to the class or allow a class "sharing session," in which all of the students can read or hear about their classmates' connections. As the students read their peers' Linked Text Sets, they could also complete a peer review critique sheet to document the new perspectives they have gained from their classmates.

After completing the project, the students should have deeper understandings about how to make thematic connections across different media. And, it is hoped, they will come to realize that all texts—whether they come from the canon, a classic book, young adult literature, a newspaper, or YouTube—have merit and worth as contributors to the expression of one or more universal themes.

Conclusion

The current reading model found in many high school English classrooms deserves closer attention. Yes, reading a great work of literature connects readers to an author or a particular time period temporarily, but if we continue to teach literature one work at a time, students are likely to miss the relationships texts have with each other as well as how these texts fit into the grander scheme of an essential question or theme. As noted earlier, educators such as Kaywell, Gallo, Herz, and Plumb have argued for the importance of incorporating young adult literature into the high school English classroom and have explored pedagogical practices to support adolescents as readers. Linked Text Sets support their work by recognizing the issues of privileging canonical literature and build upon this work by broadening notions of "text" to include both print and non-print texts.

We know that Linked Text Sets provide intertextual connections that build and mature common understandings of themes and issues; what is even more important is that the variety of formats and genres provide numerous opportunities to reach students in different ways. These multiple perspectives generate richer and deeper instances of understanding. By reading and engaging in texts via Linked Text Sets, there is no privileging of a particular title or author over another. The students can see the value and connections between the world and YA literature at least as

well as if they had read a piece from the canon, which encourages all formats and voices to be heard in the classroom. Using Linked Text Sets embraces powerful reading, thinking, and learning experiences for students.

Kristine E. Pytash is an assistant professor in Literacy Education at Kent State University where she co-directs the Integrated Language Arts program. Her research interests include writing instruction, young adult literature, and literacy instruction for youth in juvenile detention centers. Kristine has also published in Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy, Voices from the Middle, Middle School Journal, The Reading Teacher, *and* Ohio Journal of English Language Arts. *She can be reached at kpytash@ kent.edu.*

Katherine E. Batchelor is currently an assistant professor in literacy at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio. She is also a National Writing Project Teacher Consultant and National Board–certified teacher in Early Adolescence/ English Language Arts. Prior to teaching at the college level, she was a middle school reading and language arts teacher for ten years in Florida and California. Katherine has also published in The Reading Teacher, Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy, Voices from the Middle, Middle School Journal, The Clearing House, Dragon Lode, Indiana English, Kansas English, *and* Ohio Journal of English Language Arts. *She can be reached at batcheke@miamioh.edu.*

William Kist is an associate professor at Kent State University, *where he teaches literacy methods courses for preservice teachers in English Education. Having presented nationally and internationally with three books (*New Literacies in Action, The Socially Networked Classroom, *and* The Global School*) and over 50 articles and book chapters to his credit, Bill also writes for* The Cleveland Plain Dealer *as a member of the National Book Critics Circle and may be found online at* www.williamkist.com.

Kristen Srsen has been a teacher and theatre program advisor/director at Bay High School in Bay Village, Ohio, for the past 10 years. Currently, she also is pursuing her PhD in Curriculum and Instruction at Kent State University.

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Meghan E. **Barnes**

Challenging Adolescence through Hybrid Learning Spaces

I was tired of hearing my name. After four years of teaching middle school language arts, I was becoming wary of just how reliant students were on me to give them explicit directions about what to read, what to think about the reading, what to remember about the text, and how to respond. Yet, in the hallways and during lunch, I was overhearing rich conversations among students where they referenced their self-selected out of school texts (i.e., TV shows, music, movies, and novels) as if they were part of their lives. Why weren't these robust conversations making their way into my classroom? Why did the lunch monitors get to overhear conversations about Nick's impetus for quitting law school and the long-lasting effects of that choice in *New Girl*, while I was stuck with "Will the test be multiple choice?" during language arts?

In an effort to slow my progression toward a mental breakdown and also to break down the barriers between students' "real" and "school" worlds, I decided to overhaul my literature curriculum and allow students to select all of their own reading material and subsequent response methods in my class. This emphasis on student choice was not groundbreaking in a middle school literature classroom. For years, I, like so many other language arts teachers, crafted reading instruction around literature circles (Daniels, 2002) and reading workshops (Atwell, 1998). I worked diligently to select a variety of books from a range of reading levels so that I could best group students around appropriate texts. I gave students time on Fridays to read their books in class, and I provided them with creative opportunities to reflect on their reading.

The implementation of literature circles and workshop model approaches to literacy instruction is often lauded for ushering in a shift from the more traditional text-centered literature classroom, with its emphasis on memorization and regurgitation of text analysis, toward a more student-centered one where student choice and student response are made central. Adult reading groups often serve as the template for literature circles in the middle school classroom (Atwell, 1998; Daniels, 2002). Teachers use their own experiences with reading, drawing upon their casual discussions about texts around glasses of wine in the living room with friends, as they try to provide students with space for meaningful discussions of books during class.

Atwell (1998) goes so far as to suggest that "Reading workshop becomes an invitation to grow up into an adult world that's cool" (p. 48). Such literacy instruction relies on an underlying theme of "treating students as adults" that I find admirable and worth emulation in my own teaching. But there is also an undercurrent that adolescents aren't quite whole yet, that their experiences aren't quite as important because they aren't the experiences of adulthood. Instead, I wanted to encourage students to look at their experiences for their merit in that moment, rather than for some imagined future potential. I learned that I wanted to push my students to do more. I wanted literacy to serve as a tool for critique and for students to see literacy as a vehicle for challenging and changing dominant power structures (Moje, 2002; Powell, 1999), rather than simply practicing for and imitating adulthood.

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Adolescents exist in a world that demands them to construct complex and hybrid identities daily (Moje, 2002). These hybrid identities represent a borderland where myriad forces—technology; mass media; popular culture; multiple disciplines; personal interests; and a variety of cultural, racial, sexual, and economic backgrounds and considerations collide and inform what it means to be "literate" and what counts as "text." As a middle school teacher eager to engage students meaningfully and critically with each other and with a variety of self-selected young adult texts, I worked with my students to create a hybrid space that recognized their literacy practices outside of the school walls. What I found was that issues of adolescent identity and portrayal became central to the classroom. As they began to analyze text more critically, students at once recognized their differences and similarities to one another and ultimately developed deeper notions of solidarity, individuality, and agency in the learning process.

> By viewing adolescents as a homogenized group and "holding to sources of authority," teachers unintentionally diminish opportunity for students to develop individual agency in the classroom.

Confident Characterizations

At any given point, adolescents are navigating a large number of spaces and experiences, all of which intersect and interact to construct their identities (Moje, 2002). As a result, adolescent identity is in constant flux—it is fluid, context-dependent, and socially and linguistically mediated (Lewis, Enciso, & Moje, 2007). Vygotsky (1934/1987) recognized this fluidity as a ripe space for learning, as thinking becomes a social activity informed by social practices, contexts, experiences, and interactions, rather than an isolated endeavor (Wertsch, 1991).

Instead of entering classrooms recognizing the fluid nature of identity—and adolescent identity in particular—many novice teachers enter middle and high school classrooms armed with confident characterizations (Lesko, 2012) of their students and prepared to make instructional and content-based choices that align with these narrow understandings. Lesko identifies four "confident characterizations" commonly used to define adolescents: coming of age, controlled by raging hormones, peer-oriented, and represented by age. Viewing adolescents as coming of age adopts a deficit approach to identity, as youth are defined in terms of adulthood and positioned as ever-dependent on and striving for that adulthood (Beach, Appleman, Hynds, & Wilhelm, 2006; Lesko, 2012). An emphasis on hormones defines adolescents as emotional, unpredictable, confused, and sexual. Peer-oriented characterizations of adolescents remove individuality and reinforce youth dependence on peers and adults, alike. Finally, representing adolescents by age alone draws forth stereotypes about youth as "developing bodies, strange music, [and] moody distancing" (Lesko, 2012, p. 4). These characterizations encourage teachers to adopt behaviors and make pedagogical choices built on stereotypes alone.

Considered by many to be a social construction in itself, the recognition of adolescence as an age group was "spurred by industrialization and the concomitant need to prepare children via schooling for a particular kind of workplace" (Moje, 2002, p. 112). This emphasis on adolescence as a perpetual state of *becoming* and *in preparation* has become pervasive throughout the media, as well as teacher education programs. As Lewis and Petrone (2010) found in their work with preservice teachers, literature selection is often based on titles that teachers believe include "real" characters, i.e., characters who fulfill or somehow reflect their conception of adolescence—often replicating Lesko's (2012) confident characterizations. These preservice teachers then enter middle and high school classrooms and apply this same method of text selection.

Such behaviors are not only based on assumptions and stereotyping, but also encourage a superficial connection with and understanding of individual students. Thus, teachers become guilty of "othering" their students by "creating and maintaining distances between them in the service of holding to sources of authority embedded in stereotyped views of adolescence" (Sarigianides, 2012, p. 228). By viewing adolescents as a homogenized group and "holding to sources of authority," teachers unintentionally diminish opportunity for students to develop individual agency in the classroom. When teachers make text

selections based on a socially constructed view of adolescence, there is less chance that the varied individual experiences and lives of students will be sought after and discussed in the classroom.

In addition to removing both individual and collective student agency and power, teachers indoctrinated into a deficit model of adolescence through teacher education programs and/or media socialization become so engrossed in gaining and maintaining *control* (Atwell, 1998; Beach, Appleman, Hynds, & Wilhelm, 2006; Finder, 1998/1999; Moje, 2002) that they fail to recognize the individuality of students in their classrooms. When individual student identities replace preoccupations with control, *hybrid learning spaces* can be imagined where students can construct their own learning environment within the confines and affordances of the classroom, the school, and curricular expectations. Specifically, I drew from Moll and Whitmore (1993) to identify the following as essential for creating hybrid learning spaces that challenge the confident characterizations of adolescents in my classroom: 1) student choice in multiple aspects of the learning experience, 2) student-generated questions, and 3) shared power between teacher and student where the student is trusted as a learner.

Context

I implemented a critical student choice approach to literature instruction in a middle school language arts curriculum over a period of three years and was able to move almost completely away from traditional literature circles by my fifth year of teaching. Located in the capital city of a Southeastern state, the K–8 charter school where I worked as a 7th-and 8th-grade literature teacher enrolled a maximum of 57 students at each grade level at the time of my teaching. Of these students, the overwhelming majority were European American, with approximately 10% of students identifying as African American, Latin@, or Asian American. Like many charter schools, this school did not provide transportation or lunch to students. Instead, parents were responsible for finding transportation for their children and providing all meals. While the majority of students enrolled in the school were from middle or upper-class families, many were not. For these students, the school did work hard to diminish financial barriers to field trips, transportation, meals, and participation in afterschool events and sports.

