



## From the Editors

### Adolescence and Adolescents: Defining the Culture of Youth

**H**ow we conceive of adolescence influences our perception of adolescents. Through a biological lens, we might envision adolescence as an inevitable stage of life in which raging hormones determine behavior. Through a coming-of-age lens, adolescence might be defined by individual self-discovery and attainment of adult norms. Through a sociocultural lens, adolescence might be seen as a socially mediated practice created and shifted by societal expectations and influences. Taken together, these perspectives offer sophisticated and diverse means of defining the culture of youth.

In this issue, contributors invite us to consider how young adult titles (and those who write, teach, and promote them) might offer, challenge, confirm, or critique conceptions of adolescents or adolescence. They examine how authors present the young people they describe—and how readers might respond and do respond to these representations. They critique how educators envision the young people in their care—and how these visions influence how they care for them. And they offer suggestions for using young adult literature to help readers navigate adolescence (as defined through any lens) and work through the complexity expressed by David Levithan and John Green’s teen protagonist: “My face seems too square and my eyes too big, like I’m perpetually surprised, but there’s nothing wrong with me that I can fix” (*Will Grayson, Will Grayson*, 2010, p. 10).

We begin this issue with “Trusting Teens and Honoring Their Experiences: A Collaborative Conversation,” a written dialogue between Laurie Halse Anderson and Chris Crutcher, award-winning authors

known widely and well for the respect they afford their readers as adolescents capable of exploring and examining the complicated world in which we live.

Several articles in this issue reaffirm this adolescent capacity for navigating difficult realities by exploring how fiction can provide spaces that help them work through challenges they face in their lives outside of books. Jan Lower, in her piece “The ‘Necessary Wilderness’: Liminal Settings for Adolescent Emotional Growth in Four Novels by David Almond,” examines the “wilderness” and how unstructured or undeveloped spaces in fiction can serve as powerful features of narrative that have meaning for developing adolescents.

In “Creative Cussing”: The Sacred and the Profane in Rick Riordan’s Mythical Middle Grade Novels,” Genevieve Larson Ford explores how Riordan uses pseudo-profanity in nuanced ways that are both appropriate to and educative for his readership. She argues that his thoughtful decisions about language reveal an understanding of readers’ linguistic development and also engender space for readers’ explorations of various themes, such as freedom of speech and expression, personal responsibility, and social awareness.

And in her piece “Postmodern Allegory of Adolescence: Daniel Handler and Maira Kalman’s *Why We Broke Up*,” Stacy Graber uses her analysis of the postmodern space in which the work is set to argue that Handler both confirms and challenges the commonly accepted view of adolescents as subject to the seduction of media and consumer culture.

Two articles in this issue work together to ex-

amine how application of a Youth Lens might help us reconsider how we—as educators and academics—construct adolescence/nts. Mark A. Lewis, Robert Petrone, and Sophia Tatiana Sarigianides set the stage for considerations of this lens of analysis in their article “Acting Adolescent?: Critical Examinations of the Youth–Adult Binary in *Feed* and *Looking for Alaska*.” By demonstrating how these young adult titles interact with dominant ideas of adolescence/nts, they explore how these texts both critique and re-inscribe normative distinctions between adolescents and adults and examine how such distinctions affect the dynamic between young people and adults.

Michelle M. Falter demonstrates the potential application of the Youth Lens in a classroom context in her article “Addressing Assumptions about Adolescents in a Preservice YAL Course.” She describes a series of innovative activities designed to complicate preservice teachers’ understandings of adolescents and frame their reading of YA titles through these resulting insights.

Relative to our regular columns, Barbara Ward’s “Book in Review: A Teaching Guide” provides teaching strategies and resources for two YA titles: *The Queen of Bright and Shiny Things* (Aguirre, 2015) and *All the Bright Places* (Niven, 2015). Through careful consideration of these texts and the questions they raise, she argues that all readers, despite their unique identities, are products of their experiences, particularly those lived during adolescence.

Guest author Erica Holan Lucci joins Sandra Schamroth Abrams and Hannah R. Gerber in the column “Layered Literacies: Layered Perspectives of Adolescent Literacies.” Erica shares how her dual identity as a teacher and gamer informs her understandings of pedagogy and practice. She describes how teachers can use the world building of the popular videogame

*Minecraft* to help students deepen their understandings of Veronica Roth’s *Divergent* trilogy (2011–2013).

E. Sybil Durand and Jim Blasingame invite two youth advocates to join the conversation in their column for this issue, “Right to Read: Embracing the Difficult Truths of Adolescence through Young Adult Literature.” Tracey Flores, the director of Arizona State University’s (ASU) youth literacy event, “Día de los Niños, Día de los Libros,” discusses her approach to creating a celebration that honors young people and their cultures, languages, and literacies; Meg Medina, keynote speaker at the event, shares her experience with censorship and the importance of providing readers access to books that embrace the difficult truths of adolescence.

Considerations of censorship and the adolescent reader are taken up further in a thoughtful concluding piece by YA author Ashley Pérez. In her article “Embracing Discomfort in YA Literature,” she discusses the power (and necessity) of discomfort in learning to be better readers, students, and people—and the reality that young people today can handle and benefit from such encounters. She brings our thinking full circle by echoing Laurie Halse Anderson and Chris Crutcher in the reminder that the human experience itself is disconcerting and uncomfortable; stories might be the key to helping adolescents unlock meaning and find connection.

## References

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