



## From the Editors

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. Suddenly binary/ stars, we have startling/ gravity. Let’s compare/ scintillation—let’s share/ starlight” (Guenther, 2010, p. 6).

These words inspire us to remember the joy and play, the struggle and growth that can 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; we can explore and understand difference.

In this issue, contributors present innovative, collaborative efforts that involve students, colleagues, and communities creating spaces for YA literature to flourish. They describe how they have generated ideas and implemented projects in the same building, in the building next door, or in settings across distances. They explain how they designed interdisciplinary curricula with those who study or teach subjects outside their areas of expertise. They share efforts to foster partnerships that invite 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 this work attests to the fact 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*, p. 129).

We begin this issue with a cooperative piece written by an impressive group of authors. “Using Nonfiction to Form Partnerships: A Collaborative Conversation” features a written dialogue between Marc Aronson, Marina Budhos, Jim Ottaviani, and Laurie Ann Thompson. These YA authors of nonfiction both model a collective process of creation and inspire readers to engage in partnerships within and beyond the classroom.

We then celebrate the unique opportunity we as YA readers have to engage with contemporary YA authors willing and excited to share their thinking. “The Many Iterations of Andrew Smith,” a lively speech delivered at the 2014 ALAN Breakfast in Washington, D.C., provides a glimpse into the myriad identities of Andrew Smith—the writer, the high school teacher, the father, and the imperfect person. This is followed by “Painted on the Surface: *The Marbury Lens* and Gore in Young Adult Fiction,” in which Robin Kirk examines a key scene in Smith’s 2010 novel to argue that gore, when used by authors to effectively illuminate character and reveal emotion, can create spaces for readers to work through messiness in their own lives. Drawing from textual analyses and an interview with the author, her assertions suggest value in the discomfort that can come from reading disconcerting words and passages.

Kristen Nichols-Besel, in her piece “‘A Very Likable Person’: Character Development in Louis Sachar’s *There’s a Boy in the Girls’ Bathroom*,” offers a thoughtful description of the potential for collaboration between scholars and libraries. She explores the importance of an author persevering through the

challenges of publication by illustrating Sachar's multifaceted drafting process—one that became evident after sorting through the original source materials of the Kerlan Collection, a children's literature research collection housed at the University of Minnesota.

Several articles in this issue present examples of partnerships generated between educators in various settings and roles. Lacey L. Bodensteiner and Karen J. Kindle's "Beyond Borders: A Partnership to Promote Independent Reading" describes the shared work of an interdisciplinary team of middle school teachers who implemented a schoolwide independent reading program that positively increased students' volume of reading, motivation, and attitudes toward reading.

Dawan Coombs and Maichael Mayans in "Insider or Outsider? Using Young Adult Literature and Experiential Learning to Understand the Other" discuss how students in a seventh-grade language arts class used YA literature partnered with simulated learning experiences to examine the perspective of "the other" and interrogate social norms as they explored what it means to be an insider and an outsider.

In "The *Wonder* of Empathy: Using Palacio's Novel to Teach Perspective Taking," Martha S. Guarisco and Louise M. Freeman describe how sixth-grade students' interpersonal skills shifted in response to an academic unit that emphasized characterization and analysis of perspective and included an empathy-building activity led by a guidance counselor. This work highlights the practical benefits of literary study in developing both academic and social skills in middle school readers.

And in their article, "What Are Book Clubs Doing in *Health* Class? Enhancing Learning and Making Empathetic Disciplinary Connections through Young Adult Novels," Lynn Hunt Long and Lesley Roessing investigate how a partnership between faculty in two seemingly disparate university programs led to the use of YA literature circles in a current issues health education class.

This issue also offers readers an example of an innovative collaboration that extends across several community partners. In their piece, "The Book Battle: Using Service Learning to Collaborate with a Young Adult Library," Jacqueline Bach, Charity Cantey, Jay LeSaichere, and Kylie Morris invite readers into the Book Battle, a trivia contest in which contestants answer questions based on popular young adult fiction. The event encourages connection and reflection

by bringing together teen readers, students enrolled in a university YA literature course, a library's outreach program, and preservice teachers engaged in field experiences.

Our incoming columnists and column editors begin their work with this issue—and we're thrilled with the result. In her first Book in Review: A Teaching Guide column, "Trying to Find Themselves: Teen Literary Characters in Search of Identity and the Right Paths," Barbara Ward provides teachers with resources and ideas for two texts, *We Can Work It Out* by Elizabeth Eulberg and *The Kidney Hypothetical or How to Ruin Your Life in Seven Days* by Lisa Yee. Characters in both books deal with issues of identity and seek ways to change the world around them through partnerships with others in their communities.

In their inaugural Right to Read column, "The Books That Will Never Be Read," James Blasingame and E. Sybil Durand collaborate with authors, attorneys, and local community members to examine how books come to be challenged and how unjustified challenges can be addressed. We hear from YA authors Laurie Halse Anderson, Jack Gantos, Lauren Myracle, Chris Crutcher, Bill Konigsberg, and Matt de la Peña and learn about curricular battles waged in politically torn school districts and the responses of school board members and district administrators.

Our Layered Literacies column, "Layering Meaning across Literate Practices," features new column editors Sandra Schamroth Abrams and Hannah R. Gerber. Their piece explores the multidirectionality and fluidity of layering literacies in online and offline realms to promote meaning making for readers.

We end this issue with two pieces that serve as reminders of the power of connection in whatever form it might come. "I Wanna Be Rich" by esteemed YA author Paul Griffin paints a powerful portrait of the students with whom he has worked in a variety of school settings. His impressions capture and portray the wide array of circumstances they face and the stories they share, reminding us of the importance of listening, valuing young people as individuals, and believing in their capacity to achieve. And in "Sign My Cast," classroom teacher and poet L. A. Gabay offers a thoughtful and emotionally difficult tribute to Ned Vizzini, a YA author who suffered from depression and took his life in 2014. The piece highlights the need for hope in desperate times and the essentiality of connecting with others.

## References

Alexie, S. (2007). *The absolutely true diary of a part-time Indian*. New York, NY: Little, Brown Books for Young Readers.

Guenther, N. (2010). Overlapping. In N. S. Nye (Ed.), *Time you let me in: 25 poets under 25* (pp. 5–6). New York, NY: Greenwillow.