The conservative values of the parent population at this school are worth noting and were evident in a number of ways. First, parents organized a Bible study for students each Thursday morning before school. While the study did not take place directly on school grounds, it was held at a local fast-food restaurant within walking distance of the school and attended by about 60% of the middle school students. Further, the parents often requested book lists from me ahead of my teaching so that they could pre-read books to ensure that they were appropriate for their children. I was told repeatedly that fantasy as a genre should not be taught because it would confuse students' Christian values.

> When individual student identities replace preoccupations with control, *hybrid learning spaces* can be imagined where students can construct their own learning environment.

The parents at the charter school were especially active in their children's education and the maintenance of traditional pedagogical practices and conservative values. In addition to their physical presence in the school, these parents worked diligently to stay abreast of the curriculum, texts, and class assignments. Because of parents' wariness toward what could be seen as "progressive" teaching practices, I find my success with a critical student-centered approach to literacy instruction to have great potential for educators in school settings with less parent involvement and oversight in academic choices.

The Essentials

What's the right answer?
When's this due?
Why do we have to do this?

As teachers, especially those who have taught middle school, we've all heard these questions. Not only was I tired of them, I was frustrated by what they represented: my students' absolute dependence on adult direction. I wanted to give my students agency in the classroom and make them more active participants in their own education, but their reliance on traditional, teacher-centered classroom practices was getting in the way of this. In addition, I wanted the

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> **As a teacher, I have learned that people in education are wary of change. Leading this charge against change, surprisingly, were the students and their parents.**

content and assignments of my course to challenge traditional notions of adolescence and for students to develop solidarity, individuality, and agency around self-selected texts.

To shift the power dynamics in my classroom so that the voices and interests of students were present, I needed to establish common ground in terms of expectations and reading material, to provide student choice in reading and assignments, and to make reading time a priority during school hours.

Establishing Common Ground

As a teacher, I have learned that people in education are wary of change. Leading this charge against change, surprisingly, were the students and their parents. At the mere mention of "student choice," there was uproar. Students wanted to know exactly how many books they should read and how long each book should be; parents were concerned with the level of text their child should read and how they would find these books. To put their minds at ease, I created reading contracts for both students and their parents and regularly used anchor texts throughout the year.

Reading Contracts

For the purposes of my class, I drew upon Donalyn Miller's (2009) work as I created reading contracts that included information about the genres from which students should draw their book choices, the number of books to be read for the year, and how students would respond to their books. Perhaps the most daunting task for both students and me was determining the number of books to be read. Rather than providing a set number for all students, I gathered information about students' reading habits from previous teachers and their parents and then met individually with each student to determine an appropriate goal for the year.

Most of my 7th graders chose to read around 25 books for the year. Before students went home for winter break, I met individually with students to

check-in on their reading goal, and to renegotiate their number, if necessary. These meetings, as well as my one-on-one meetings with students during reading time throughout the semester, helped me keep students on track, learn more about their reading habits, experiences, and preferences, and make appropriate book recommendations to them.

Genre-based Anchor Texts

Finding common literary ground with students (and between students) was essential for cultivating classroom community while also addressing curricular standards. Over the course of the school year, I found many ways to create conversation around shared texts. Like many literature teachers, I organized my school year around genre studies. For instance, I began the year with a science fiction unit. During this time, students selected science fiction books as their independent reading material, while I led them in mini-lessons, seminars, and discussions that encouraged critical analysis of real-world technological advances during instructional time. I was able to establish common ground for my students and incorporate high-interest nonfiction texts into my curriculum by including articles about such topics as Google glass and electronic skin.

Supported Student Choice

Student choice became the bedrock of my teaching. After three years of teaching 12- and 13-year-olds, I was starting to see the truth behind Finders's (1998/1999) frustration that "adolescence is denied diversity" and that popular discourse around adolescence is driven by an assumed homogeneity (Finder, 1998/1999, p. 255). I knew my students had valuable stories to tell; they had unique experiences, interests, backgrounds, and identities that influenced their lives on a minute-to-minute basis outside of the classroom. Why should these stories be checked at my door?

I decided to provide student choice in book selection and response method, but I realized that these wide-open spaces could be overwhelming and counterproductive for some students. To allay those potential concerns, I provided resources that *could* aid them (if necessary) in book searches and project choices. At the beginning of each new genre study, I provided a list of recommended books to students, shared book trailers, invited other teachers and administrators into

the class to give book talks, and met individually with students to help them make appropriate choices.

Upon completing a book, students were expected to choose from eight assignment options. In addition, students could propose their own idea—an option that many students selected. I created assignment options that encouraged students to showcase their strengths, while also considering the myriad interests, talents, and out-of-school resources available to them. For instance, one option for students was to create a storybook (or children's book) version of their novel. A few students discovered an online tool called *Storybird* and used this, rather than traditional paper and pencil, to create their book. Other response options included filmed book trailers, character journals or blogs, poems/songs, and (my personal favorite) lunch with me where we could discuss the book together, casually. The point was to encourage students to find the best way to respond to or represent their novel—to feel a sense of ownership over their text and subsequent work.

Accountable Reading Time in Class

In his book, *Reading Reasons*, Kelly Gallagher (2003) shares that students who scored in the 98th percentile on standardized reading tests read an average of 90 minutes per day, or 4.7 million words each year. Conversely, students who scored in the 10th percentile on standardized reading tests read an average of 1.6 minutes per day, or 51,000 words each year. I will admit that I'm certainly wary of the perception that test scores provide a valid and definitive representation of students' critical thinking, reading, and writing skills. However, I couldn't help but read this information in Gallagher's book and examine my own classroom. At the time, I was providing almost no in-class reading time to students. Instead, I was using class time for test prep, grammar drills, and teacher-centered discussions. What message was I sending to my students? I certainly wasn't suggesting that reading was a valuable use of their school time, let alone their limited out-of-school time.

I decided that *showing* students what I believed was important would be much more effective than simply telling them. Each day at the beginning of class, I set a timer for 20 minutes, turned on jazz music, turned off the overhead fluorescent lights, and pulled out the pillows and yoga mats. Students spread out across the room, sitting under desks or near windows, lying down on the yoga mats—and together, we read. Most days, I met individually with students to read with them and to discuss their text. But some days, I modeled. I read the books they were recommending to me in rapid-fire succession.

After 20 minutes, students moved back to their desks and pulled out their reading journals. Each day, they started a new entry in which they recorded their book title, pages read, and the date. Then, they chose one question from a list of 20 to answer about the section of the book they read that day. We often used these questions as the jumping off point for our mini-lesson or class discussion for the day. I collected students' journals weekly and responded to their questions, focusing exclusively on content and building connections through my feedback.

Working within (and against) Constraints

It is important to note that I was not teaching without consideration of mandated curricular standards and administrative expectations and demands. In fact, the first year that I implemented this model of literacy instruction, I wrote a proposal and gave a presentation to my administration in which I detailed my plans for text selection and instruction. During that year, I also met regularly with my administration to share my work and review student progress. I will also mention that, in the first year of this student-centered model, I was only able to give students 20 minutes of in-class reading time each *week*, and I had to fight for those 20 minutes. However, as I developed more strategic systems for documentation and student accountability (through reading journals, my notes from student discussions, student responses to readings, etc.), I was able to convince my administration that more reading time in class was an essential component of the language arts classroom. Each year, I worked my way up until finally, in its third year, I had students reading for at least 20 minutes *every day* in class. We had come a long way from our mere 20 minutes a week!

As the students and I worked to create this hybrid space of student-led text selection and response, we simultaneously worked to merge unofficial and official realms of education, rather than replacing one with the other. That is, students were given the agency and power to make their own young adult text selections,

while I supplemented their in-class work with texts, discussions, and assignments that were, perhaps, more traditional in the eyes of my administration and parents and certainly more directly guided by standards. In this way, learning was applicable and meaningful to students, stakeholders, and myself and did not eliminate the role of district- and state-mandated curricular goals. In other words, rather than placing curriculum (or the teacher) at the center of the class, the personal experiences and interests of students were *negotiated into* the educational context.

> **Students were able to use texts to develop a sense of solidarity defined by their age rather than class, race, and gender, while also developing as individuals with agency in various contexts.**

After a few months spent actively building common ground, student choice, and in-class reading time into the curriculum, students' interactions with me and their peers began to change. Rather than spending class time discussing directions and expectations, students wanted to discuss their books. Class discussions became richer because students were drawing connections between their own novels and the supplemental readings we did together in class; they were building connections between their personal lives and the lives of characters; and they were building connections with one another by using story to find common ground. As students gained a greater sense of control and agency in the classroom and felt trusted as learners, they were able to move toward a *hybrid* space where their interests, experiences, and connections guided classroom practices and traditional boundaries blurred.

Solidarity, Individuality, and Agency

Not only did the format of the course, with its emphasis on student choice and reading time, challenge normative roles of teachers and students, the content of the young adult literature and subsequent discussions pushed students to critique these traditional roles as well. Through self-selected texts and response methods, students were able to examine the dominant

discourse and portrayals of their age group and then challenge these assumptions, find common ground, and learn more about the diversity that exists not only within the classroom, but within the concept and construct of adolescence, as well. Over the course of the school year, students were able to use texts to develop a sense of solidarity defined by their age rather than class, race, and gender, while also developing as individuals with agency in various contexts.

Solidarity

While, like Lewis and Petrone (2010) suggest, many teachers make text selections based on characters with whom they believe students will most closely identify, the solidarity that can be formed between diverse students when reading about and discussing these characters is equally important. In Carolyn Mackler's (2003) novel, *The Earth, My Butt, and Other Big Round Things,* 15-year-old Virginia Shreves lives in the shadow of her athletic, attractive, and intelligent college-age brother, Byron. In stark contrast to Byron, Virginia is overweight, an average student, and introverted. When Byron is accused of raping a fellow college student, Virginia learns that the only way to live her life is to stop defining herself in terms of those around her and to find and be true to herself.

The Earth, My Butt, and Other Big Round Things confronts head-on Lesko's (2012) confident characterization of adolescents as "coming of age"—a stance that defines adolescence in terms of adulthood—as Virginia learns to accept her family members and herself for who they are as individuals, rather than as a collective. Further, while Virginia maintains a close relationship with her distant friend through the Internet and develops a sexual relationship with Froggy, she does not depend on these relationships alone as she deals with her body image and the allegations against her brother.

In his video book review, 7th-grade student Wilson (all names are pseudonyms) was careful to mention that *The Earth, My Butt, and Other Big Round Things* is "not just for girls, also for boys." As Wilson and a few friends read and discussed the novel, they openly challenged Virginia's mother, finding Virginia, instead, to embody a more mature reaction to Byron's misconduct. Students built a sense of unity as they began to recognize "adult" characteristics in Virginia

and traditionally held stereotypes of adolescence in the behavior and thought processes of her mother.

Individuality

Similar to the sense of solidarity that developed around Mackler's novel, students evinced a growing comfort with and recognition of their own individuality as they read *Bronx Masquerade* by Nikki Grimes (2002). In the novel, 18 high school students challenge the concept of adolescence as a time of "coming of age" as they use poetry to tell their individual stories of fear, friendship, family, and, ultimately, hope. Characters like Gloria Martinez struggle through the balancing act of having a baby while also completing school and trying to keep a job. Porscha Johnson works through her anger issues to forgive her mother for drug abuse. Devon Hope decides to stop hiding his love of books and poetry and to break the stereotype, or what he refers to as *box*, of the high school jock. While the students in my classroom lived very different lives from those of the students in *Bronx Masquerade*, they found in each of the characters something they could relate to. Something they deeply understood.

During a class seminar, many students expressed deep connections that they had built with characters. When asked if the book was realistic, Ansley replied, "Yes, because how the people feel in the book. And how different people can appear one way and actually be very different. I feel self-conscious like Diondra." After this comment, Ansley went on to tearfully explain how she always felt very unattractive compared to her friends and how she was trying to worry about her appearance less after having read Diondra's story. Wade had a similar experience, noting that he felt a connection to Devon "because he likes playing sports, but he wants to be known for other things as well." Ned finished the discussion with the following: "We have so many boxes—it's hard to fit into certain boxes—you may strive to be in certain boxes, but you'll never get to that box. You'll always stay in your own box." At age 13, these seventh graders in a small suburban charter school were building connections to and learning from characters in a high school in the Bronx. They challenged the concept of adolescence as a time of becoming, as a time ruled by hormones, and made themselves vulnerable in front of a classroom of

their peers as they recognized and struggled with their own individuality.

Agency

As students read Patricia McCormick's (2006) novel, *Sold,* they were empowered by the main character's acts of strength and independence and began to see themselves as agents for change both in and outside of the classroom. Written in a series of vignettes, *Sold* follows 13-year-old Lakshmi as she leaves the comfort of her family home in Nepal, India, to find work to support her impoverished family. Lakshmi is sold into prostitution where her earnings are stolen from her, her body is given to others, and her family, left behind in the mountains of Nepal, is but a memory of a past life. After a year, Lakshmi chooses to risk it all for the hope of escape and a life of freedom.

While Lakshmi's story is wrought with sexuality, confusion, and emotion, her behaviors are not hormone-induced, as is the common perception of her age. Just as Lesko (2012) challenges traditional notions of adolescence as a process or journey toward adulthood, Lakshmi is not sheltered by a label that views her as *becoming.* Instead, she is removed from humanity entirely—viewed as a pawn to be used, rather than as a person in need of nurture and guidance.

Lakshmi's story is a challenging one for students. Not only are many of them shocked by her experiences, but they also express frustration as they try to navigate her development as a person and to understand her life on their own terms. During a small-group discussion, Caleb asked his group if bullying could ever be compared to the physical and mental harassment that define slavery. After a few minutes' thought, Shay replied: "Slavery has a very long affect on people, similar to how bullying can lead to suicide." Marianne, not one to participate in discussion, and especially reluctant to disagree with others, replied that she believed "Bullying could definitely lead to long-standing negativity, but not as bad as slavery." Renee jumped in at this point, agreeing with Marianne that "Bullying is a big problem today, but slavery is more severe. Slavery had more of an impact on future opinions of people; it is a type of bullying, but has had more consequences than bullying." Without guidance from me, students established themselves as the leaders in the classroom and agentive in their

own education as they began drawing their own connections between the story of a girl in India and their experiences in a US middle school.

By critically analyzing narratives like those of Virginia, the students of the Bronx, and Lakshmi, students challenged common portrayals of adolescents in young adult literature. Through collaboration and discussion surrounding such texts, students began to see the ways that these confident characterizations of adolescence manifest in their "real" worlds. Ultimately, students were able to use their self-selected texts and response methods to develop senses of solidarity, individuality, and agency that extended beyond the classroom walls.

Conclusion

There's a delicious Italian restaurant in my neighborhood called *Baraonda*. When I asked the owner about the meaning of the name, he informed me that it translates most clearly to the English word for *chaos*. But he was quick to add that *baraonda* suggests an *organized* chaos, not a complete shambles. Classrooms where adolescents are constantly calling the teacher's name, questioning due dates and expectations, and soliciting direction at every turn can feel like chaos. Teachers must begin the work of turning these teacher-centered places of chaos into student-centered hybrid learning places of *baraonda*.

When students are given agency, when they're treated as individuals, and their language practices, experiences, and interests are moved to the forefront of curriculum, the classroom can feel like a place of chaos. Students are reading different books, they're responding in different ways, they're challenging the social norms and perceptions of their age group, and it is often the case that, at any given time, no two students are completing the same work. But if we, as teachers, can begin to shift our perceptions (and those of parents and administrators) of these hybrid learning spaces from that of chaos to *baraonda*, of *organized* chaos, we can start to see the positive benefits of student-directed instruction. By having the freedom to select texts that sometimes match and sometimes challenge their own identities as adolescents, students can cultivate stronger appreciations for and connections to literature as they develop a sense of solidarity around their age identification, as well as a sense of individuality and agency in learning.

Meghan E. Barnes taught middle school language arts in North Carolina before returning to graduate school to pursue her doctorate in English Education at the University of Georgia. Her current research interests include teacher education, community engagement, adolescence, and young adult literature.

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Sugar and Spice and Everything . . . FIERCE:

The Resolute Young Women of *Always Emily*

Please note that this article is also available in an online format that allows direct access to all links included. We encourage you to access the piece on the ALAN website at http://www.alan-ya.org/page/the-alan-review-columns.

Welcome to *The ALAN Review*'s inaugural column of "Book in Review: A Teaching Guide," the purpose of which is to offer instructionally grounded ideas designed to increase the use of young adult literature in classroom communities at many levels.

With this issue's theme of "Stand Your Ground: Fostering Independent Thought and Action," I chose to feature Michaela MacColl's *Always Emily* (2014), a mesmerizing tale inspired by two powerful young women—sisters, even—who became a couple of history's most beloved authors: Charlotte and Emily Brontë.

In the spirit of full disclosure, a second reason I chose *Always Emily* is that it connects me to a former professor of mine whose daily practice was to foster in his learners independent thought and action. At the time, I was teaching eighth-grade English at the Tennessee School for the Deaf and was taking my first young adult literature class. The professor, with his tie so brilliant and multicolored that I thought it must have been taken from the material of a harlequin costume, blazed into the classroom and ignited all of our passions for young adult literature.

The professor was Dr. Ted Hipple, ALAN's first and longtime Executive Secretary. Ted shaped ALAN through decades of unwavering service and support, he inspired countless educators to become proponents of young adult literature, he advocated for books that didn't shy away from culturally taboo subjects and that gave marginalized teens a voice, and he defended the right of every person to read whatever they wanted to read. Undoubtedly, the man knew how to stand his ground.

As facile as Ted was with the English language, it was a Latin expression he quoted often that became for me a verbal talisman of sorts: *de gustibus non est disputandum*—literally, "about taste there is no disputing." This is the basic premise behind Ted's insistence "*that* you are reading is vastly more important than *what* you are reading." Ted convinced me, as well as hordes of others, that reading literature other than the classics was not only enjoyable, it was good for the mind and spirit. What's more, Ted urged that we teach young adult literature in order to transfer the excitement it offers, regardless if the readers are middle-grade learners, college students, colleagues, parents, administrators . . . anyone who is open to a good book.

By the way, the writers Ted Hipple used to discuss at length happened to be Victorian authors—authors such as Jane Austen, George Eliot, . . . Charlotte and Emily Brontë—the two who happen to be our featured "Stand Your Ground" characters in this edition of "Book in Review."

About the Book

The Characters

Always Emily is a tale of intrigue and suspense inspired by the real-life Brontë **sisters**, Charlotte and

Emily, who began their craft early in life and who would become two of the world's most renowned authors. In this fictional tale, Charlotte is 19 and Emily is 17. Although close in age, the sisters couldn't be any more different. Charlotte is down-to-earth, no-nonsense, and careful in all her affairs. Emily, on the other hand, is not; she is as reckless as she is curious, as headstrong as her sister is cautious. Still, the two must combine the extraordinary imaginativeness and cleverness that are present in both of their writings to untangle a series of knotted mysteries in their life on the moors. Furthermore, Charlotte and Emily must figure out how to work together quickly . . . before someone else dies.

> The sisters couldn't be any more different. Charlotte is down-to-earth, no-nonsense, and careful in all her affairs. Emily, on the other hand, is not.

The Author

Growing up in upstate New York, Michaela MacColl was infinitely fascinated with how famous people achieved their prominence. She studied multidisciplinary history at Vassar College and Yale University, which turns out to be the perfect degree for writing historical fiction. However, before she began writing, MacColl moved to France for five years, returned to Connecticut, worked as a technical writer and project manager for Internet design firms, raised two daughters, led a Girl Scout troop, built Habitat houses, and ran the elementary school book fairs for eight years running! Somehow during all this activity, MacColl also began to write.

Her first novel, *Prisoners in the Palace* (2010), explores the restricted and sheltered life of Queen Victoria the year prior to receiving her crown. In her second book, *Promise the Night* (2011), MacColl's subject is aviator Beryl Markham. In *Nobody's Secret* (2013), 15-year-old Emily Dickinson must unravel the mystery of the death of a nameless handsome young man with whom she enjoyed a brief, surreptitious, and flirtatious exchange prior to his turning up dead . . . in her family's pond. When not in Connecticut with her family, MacColl enjoys traveling for the sake of research or presenting about her books.

Using the Book in the Classroom

Pre-reading Activities

NORTH WINDS AND VAST MOORS

Where writers live can have a tremendous impact on their writing. In a 1956 interview for the *Paris Review,* William Faulkner said, "I discovered that my own little postage stamp of native soil was worth writing about and that I would never live long enough to exhaust it" (Meriwether & Millgate, 1980, p. 255). When Emily arrives home—to her own little postage stamp of native soil—the narrator explains, "The cool night air caressed her skin and the north wind felt like a familiar friend's embrace. . . . Emily gasped in delight when the moon reappeared and illuminated the vast moor unfold" (pp. 45–46).

View one or several images from the resources below. Take into account everything that you see: the sloping rise and fall of the moors, the color of the flora, the winding paths, the cloud patterns in the sky, the light breaking or disappearing on the horizon. Put into writing as many details as possible using as much sensory language as you can. What emotions and/ or thoughts begin to effervesce in your mind? Record those, too. This is the native soil that shaped and formed the Brontë sisters.

- http://www.dennisbromage.co.uk/north-yorkshire-moors
- http://kathfeatherstone.turnpiece.net/gallery/728

LOVE AND HATE—IT'S A FAMILY THING:

In *Always Emily*, Charlotte describes Emily as "aggravation personified" (p. 100); Emily describes Charlotte as "insufferable" (p. 92), yet the sisters guard each other's deepest secrets and put themselves in harm's way to protect each other. Discuss with your peers a love/hate relationship you have in your life. How is it possible that this paradox of such opposite emotions exists? At the end of the day, which emotion emerges to become the most dominant?

Interdisciplinary Connections

Michaela MacColl embeds several issues and topics significant to the early 1800 Yorkshire setting of *Always Emily*. Consider some of these topical connections to various content areas by exploring the following resources.

Tuberculosis

"Tuberculosis in Europe and North America, 1800–1922" (Contagion: Historical Views of Diseases and Epidemics): http://ocp.hul.harvard.edu/contagion/tuberculosis.html

"Tuberculosis" (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention): http://www.cdc.gov/tb/

Mental Illness

"Mental Institutions" (Brought to Life: Exploring the History of Medicine): http://www.sciencemuseum.org.uk/broughttolife/themes/menalhealthandillness/mentalinstitutions.aspx

"Mental Health" (The National Archives): http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/records/research-guides/mental-health.htm

Industrial Revolution in Great Britain

"Effects of the Industrial Revolution" (Modern World History Interactive Textbook): http://webs.bcp.org/sites/vcleary/ModernWorldHistoryTextbook/IndustrialRevolution/IREffects.html

Freemasons

"History of Freemasonry": http://www.mastermason.com/jjcrowder/history/history.html

Group Discussion Questions

1. MacColl begins *Always Emily*:

    The minister pronounced the final benediction for Elizabeth Brontë, aged ten. The funeral was finally over.

    The surviving Brontës huddled in the family pew. Charlotte, the eldest child at nine, sat stiffly, her back perfectly straight. She frowned at her younger sister, Emily, who had fidgeted unconscionably during the long service. Then she clutched her eight-year-old brother Branwell's hand. With a loud sniff, he snatched it away and wiped his nose with his knuckles. (p. 1)

    What does the reader learn from these first few lines—about the setting, about one of the story's conflicts, about the main characters?

2. At the end of the first chapter, nine-year-old Charlotte is admonished by her father that she must become more responsible because she is now the oldest after losing her mother to cancer and her two older sisters to tuberculosis. What can a reader infer about Emily's future from the last sentences of the first chapter:

    Charlotte put her hands to her face and sobbed. Emily put her arm around Charlotte's shoulders. She couldn't imagine anything more awful than being the responsible one. (p. 14)

3. One of MacColl's subplots involves Charlotte and Emily's father's advocating for the rights of mill workers who are being displaced by machinery. When defending her father's actions against an unsavory headmistress, Charlotte says, "My father tells the truth even when it's not to his benefit" (p. 25). Later, Reverend Brontë explains to a mill owner that, "I hope I will always do my duty as a priest and as a human being" (p. 106). By taking this position, the Reverend jeopardized his job as parish priest, which was the family's only source of income. In fact, Charlotte thinks at one point, "Worse was the paralyzing fear that something—an illness or an accident—might take down her father, and then what would happen to them all?" (p. 101). Discuss with your peers the positives and negatives of being so strongly principled. What would you have done if you were the Reverend Brontë? If you were part of his family, what would you encourage him to do?

> **Although Charlotte constantly stands her ground when it comes to her principles, as does Emily, Charlotte is far more cautious when it comes to taking physical risks.**

4. Although Charlotte constantly stands her ground when it comes to her principles, as does Emily, Charlotte is far more cautious when it comes to taking physical risks . . . until she decides to sneak into a large trunk to spy on a secret meeting of Freemasons. When Charlotte discovers she is trapped, she tries to stay calm, "But fear, *raw and bleak as a February storm*, threatened to overwhelm her" (p. 150; emphasis imposed in this and subsequent examples). MacColl weaves into her

narrative many such figurative lines. Choose the line above or one of the lines below to discuss the literal meaning.

"Her [Emily's] pen moved frantically, *as though her words were like water overflowing its channel.*" (p. 138)

"'Emily!' *As though a butcher's cleaver had crashed between them* [Emily and Harry as they were having their first kiss], a shrill voice drove them apart." (p. 186)

"Tabby [the Brontës' maid] pretended to scold Emily but was delighted when Emily gobbled down the jam. It was her personal ambition to fatten Emily up. Indeed, since her return from school, *Emily had plumped up like a bullfrog's throat.*" (p. 64)

> **Michaela MacColl writes, "I've always been fascinated by stories of how famous people grew up to be that way." MacColl has written historical fiction featuring strong women such as Queen Victoria, Beryl Markham, Emily Dickinson, and the Brontë sisters.**

5. As Charlotte remembers her two sisters (Maria and Elizabeth) who died from the ravages of "graveyard cough" (tuberculosis), she says, "I suppose Emily and I should consider ourselves fortunate to have survived" (p. 88). Tabby replies, "The Lord only takes those he needs. You and Emily were spared because you have wonderful futures in front of you." What are your thoughts about Tabby's reply? Considering all three of the remaining sisters (including Anne, the third surviving Brontë sister) achieved success as writers, what might have been Maria and Elizabeth's future? What do other cultures/religious systems believe about death?

6. Several times throughout *Always Emily,* MacColl juxtaposes the actions of her characters against the backdrop of "thick, dark clouds rolling down from the moors" (p. 123), "rain splattering gravestones" (p. 123), "mist turning thicker" (p. 191), "sewage flowing freely down the street" (p. 203), and "thick fog" (p. 241). How does MacColl use the various backdrops to establish the mood of the novel? How would the story change if the settings were

changed?

7. Read Emily Brontë's (1941, p. 30) short poem, "Past, Present, Future" (found at http://www.poets graves.co.uk/Classic%20Poems/Bronte/Past%20 Present%20Future.htm).

> **Past, Present, Future**
> by Emily Brontë
>
> Tell me, tell me, smiling child,
> What the past is like to thee?
> "An Autumn evening soft and mild
>
> With a wind that sighs mournfully."
> Tell me, what is the present hour?
> "A green and flowery spray
> Where a young bird sits gathering its power
>
> To mount and fly away."
> And what is the future, happy one?
> "A sea beneath a cloudless sun;
> A mighty, glorious, dazzling sea
> Stretching into infinity." (p. 30)

Compare the voice of the narrator in this poem to the character of Emily in MacColl's novel. What are the similarities? How are they different? To what does Emily compare the past, present, and future?

Post-Reading Activities

Star (Re)Search

Michaela MacColl writes, "I've always been fascinated by stories of how famous people grew up to be that way." MacColl has written historical fiction featuring strong women such as Queen Victoria, Beryl Markham, Emily Dickinson, and the Brontë sisters. Choose a famous person who captivates you. Conduct as much research as possible to find out what you can about that person's life as a child. Once you have ample information on your person of interest, as MacColl always did, have a go at creating a story that you align with historical information while creating a series of fictional events.

Say Whattttt?

Each of MacColl's chapters begins with a quote from one of the Brontë sisters' novels or personal correspondence. Choose a quote that stands out to you—that you find intriguing or simply enjoy. Explain how the quote matches the plot progression in the chapter. If you were to pull a single quote *from within* the

chapter that would serve as an overview of the chapter, which piece of text would you choose?

NOTEBOOKS: A PLACE WHERE WORDS FLOW ONTO PAPER AS EASILY AS RAIN FALLS TO THE EARTH

Will Self (2010) offered the following advice as one of his "golden rules" for writing, "Always carry a notebook. And I mean always. The short-term memory only retains information for three minutes; unless it is committed to paper you can lose an idea forever." It's safe to assume that most everything that Charlotte Brontë and Emily Brontë ever published had its genesis in one of their writer's notebooks. Ralph Fletcher (1996) explains, "Your writer's notebook gives you a safe place to ask: *What really matters? What haunts me? What in my life, in this world, do I never want to forget*" (p. 13)? Practice the habit of the Brontë sisters and begin your own writer's notebook. Simply begin paying attention to the world around you and collecting: odd facts, questions, lists, lines and insights, rants, raves, story ideas, character sketches—whatever comes to mind. Go ahead. It's safe!

ONCE UPON A RELATIVE

The Brontë sisters were not shy about using family members as fodder for their imaginations. In Emily's *Wuthering Heights* (1847), several similarities exist between Emily's character, Hindley Earnshaw, and her brother, Branwell. In Charlotte's *Jane Eyre* (1847), Charlotte created the character of Helen Burns to reincarnate her long dead sister, Maria.

Think about all the relatives you might see at a Bat/Bar Mitzvah or a family reunion or a Fourth of July cookout. Quickly write down three of the people who make you laugh or strike you as being unique. Now, choose *one* of the family members or friends to think about more deeply. As you think of your relative, which of that person's specific actions makes her or him interesting? Write down as many actions as possible. Write about how the relative looks, feels, sounds, or smells. What kind of things does your relative say, and how does she or he say them? For example, my grandmother says things like, "Well, lawz" and "I declare!" Again, write as many specific examples of their words as you can. Describe, describe, describe!

Remember, although you began your character with a real person in mind, you can use your imagina-

tion to cook up more actions, add fictional details, and invent dialogue. You now have an entirely different character to use in your writing.

PAST MEETS PRESENT

Michaela MacColl's *Always Emily* is an excellent introduction to the bold and tenacious Brontë sisters. Even for readers who have long enjoyed Charlotte's *Jane Eyre* and/or Emily's *Wuthering Heights*, *Always Emily* is a thought-provoking jaunt into the world of "what if?"

Where to go from here, though? Certainly, if your readers haven't experienced either of the Brontë sisters' classics, they may want to give *Jane Eyre* or *Wuthering Heights* a try. Other options are April Lindner's books *Jane* (2010), a contemporary retelling of *Jane Eyre*, and *Catherine* (2013), a fresh retelling of *Wuthering Heights*. In both of Linder's books, rock stars and nightclubs become the scenery.

> **It's safe to assume that most everything that Charlotte Brontë and Emily Brontë ever published had its genesis in one of their writer's notebooks.**

Additional Resources

There are infinite ways to invite students to imagine, explore, and create stories based on insights gained using *Always Emily.* Try the following resources to deepen your own and students' understanding of the Brontës and an author's process.

A teacher's guide for *Always Emily* published by Chronicle Books
http://www.chroniclebooks.com/landing-pages/pdfs/AlwaysEmily_DiscussionGuide_FINAL.pdf

Haworth Village—A Repository of Links to All That Is Brontë
http://www.haworth-village.org.uk/brontes/bronte.asp

The Brontë Society and the Brontë Parsonage Museum
http://www.bronte.org.uk/

S. d. Collins *teaches eighth-grade English at Cornerstone Middle School where he loves talking books with his learners, colleagues, and parents. A former associate professor of Language and Literacy Education at Tennessee Technological University, S. d.'s writings have appeared in* English Journal, Language Arts, The ALAN Review, *and the* Handbook of Research on Teaching Literacy. *S. d. invites you to contact him at sd_cllns@charter.net.*

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The Tip of the Iceberg

This article is also available in an online format that allows direct access to all links included. We encourage you to access the piece on the ALAN website at http:// www.alan-ya.org/page/the-alan-review-columns.

During our spring break, my husband and I spent a day at the Houston Museum of Natural Science. Several exhibits piqued the interest of my majored-in-anthropology husband. We toured Ancient Egypt and the cave paintings of Lascaux. We saw one of the extant copies of the Magna Carta and spent an hour with the butterflies fluttering though a rain forest. On the way out of the museum, we stopped at the gift shop to look for a magnet to add to our collection representing places we have visited. We passed a display of books with its accompanying poster proclaiming, "From a snowflake to an iceberg," reflecting another of the museum's exhibits. However, it was not the topic of the book that caught my interest. It was the single word *iceberg*. I had been mulling over what I wanted to write about when it comes to censorship, and the idea of "snowflake to iceberg" coalesced some errant thoughts I had already jotted down.

Most of us are familiar with the fact that 90% of icebergs are unseen; they exist below our line of vision. I think that the hidden nature of the bulk of an iceberg makes it a perfect metaphor for a column on censorship. So much censorship lurks beneath the surface; much of it is off the radar. We need to extend our definition of censorship to cover instances that lurk beneath our notice or that might reflect a new, more subtle form of censorship. I hope that we can sound the alarm well before the iceberg of censorship sinks the ship of books and reading and writing and teaching.

ALAN has long been a strong voice in the censorship arena, including sending letters supporting teachers, authors, and librarians who are facing challenges. It has also joined voices with NCTE, our parent organization, and ALA—specifically YALSA, the Young Adult Library Services Association of the American Library Association, and OIF, ALA's Office of Intellectual Freedom. I hope to contribute to that effort and want to thank the editors for including my own small voice here. In this inaugural column, I will talk about the iceberg that lurks ahead, something that cannot just obstruct forward movement but can cause catastrophic damage to the freedom to read.

The Danger of Icebergs

The Tip Provides a Warning

The American Library Association's Office of Intellectual Freedom (ALAOIF) tracks challenges and notes that, in 2008, there were more than 500 reported challenges. That figure drops precipitously to 460 in 2009, then 348 in 2010, and 326 in 2011. There is an increase for 2012 to 464. These numbers do not appear to be significant on the surface. But we need to take into consideration a few other facts.

First, many challenges and book bannings are never reported. ALAOIF asserts that for every ban or challenge reported, 4–5 incidents go unreported. So we must consider the 20% of challenges that we see as a warning about the 80% of the challenges that might be "below the surface." Warnings also exist in the obvious efforts to censor, because we know

that other efforts are deviously subtle. Consider these examples:

- An administrator comes to the school library and asks that a book causing controversy in a neighboring district be removed temporarily from the collection until "things quiet down."
- Patrons of a public library borrow a controversial book, claim they have lost it, and pay the fine, hoping that the book will not be replaced. If it is added back to the collection, another patron will come to check it out and lose it.
- A school librarian receives a survey from a parent group asking her or him to check off titles that are in the school library collection.
- A local group with a patriotic name stands on the steps of the public library with a mulching machine into which they feed the books they deem harmful, books they want removed from shelves.

I think all of us would define the last scenario as an obvious example of censorship. The other three examples, however, represent realities potentially more dangerous because they are likely not seen. I know about the preceding incidents because they occurred in my neighborhood, in schools my children attended, at the public library down the road. However, I doubt that many outside of my community know that censorship is this stealthy. After all, also hidden are the books targeted, the places where the challenges are occurring, and the results of such challenges.

This is the iceberg of censorship, and as we confront the warnings we see in the tip, we must remember that the bottom of the censorship iceberg is indeed formidable. Much of it is never witnessed by anyone outside of the incident, and it is difficult to tackle what we cannot see, to prepare for challenges, to develop appropriate practices than can withstand this hidden attack on freedom to read.

A Greater Threat Lurks beneath the Surface
There is a second cause for concern about how deeply censorship might be cutting into our freedom to read, our FREEDOM, if you will, and that is gatekeeping. I was blissfully unaware of this incidence of preemptive censorship until I was interviewing YA author Barry Lyga many years ago. He was part of a panel on censorship for a Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) of the American Library Association when

I asked him about his experience with would-be censors of *Boy Toy* (2007). Lyga reported that he encountered little push back on this novel that focuses on a young boy who is sexually abused by a teacher and what happens once that teacher is released from jail. When I expressed surprise, Lyga began talking about the fact that his book was not even being purchased for library shelves in many schools.

This practice of not purchasing potentially controversial materials—gatekeeping—is a silent censorship, part of that below-the-surface section of the iceberg. How many books are never purchased for a collection because of the fear that they *might* provoke a challenge? A decade ago, a survey of several Texas school libraries revealed that many collections did not include titles that appear regularly on lists of challenged and censored titles. Similarly, *School Library Journal* surveyed hundreds of librarians and found that almost three-quarters of respondents would consider not adding a controversial book to their collections (Whelan, 2009; see http://www.slj.com/2009/02/censorship/a-dirty-little-secret-self-censorship). This is not an isolated case, as Rickman (2010) observed in her research on self-censorship.

A survey I conducted with colleagues (Lesesne, Hynes, & Warnock, 2013) resulted in similar conclusions. We found that certain topics and issues may lead to gatekeeping, to self-censorship. To date, there has not been research about classroom libraries and how they might also be problematic. Are we limiting students' access to books via gatekeeping? Are there texts we avoid adding to our classroom shelves for fear of potential challenges? This is a deadly part of that censorship iceberg that lurks beneath the surface.

Hand in hand with gatekeeping comes the practice of "dis-inviting" authors from scheduled school visits. Last year, Rainbow Rowell and Meg Medina, two authors whose books received recognition from the American Library Association's Youth Media Awards, had their author visits cancelled (http://ncacblog.wordpress.com/2013/09/13/talks-cancelled-for-ya-authors-meg-medina-and-rainbow-rowell). In 2010, Ellen Hopkins received similar treatment, being dis-invited from an appearance at a teen book festival (http://content.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,2022356,00.html).

I would add to this discussion of gatekeeping another subtle form of limiting reading and expression:

filtering. I understand the need for CIPA (the Children's Internet Protection Act). Keeping children safe while online is a task schools do take seriously. However, filters can also prevent information from reaching the people who need it the most. Filters might prevent a student from accessing information about *breast* cancer or stop a student from finding information about *LGBTQ* topics. Indeed, several lawsuits have claimed that school libraries are unfairly restricting access to information. As someone who travels to present workshops on books and reading, I can attest to various instances of filtering gone awry. There are district buildings inhabited only by adults where the filters prevent access to Facebook, Twitter, and a host of websites. I have learned to travel with my own modem so that I can use the hyperlinks in presentations to show a YouTube video or explain how Twitter can be utilized as a Personal Learning Network (PLN) for educators.

Filters are not the only restrictions facing many educators. In addition, there are districts across the country that limit postings to social networks by their employees. This limitation of free speech is troubling. The legal issues that arise from limiting teachers' use of social media are complex as well, as this brief discusses: http://lawdigitalcommons.bc.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article = 1393&context = lsfp. Is it possible to draw a line between what is deemed "acceptable" and "unacceptable" by a school or district or state? When is the right of an educator to speak her or his mind "unacceptable"? This potential for censorship is one that will not be easily solved by policies, I suspect.

Diving Deeper

Censorship extends even deeper than the previous sections illustrate, though. A widespread narrowing of the freedom to read comes from a source we might not readily suspect: programmed approaches to books and reading. The Common Core State Standards (CCSS), Accelerated Reader, and other programs that limit the books students may read can also be forms of censorship. When an 8th grader is told he or she may not read *Nightjohn* by Gary Paulsen or *The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins because these titles are not in his Zone of Proximal Development or her Lexile band, reading has been curtailed and/or limited.

While canned programs and curricula will note that lists, scores, numbers, and the like are not meant to be the sole guideline for selecting books to use within the classroom, this is disingenuous at best. When the curriculum or program demands that students read books only at (or in the case of CCSS, above) their grade level, they do narrow the selections teachers might use and students might read.

The aforementioned *Nightjohn* has a Lexile that places it within the band for 3rd grade and a 3.8 reading level, according to AR measures. *The Hunger Games* comes in at a 3rd- or 4th-grade Lexile measure and a 5.3 reading level (though the companion book based on the movie has a 7th-grade reading level, interestingly enough). I do not want to be sidetracked here with the lack of reliability of using scores and numbers and formulae to select materials, but the bottom line is that using scores and levels and numbers does deny access in classrooms that are adhering strictly to the demands of such curricular programs and packages. It is possible to include books not already on the recommended lists. However, the process for selecting those books is long and involved. Given the constraints on time caused by a new curriculum and new tests, it is doubtful that many educators will have the time, much less support, to do the necessary work to include more diverse titles, more contemporary titles, and titles with a wider band of complexity as measured by levels and Lexiles.

Perhaps a step back here is advisable. Lists, in and of themselves, can be limiting, can narrow what children might read. Whether the lists are the ones currently making rounds on Facebook ("How many books on *this* list have *you* read?"), or the ones defining the classics, or the ones compiled by various organizations, lists are limited and limiting. Starred review lists, award lists, best books lists from a wide range of people and organizations are useful for educators. However, if educators use these lists alone without paying attention to the individual needs and

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interests of their students, we all lose. When you put together a list, be sure to ask yourself *What is the purpose of this list? Is there any way I might be limiting what someone could elect to read?* I wrestle with these questions each semester as I put together my required reading list for the YA literature course I teach. Am I providing as broad a list as possible? Is something missing? I solicit student feedback each semester as well. This list continues to evolve; I doubt it will ever be the same from one year to the next.

Sounding the Alarm: Preventing a Collision

In 2011, in response to challenges put forth against Laurie Halse Anderson's *Speak* and other titles, Paul Hankins and David Gill assembled a blog and Twitter campaign entitled SpeakLoudly. As a result of these efforts, *Speak* was ultimately returned to the shelves. Other books, sadly, were not, including Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five*. When Wendy Glenn and her anti-censorship committee began to write about this issue in the *ALAN Newsletter,* they adopted the title SpeakLoudly as well. This same committee created an incredible resource page at http://www.alan-ya.org/page/censorship-committe. You can also look at past issues of the newsletter and the SpeakLoudly columns from this archive page at http://www.alan-ya.org/page/alan-newsletter-archives. The work of this group continues under the leadership of Barbara Ward.

I think this idea of speaking loudly is essential for us all. Pastor Martin Niemoller (1963) put the need to SpeakLoudly thusly: "First they came for the Socialists, and I did not speak out—because I was not a Socialist. Then they came for the Trade Unionists, and I did not speak out—because I was not a Trade Unionist. Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out—because I was not a Jew. Then they came for me—and there was no one left to speak for me" (http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId = 10007392).

If we permit a challenge to go unanswered, we run the risk of making more challenges even easier. We must fight, we must SpeakLoudly, for *all* books and not just those that might be our favorites. If we do not speak up in defense of books and the freedom to read (and write), we might as well abrogate all of our responsibility to a computer program or someone outside of our classrooms to make the list of approved books. When that happens, who will be dictating the content that is deemed acceptable?

Recently, author A.S. King wrote about censorship on her blog, *Here's Me Using the Word Blog in a Sentence* (http://www.as-king.info/2014/03/whos-afraid-of-as-king.html). Here is her take on some of the aspects of censorship discussed in this column (used with permission of the author):

> I don't know about you, but quiet censorship freaks me out. It's the censorship that's spoken over tea, over lunch, at random times when we are not prepared to answer because we are caught so off-guard that we really only think about what was said on the plane home. Last year I was asked to be on a censorship panel as an "expert." I had to reply and say I was not an expert at official challenges. So far, my books haven't had an official challenge as far as I know. Instead, I get embarrassed looks from dedicated librarians who whisper, "My principal won't let me have that one in the stacks." I have quiet un-invitations. I have quiet conversations with saddened teachers who tell me that a colleague said, "But you're not going to actually give that book to students, are you?" I get quiet letters from devoted teachers who apologize for not being able to share my book with a student who needs it because of a fear of losing their job. Ah quiet. It is usually an indication that something really important is being withheld. Like the way we whisper *cancer.*

A Final Request

As I write and submit this inaugural column, there are at least a handful of very public censorship cases being discussed in the educational community. Surprisingly, one of the current attacks on books is leveled against the CCSS Exemplar Texts: http://blog.al.com/wire/2014/03/mccarthy_was_right_the_crucibl.html. The claim is that these texts are socialist in nature and are being used to indoctrinate our school children.

Other challenges center on some of the most frequently challenged books each and every year (see the list from ALAOIF at http://www.ala.org/bbooks/frequently challengedbooks/top10), with challenges against *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* (Sherman Alexie), *Speak* (Laurie Halse Anderson), and *Persepolis* (Marjane Satrapi), among others. Another organization has targeted AR's point system as a result of a graphic novel checked out of an elementary school library (http://www.mommabears.org/1/post/2014/03/alert-is-this-in-your-childs-library-at-school.html). Remember, these instances are simply the tip of the iceberg. In how many schools, classrooms, public libraries, and even bookstores is censorship occurring with barely a ripple seen on the surface?

For those of us who cherish YA literature, who know the power of the right book in the right hands at the right time, who witness the power of the incredible authors who offer books to teens, it behooves us to get beneath the surface, to lower our line of vision, to shine a light on challenges, and to make certain that everyone is given access to books. If you have a story to share about censorship or challenges or book bannings, please contact me (terilesesne@gmail.com). I want future columns to feature a chorus of voices. If we all SpeakLoudly, we can and will have an effect on censorship in all of its guises.

Teri Lesesne (rhymes with insane) is a professor in the Department of Library Science at Sam Houston State University in Texas where she teaches courses in literature for children and young adults. She is a former ALAN president and currently is the Executive Director of ALAN. Teri is an author of three professional books, numerous articles, and several columns on YA literature. Teri also blogs about books (http://www.ls5385blog.blogspot.com) and educational issues (http://professornana.livejournal.com). She has served as the chair of NCTE's Standing Committee Against Censorship. You can find her on Twitter (@professornana) and Facebook (Teri Lesesne). Most of the time, though, you will find her with her nose stuck firmly in a book.

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Stand Our Ground against Stand Your Ground

This article is also available in an online format that allows direct access to all links included. We encourage you to access it on the ALAN website at http://www. alan-ya.org/page/the-alan-review-columns.

We dedicate this column to the memories of Trayvon Martin, Renisha McBride, Jordan Davis, and all youth who struggle daily just to *be free.*
Wear your hoodie, wear it proud!
Play your music, play it loud!

The Fall 2014 issue of *The ALAN Review* centers on banding together and uniting around "our shared commitment to kids and YA literature" while *standing our ground* against scripts, censors, and standardized tests. While the call for articles sharing "stories of battle, loudly fought or quietly conceived" was sent out months ago, we are living in a time when *stand your ground* has taken on new, malicious overtones:

- In February 2012, Trayvon Martin, an African American teenager, was shot and killed by George Zimmerman, who was later acquitted based on Florida's *Stand Your Ground* laws; Martin, wearing a hoodie, was walking home from a convenience store; Zimmerman thought the unarmed teen looked suspicious, initiated an altercation, and shot Martin to death.
- In November 2013, an African American teenager, Renisha McBride, was shot and killed by Theodore Wafer, whose defense is expected to focus on Michigan's *Stand Your Ground* laws; McBride was

on Wafer's front porch, seeking help after an automobile accident, when Wafer shot her in the face with a shotgun.
- Also in November 2013, Jordan Davis, an African American teenager, was shot and killed by Michael David Dunn, who was convicted on lesser charges for firing at the other occupants of Davis's car. Dunn faces a retrial in the killing of Davis because the jury was hung over Florida's *Stand Your Ground* laws. Davis was apparently playing his rap music too loudly.

That's what it means to stand *your* ground. It means that armed citizens can shoot and kill unarmed Black teenagers because our systemic and civilizational racism teaches us that Black teenagers should be feared. These young people don't have a voice in the mainstream media about how they are portrayed; they don't get a say in how people see them. These are students who sit in our classrooms, fearing for their lives.

So, how do we *Stand Our Ground* against *Stand Your Ground*? There's a big difference made by the pronouns in these phrases. We can *stand our ground* as teachers and advocates by disrupting troubling discourses about youth, especially youth of color. In her 2004 *The ALAN Review* article, Elaine O'Quinn (2004) explained how adolescents have been cast by culture and society as "problematic":

> Through a blend of modern psychological science, the Enlightenment ideal of rationality that threads throughout the history of modern education, and the traditional Protestant notion of humans as fundamentally flawed and fallen, the haunting specter of adolescents as problematic, emotionally unstable, and innately sinful has permeated societal judg-

ments of who they are. Pathologized as deviant, ascribed with endless maladies that capitalize on societal anxieties and intolerances, and diagnosed as irrational, dependent, and non-conforming, young adults are viewed as dangerous and unpredictable aberrations that must be cured of their reckless natures. (p. 50)

Intersect these maladies with race, gender, and socio-economic class positions, and youth of color become "public enemies," "thugs," "welfare queens," or "hypersexualized video vixens" who "lack literacy" and "lack character/morality" (Meiners, 2007). David Kirkland (2013) and Maisha T. Winn (2011), long-time urban youth activists, give us ideas about how to talk back to these "discourses of deficiency" (Fine & Ruglis, 2009), and exhort English teachers to help young people develop and act on critical literacy skills (Morrell, 2008), so they may disrupt and resist cultural misrepresentations and work to transform oppressive social structures. If, as Hall and du Gay (1996) remind us, it is through representation that we negotiate our identities, youth must have *ground to stand on*—opportunities and spaces—where they can talk back to distortions and apparitions and also shape their own possible selves.

We can find this ground if we pay attention and listen to youth (Lachuk & Gomez, 2011). As coeditors of the "Layered Literacies" column in *The ALAN Review*, we are called to draw on Internet-based learning opportunities and materials that might prove useful in teaching YAL. When exploring this charge through the issue theme of "Stand Our Ground," we found something interesting: it is in the Internet-based media that students are speaking out and speaking back to how they are portrayed, sharing their own fears and struggles in a society that portrays them as dangerous.

Miles Ezeilo used his blog (http://www.thedarker lens.com/2014/02/18/jordan-davis-thoughts-from-a-black-teenager/) to respond to the killing of Jordan Davis:

> I get scared every time I turn on the news now . . . . [A]s a black boy in this day and age, my trust and sense of safety is dwindling as I write this. . . . This entire case hits home for me because Jordan Davis could have been a lot of people I know.

Sharing similar sentiments, there are multiple Facebook tribute pages for Jordan Davis (https://www.facebook.com/pages/RIP-Jordan-Davis/119289181565449), Renisha McBride (https://www.facebook.com/pages/RIP-Renisha-Mcbride/213246385513796), and Trayvon Martin (https://www.facebook.com/pages/RIP-Trayvon-Martin/268784303205174).

Throughout young adult literature, we find stories of youth claiming their own ground and speaking truth to power. Certainly the genre could play a role in how we *stand our ground* for students in ELA classrooms. In what follows, we bring to you the work of a graduate English teaching intern at the University of Tennessee, Andrew Swafford. Andrew is passionate about literature and music and is excited to teach adolescents about the many connections between these two art media. Andrew believes songwriting is the dominant form of poetry in the 20th and 21st centuries and is intrigued by the idea of the long-playing album as a sort of "musical novel." Some of Andrew's favorite musical genres include hip-hop, alternative rock, electronica, and ambient.

When exploring this charge through the issue theme of "Stand Our Ground," we found something interesting: it is in the Internet-based media that students are speaking out and speaking back to how they are portrayed.

For an assignment in his Young Adult Literature class with Susan, Andrew created two book talks that revolve around the music that matters to teens in young adult literature. We thought it important to include them here because it was music (http://youtu.be/06BZss9iyo4) that allegedly led to Jordan Davis's murder. We also think it's in both the consumption and production of music where we can see teens telling us who they are and long to be. Perhaps if we engage youth with the music they love and strive to understand why music matters to teens—rather than dismiss it—we can begin to *stand our ground* against the beliefs and actions that underlie a *stand your ground* mindset.

The first of Andrew's book talks considers Coe Booth's (2007) *Tyrell*, in which we find significant possibilities for responding to the killing of Jordan Davis in particular and to "thug" discourses in general. Tyrell loves old-school rap and hip-hop music,

and with good reason—the music speaks to Tyrell's anguish and feelings of powerlessness, but it also inspires him and ultimately provides an economic livelihood for him and his family. As Jabiri Mahiri (2000; 2005) explains, "Rap has clearly emerged as powerful discourse able to effectively critique other discourses including dominant ones. This capacity offers urban youth possibilities for counter-hegemonic actions in their social worlds" (2000, p. 383). Mahiri likens the rap artists that Tyrell loves—KRS-One, Mos Def—to "public pedagogues—educators with degrees in street knowledge and a lyrical curriculum for raising consciousness" (2000, p. 383).

> We can stand our ground with youth, but we have to be willing to listen and pay attention, especially to the music they love.

While reading *Tyrell* with students, teachers could explore the rap and hip-hop songs mentioned in the text and treat them as important intertexts that complement Tyrell's story. But Mahiri (2000) warns that teachers don't need to necessarily incorporate what he calls "pop culture pedagogy" in the classroom, because "pop culture works in young people's lives in context-specific ways that often could not be reproduced in the context of school." Rather, Mahiri encourages teachers to "become more aware of the motives and the methods of youth engagement in pop culture in terms of why and how such engagement connects to students' personal identifications, their need to construct meanings, and their pursuit of pleasures and personal power" (p. 385).

The second book talk considers Stephen Chbosky's (1999) *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, where the music Charlie and his friends share speaks to the intense pleasure and joy the teens experience in their relationships with each other—relationships marked by sincerity, vulnerability, and perhaps most important, acceptance. Charlie comes of age in the '90s, before playlists and MP3 players, a time when the mix tape ruled. Creating a mix tape took time and work, and thus was an act of love and commitment, a deliberate act of choosing *just* the right song, putting it in *just* the right order, and creating *just* the right experience for the listener.

As Matias Viegener explains in Thurston Moore's (2005) book *Mix Tape: The Art of Cassette Culture*, the mix tape is "a poem, a cento, made up of lines pulled from other poems. The new poet collects and remixes" (p. 35). And therein lies the pleasure and personal power of which Mahiri speaks: an aesthetic pleasure in the music itself and an engaged, "flow-like" pleasure in the act of creating something for someone important. And there's power in the creation, too. As Viegener goes on to explain, making a mix tape turned consumers of music into producers and "gave listeners some control over what they heard, in what order, and at what cost." It turns out hip-hop artists and DJs and mix tape creators have much in common and much to say. We can stand our ground with youth, but we have to be willing to listen and pay attention, especially to the music they love.

As the Layered Literacies column editors, we want you to experience Andrew's book talks twice—once in print and again through multimedia presentations on YouTube. While the source material is similar, the textual and multimedia presentations are not the same. We believe wrestling with the different possibilities each medium provides presents a methodological way to move toward engaging our students across multiple media and multiple platforms in a content area too often relegated only to the printed page.

Tyrell by Coe Booth

What follows is a transcript of the *Tyrell* online video; see it at youtu.be/FHmHFrwew5A.

> My music was mad, and so was I. Them rappers was saying shit I couldn't say to no one 'cause no one was listening to me. Only thing, I don't listen to that gangster shit too much no more. Yeah, I'm up on all the new music, but the CDs I play the most is rap from back in the day, brothas like Rakim, Big Daddy Kane, KRS-1, and Tupac, 'cause them niggas had some real deep shit to say. My pops got me into them 'cause that's the only kinda rap he play at his parties, and when I took the time to listen to the words, man, I started to respect them dudes. They was the real deal. Not like now when most of the rappers is just frontin' like they from the streets or starting beef with other rappers over nothing just so they could be in some fake war and sell more CDs. The new rap is all right, but there ain't never gonna be another Public Enemy. Never.

Tyrell, the main character of this novel, is a really complicated guy, but one thing he has going for him is that he is a hip-hop expert, and his knowledge of

music is the weapon he uses to battle the harsh world he's living in. Tyrell's father [serving a stint in prison] is a DJ, and by the end of the book, Tyrell becomes a DJ as well. Without giving anything away, near the end of this novel, Tyrell DJs a huge party. He's spinning records on a Technics SL-1200, which is the turntable hip-hop was *invented* on, and he tells us about playing this classic hip-hop track called "The Message" by Grandmaster Flash:

> Man, ain't no way you could listen to this song and not see where the man coming from. Them lyrics is deep. *Don't push me 'cause I'm close to the edge, / I'm trying not to lose my head. / It's like a jungle sometimes, / It makes me wonder how I keep from going under.* And the way Melly Mel say them words, man, you know he feeling them. He talking 'bout life on the streets and how you don't hardly get to have no kinda childhood when you grow up in the hood. The song is mad real.

Tyrell is living in 2007, and he's 15. Why does he love this music from the '80s so much—this era of hop-hop that we call the Golden Age of hip-hop? I think it's because these rappers he loves aren't just bragging about how much money they have or how many women they get. They're rapping about real life on the streets: being poor, being oppressed, being discriminated against, being dissatisfied with the world in general, and needing to express what that dissatisfaction is like. And this stuff means a lot to Tyrell because Tyrell is homeless. His father's in jail for dealing drugs, and he has to take care of his mom and his baby brother, who have no place to live. That's the kind of struggle that rappers in the '80s were talking about, and that's why Tyrell understands this music so well.

Now, this novel, *Tyrell*, definitely isn't just about music. It's more so about poverty, drugs, family, love, and even sex. Especially sex, actually. But what I think is most interesting about the book is how Tyrell relates all of those things to music—which is what he uses to try and get himself out of the mess he and his family are in. I'm not going to tell you if that works out or not. You'll have to find that part out for yourselves by reading *Tyrell* by Coe Booth. [See, too, the sequel *Bronxwood*.]

The Perks of Being a Wallflower by Stephen Chbosky

What follows is a transcript of the *Perks of Being a Wallflower* online video; see it atyoutu.be/g0tQgEe OgLc.

The Perks of Being a Wallflower tells the story of a high school freshman named Charlie who lives in the early '90s and has a lot of emotional issues. His best friend has committed suicide, and he's been around death and abuse for a good deal of his life. As a result, Charlie's very fragile and doesn't really know how to talk to people. He feels sad and alone in a way that most teenagers can relate to, even if they haven't had many traumatic experiences.

High school finally clicks for Charlie when he finds a whole group of outsiders who are all insecure or damaged in some way, and they bond through a shared love of music, movies, and books. Music is the most important, though, as Charlie and his friends make mix tapes for each other. A mix tape is either a collection of songs specifically designed to be a gift from one friend to another or a collection of songs that perfectly captures a particular moment in life:

> "Why does he love this music from the '80s so much? . . . I think it's because these rappers [are] rapping about real life on the streets: being poor, being oppressed, being discriminated against, being dissatisfied with the world in general, and needing to express what that dissatisfaction is like."

> My dad said I couldn't drive until the weather cleared up, and it finally did a little bit yesterday. I made a mix tape for the occasion. It is called "The First Time I Drove." Maybe I'm being too sentimental, but I like to think that when I'm old, I will be able to look at all these tapes and remember those drives.

Thanks to the tapes Charlie exchanges with his friends, Charlie's taste in music is very diverse, and he's into music from a lot of different decades and genres ranging from folk [Simon & Garfunkle] to grunge [Smashing Pumpkins] to progressive rock [Genesis] to Britpop [The Smiths]. Here [are the words to] Charlie's all-time favorite song, *Asleep* by The Smiths:

> *Sing me to sleep*
> *Sing me to sleep*
> *I don't want to wake up*
> *On my own anymore*

Sing to me
Sing to me
I don't want to wake up
On my own anymore
Don't feel bad for me
I want you to know

This song has profound meaning for Charlie, who probably relates the lyrics to his suicidal friends. We all do this with music. Music doesn't just have meaning because of what the musician wrote—it can also have deep *personal* meaning for the listener and can become part of who we are, attached to our memories and relationships. Sharing music is, for Charlie, a way to feel connected with other people, and listening to beautiful and personal music is a way that he can feel a sort of peace in knowing that someone else understands what it's like to feel alone or to feel sad.

> **"This song has profound meaning for Charlie, who probably relates the lyrics to his suicidal friends. We all do this with music. Music doesn't just have meaning because of what the musician wrote—it can also have deep *personal* meaning for the listener."**

Here's a passage where Charlie talks about the significance of the mix tape he makes for his friend Patrick:

I spent all night working on it, and I hope Patrick likes it as much as I do. Especially the second side. I hope it's the kind of second side that he can listen to whenever he drives alone and feel like he belongs to something whenever he's sad. I hope it can be that for him. I had an amazing feeling when I finally held the tape in my hand. I just thought to myself that in the palm of my hand, there was this one tape that had all of these memories and feelings and great joy and sadness. Right there in the palm of my hand. And I thought about how many people have loved those songs. And how many people got through a lot of bad times because of those songs. And how many people enjoyed good times with those songs. And how much those songs really mean.

For Charlie, falling in love with music is an important part of growing up and forming relationships with people, as it is for many teenagers. There's one moment in particular that I find really interesting—it's when Charlie is sitting in a pickup truck with his

friends and hears the song "Landslide" by Fleetwood Mac on the radio.

The song is about moving on in life and accepting change—which is incredibly important during teenage years. Here's how Charlie describes the experience of listening to "Landslide" in the book:

The feeling I had happened when Sam told Patrick to find a station on the radio. And he kept getting commercials. And commercials. And a really bad song about love that had the word "baby" in it. And then more commercials. And finally he found this really amazing song about this boy, and we all got quiet. Sam tapped her hand on the steering wheel. Patrick held his hand outside the car and made air waves. And I just sat between them. After the song finished, I said something. "I feel infinite." And Sam and Patrick looked at me like I said the greatest thing they ever heard. Because the song was that great and because we all really paid attention to it. Five minutes of a lifetime were truly spent, and we felt young in a good way.

What does Charlie mean when he says he feels infinite? I think that's something that's up to your interpretation. I hope you check out *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* by Stephen Chbosky and decide for yourself.

Susan L. Groenke *is Associate Professor of English Education at the University of Tennessee, and directs the Center for Children's and Young Adult Literature on the UTK campus. Dr. Groenke teaches courses on young adult literature and secondary English methods. Her research interests center on adolescent reading engagement and the motivation to read. When she is not reading young adult novels, she can be found walking her dog Bootleg or driving down the road with her husband in their 1978 VW bus.*

Judson Laughter *is an assistant professor of English Education at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. His research interests include multicultural teacher education, critical race theory, and the preparation of preservice teachers for diverse classrooms through dialogue and narrative. Dr. Laughter is currently the advisor for the Track I (non-licensure) English Education program. He teaches courses in English methods, action research, sociolinguistics, and trends in education. When not wearing his academic hat, Jud enjoys crossword puzzles, cycling, and traveling.*

Andrew Swafford *is pursuing a master's degree and licensure in English Education at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. After graduation, he plans to become a*

high school English teacher. Andrew is passionate about literature and music and wants to teach adolescents about the many connections between the two. In particular, Andrew is interested in songwriting as the dominant form of poetry in the 20th and 21st centuries, as well as the long-playing album as a sort of "musical novel" with themes and characters. Some of Andrew's favorite musical genres include hip-hop, alternative rock, electronica, and ambient.

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Joan **Bauer**

Hope

I Googled "hope" the other day. I found a special hope formula for 70% off, a Hope TV Channel, a Hope Finance Program, Bob Hope, an official Hope website, and Wikipedia really went to town on hope, talking about the history of it, how to measure it, recognize it . . .

There are millions of "hopes" to click on.

I'm not sure what that will do for a kid who's close to the kind of despair that's a game changer, or a kid who's being abused at home or somewhere else, or a young reader who has a colossally dark secret that's crushing her, or a boy who feels close to doing something dangerous because he's got so much anger inside, or a regular kid who feels confused and wants to try to understand a little bit of what you do with a conflicted heart.

It's so easy to toss hope around like a beach ball. "Wheee! Here it comes!" And it just so happens that last week when I started working on this speech, we had a tsunami of complications hit our family. It was, in a few of those places, quite easy to not feel too hopeful about much good coming out of these things. In the midst of that, I sat down to work on these remarks, and as I did, I remembered an image that has so captivated me—and I think it's a true visual of how I try to breathe hope into my characters' lives. And into my own life as well.

In Asian pottery, there is a method called "golden seams," specially created by craftsmen to mend cracked ceramics. Instead of trying to match the color of the pot to make the crack less visible, they flaunt the flaw by repairing it with lacquer mixed with powdered, flecked gold. It dries bold and shiny; the cracks fill in with gold. Brokenness made beautiful and more valuable.

That's what I hope to do—use gold paint around the broken parts. Humor certainly is a way to help life go down easier. In my novel, *Almost Home,* a girl loses her home—she's there when the sheriff comes. How can lightness come in the midst of that? Her mother is a southern belle wannabe who insists that her daughter always write the perfect thank you note. And Sugar Mae Cole is a poet, and she writes about wanting a home that won't go away with people who really think she's something.

In *Close to Famous,* a girl who simply can't read decides to give it one more try. In *Hope Was Here,* a girl wants to live with hope so much she changes her name to Hope, as if to say to the world, "Call me what I want to become." Seeds of hope planted in a story. A touch of gold paint to illuminate the cracks and make them beautiful.

Who are these kids we adult writers dare to create, as we limp back into our pasts and dust off the boxes we've put away?

Where do they hide their wounds?

What's their biggest strength?

What's the thing about themselves they just can't see?

What are the rules they live by?

How are those rules challenged?

How do they find their voices in this very broken world?

What do they long to see made better? Ah, that's

the door to their hope. Right there.

Now, how do they get on the road? How do they put shoe leather to their dreams? How do they learn to talk the talk a little, step outside their comfort zone, and go for it?

Here's the lovely thing about hope: it's really quite selfless; it's happy to take a back seat in lots of situations. It partners in all kinds of moments and doesn't take the glory.

Take courage—you don't step out and do something brave without a hope that it could be better.

Or truth—you don't speak the truth without hoping someone will get it.

And my heart goes out to Hope Yancey of *Hope Was Here,* this courageous girl who wears her name like a flag. Sometimes that flag crashes to the ground, but she's willing to have it be her identity—that's how she wants to live.

We need to show kids what living with hope looks like, how it hides in all kinds of places, how it's not really meant for exceedingly happy times. Hope is built for the open sea with the sharks and the wind that's about to knock over your boat. Let's not relegate it to a Hallmark card with kittens wearing sunhats. Let's take this thing out on the open road and see what it can do. And if we're teaching a book, let's look for the hope and point it out and ask kids, "Where do you see it? Where is hope in the building blocks of courage, sensitivity, and friendship?"

Hope is in the soil. You dig in a garden in the spring, and there are the earthworms dancing; they're preparing the earth. Man, it's a good thing! That's what hope does; it's there underneath when we don't even think about it, waiting for us to discover it, waiting to make our lives richer and better, waiting to reach out a hand to a kid who is more broken than we could ever know.

Years ago, I spoke in Youngstown, Ohio. A girl came up to me; she took my hand and started to cry. "Mrs. Bauer, I just need to tell you. I read your book . . ." She couldn't finish. I was getting ready to speak to a group about humor in my novels, and now this girl was overcome by tears.

"Honey, tell me."

"I think I read it 50 times. I had leukemia. I read it every time I had chemotherapy. Mrs. Bauer, I don't have leukemia anymore."

Now I'm crying, and the humor crowd is coming in. But, that was okay.

Hope is a glorious mess of inconsistencies. It shows up places it has no right to be: at gravesites and horrific accidents—how dare that thing come? And yet it does, sitting down on the couch with sorrow and pain and depression and lost love and terminal illness and anger and so much, so much. We ignore it at our peril! And here's what we tell the kids—here's what we show them in our stories. Hope isn't a feather; it's an anchor. It's not a butterfly; it's a 900-pound gorilla that's come to throw its weight around. It's the golden seams glistening off the paintbrush of a gifted artist outlining the cracks and the brokenness and saying, "Look how it can be put back together—more beautiful, more unique—shining out bold and true."

So, we can say to trouble when it turns out the light: "Go ahead. Give it your best shot. Guess what? I glow in the dark, and I am beautiful!"

Hope is a game changer.

May our eyes be open in new ways to the young people we teach and mentor. And may we hold this hope out to them so they can see ahead to a better day.

*In her 12 novels, **Joan Bauer** explores difficult issues with humor and hope. A* New York Times *bestselling author, speaker, and songwriter, Joan has won numerous awards for her books, among them the Newbery Honor Medal, the American Library Association's Schneider Family Book Award, two Christopher Awards, the* LA Times *Book Prize, the* Chicago Tribune *Young Adult Literary Prize, and the Golden Kite Award of the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators. Joan has been a frequent guest on both local and national radio. Through the State Department's professional speakers program, she has visited both Kazakhstan and Croatia, where she spoke with students, writers, educators, and children at risk about her life and her novels. She lives in Brooklyn, New York, with her husband, computer scientist Evan Bauer, and their intrepid wheaten terrier, Max. Her new novel,* Tell Me, *is about a girl of humor, hutzpah, and hope.*

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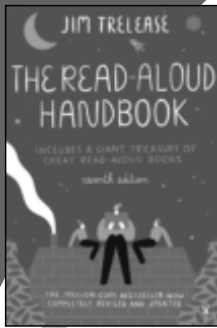
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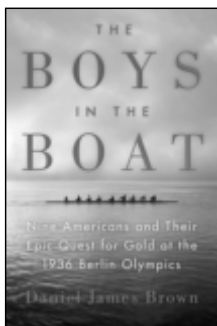Penguin • 384 pp. • 978-0-14-312160-2 • $17.00
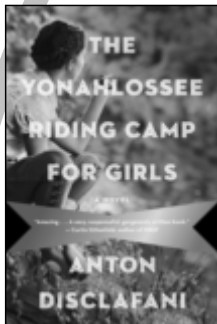
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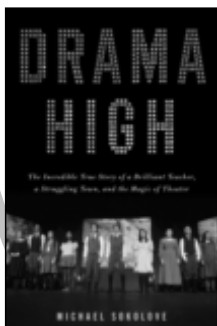
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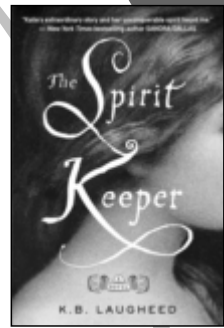
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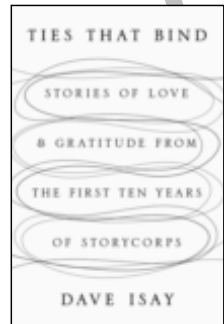
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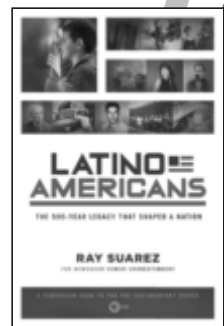Gotham • 288 pp. • 978-1-592-40724-8 • $22.50
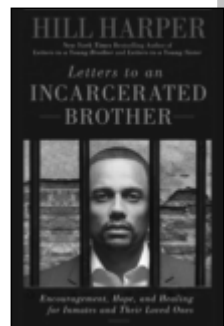
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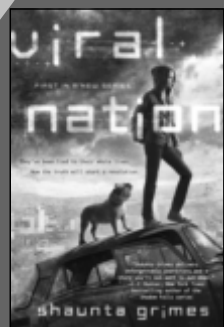Celebra • 272 pp. • 978-0-451-23814-6 • $18.00

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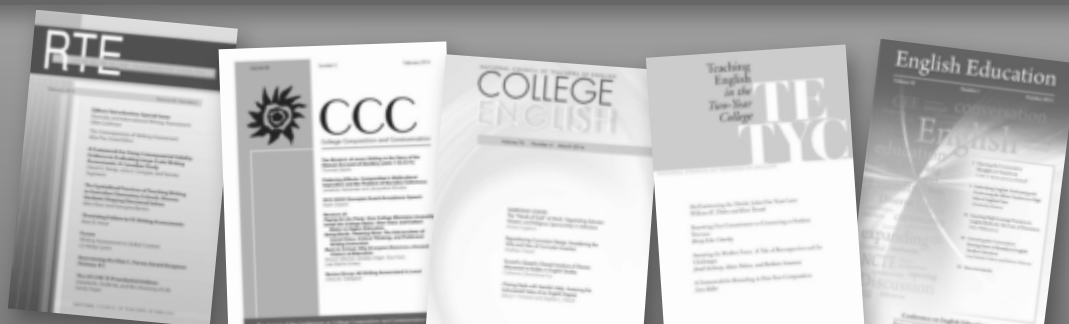
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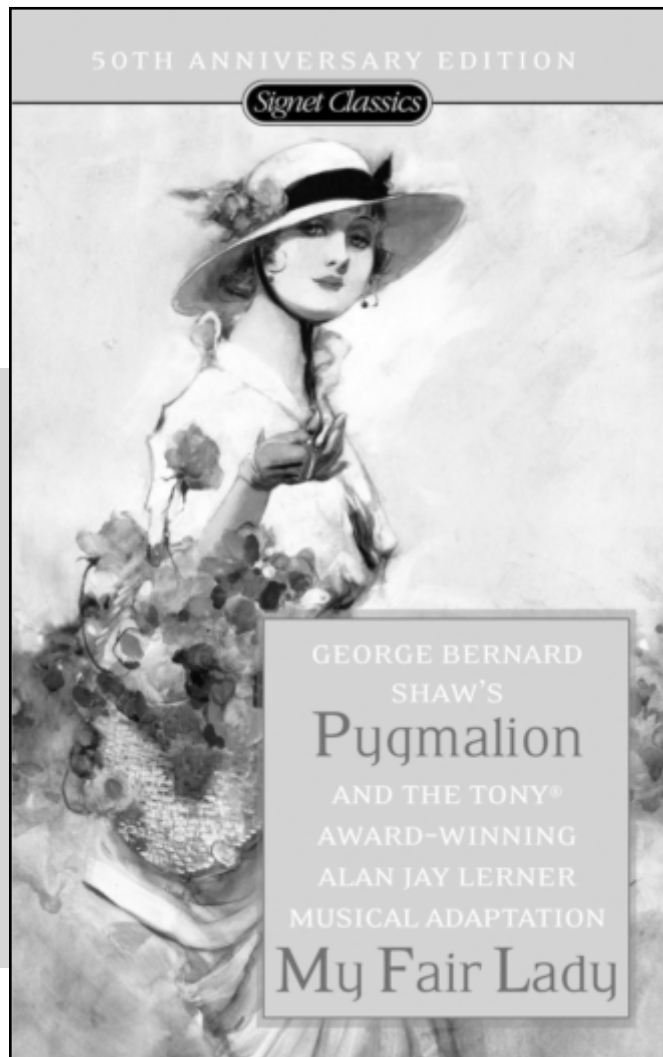
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