



From the Editors

Story and the Development of Moral Character and Integrity

As lovers of literature, we want to believe that through books, adolescent readers may gather insights and knowledge that support their efforts to make sense of themselves and others. That while accessing worlds they might never know, they broaden their perspectives and vicariously experience decision-making processes that parallel those encountered in their lived realities. And yet, if fiction has the power to achieve this good, might it also have the capacity to engender the bad?

It might be true that “It’s a lot easier to be lost than found. It’s the reason we’re always searching and rarely discovered—so many locks, not enough keys” (Dessen, 2008, p. 365). We might “envy the trees/ that grow/ at crossroads./ They are never/ forced/ to decide/ which way/ to go” (Engle, 2013, p. 138). But sometimes we need to consider the difficult possibilities, and “sometimes the best way to find out what you’re supposed to do is by doing the thing you’re not supposed to do” (Forman, 2013, p. 125).

In this issue, contributors consider the complex moral interactions that might occur when adolescent readers enter a text, particularly one intended for them as young adults. They explore whether young adult literature (YAL) can foster opportunities for readers to assess what might be right and what might be wrong—and who decides; provide avenues for exploring dark, forbidden paths; reinforce or challenge belief systems contradictory to those grounded in democratic values of equity and social justice; and/or foster more empathetic and nurturing dispositions and behaviors among young people.

We begin this issue with Jandy Nelson’s ALAN 2015 Workshop keynote address, “Our Contemporary Shamans.” In this lyrical piece, Nelson describes the influence of English teachers who taught her to think, to dream, to risk, to be unique. As she describes it, each teacher “blasted through stone and found me, a truer me. I think this is what English teachers do. They blast through stone and find us. And then they talk in our sleep for lifetimes.”

Our exploration of morality begins with the reflections of three authors we admire—Becky Albertalli, Kekla Magoon, and Aisha Saeed—and their collaborative conversation, “Who Decides What’s Right for Me?: Morality and Cultural Norms.” These writers help us better understand the ways in which culture influences individual and societal perceptions of morality and how literature can help adolescent readers decide who and what is right in a world of moral complexity and contradiction.

“‘Just Take One Step’: How YA Novels Empower Bystanders to Stop Sexual Assault,” written by Sarah E. Whitney, closely examines six YA bystander books, or texts that narrate adolescent sexual assault from the perspective of a witness or confidante. Whitney analyzes how such titles can challenge and support teen audiences by helping them discern problematic peer behaviors, identify and confront rape myths, and recognize their own power to disrupt potential episodes of sexual violence.

In “Taking Down Walls: Countering Dominant Narratives of the Immigrant Experience through the Teaching of *Enrique’s Journey*,” Ashley Boyd

and Jeanne Dyches explore how YA nonfiction can be used concurrently to satisfy the demands of the Common Core State Standards (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010) and cultivate social justice dispositions among preservice English teachers. Drawing upon blog responses to Sonia Nazario's (2007) *Enrique's Journey*, the authors argue that the text helped participants begin to develop a sense of critical consciousness.

In "Reviewing to Exclude?: Critical Discourse Analysis of YA LGBTQ Book Reviews for School Librarians," Jenna Spiering analyzes book reviews of YA LGBTQ literature to consider how the language within the reviews might influence the decisions that school librarians make about including such literature in their collections. Spiering also forwards examples of reviewers' discourse that encourage school librarians to disrupt normative understandings about what might be considered appropriate content with regard to LGBTQ literature.

Nicole P. Clawson offers evidence of the lasting effects of literature on life in her piece, "*Treasure Island* and *The Chocolate War*: Fostering Morally Mature Young Adults through Amoral Fiction." She argues that Robert Louis Stevenson (1883/2012) and Robert Cormier (1974/2004) incited literary revolutions that provided (and continue to provide) opportunities for young adult readers to navigate complex and ambiguous moral situations without didacticism.

Hilary Crew, in her article "Revisiting the Vietnam War: Chris Lynch's Vietnam Series and the Morality of War," examines five young adult novels in which Chris Lynch presents the experiences of four protagonists who serve in the US military during the Vietnam War. She argues that Lynch's war narratives honor the value of friendship over nationalistic objectives of war, and she offers advice and resources for using these titles in the classroom to help students employ theories of war to think critically and carefully about the Vietnam conflict.

In his article "Read This Book Out Loud: A Review of Young Adult Works by Artists from the Poetry Slam Community," Adam D. Henze gives readers an overview of YA texts written by poets from the slam community. He shows how YA literature shares numerous conventions with the narratives commonly

shared in the poetry slam scene and discusses the moral implications of using these titles in the classroom.

In Book in Review: A Teaching Guide, Toby Emert's "Of History Lessons and Forbidden Loves and Stories Worth Telling Twice" reviews two historical fiction texts, *Lies We Tell Ourselves* (Talley, 2014) and *Something Must Be Done about Prince Edward County* (Green, 2015). Emert provides educators with ideas and resources for using these texts to support students in developing empathetic understandings of people who inhabited times past and those who live in the present day.

In his Right to Read column, "The Undercover Life of Young Adult Novels," Angel Daniel Matos asks readers to think carefully about the role of book covers in the conveyance of content and the ways in which glossy images can reaffirm deficit perspectives of LGBTQ individuals. As he explains, "Given the status of a book cover as an interpretative threshold, it is important for us to question which audiences are invited to 'step inside' a book's pages through the implementation of certain paratextual features and the extent to which these thresholds are deliberately designed to reach out to, or withdraw from, a particular readership or purchaser by omitting crucial information."

Guest author William Kist joins Peggy Semingson in the Layered Literacies column, "The Multimodal Memoir Project: Remembering Key YA Texts." Kist describes the ways in which this project affords students opportunities to make intertextual connections across a wide variety of texts and media. The reflective process of creating these digital literacy narratives encourages students to explore their literate identities, particularly the YA titles they read as young people, to better make sense of themselves and their world.

We end this issue with a deeply felt piece, "Meanings of Life and Realities of Loss: A Collaborative Conversation," that includes the voices of YA authors Martha Brockenbrough, Jennifer Niven, Adam Silvera, and Francisco X. Stork. Their thoughtful conversation focuses on the role morality plays in defining the value of life and facing the realities that come with loss. Their words remind us that story can breed love, that hope can come from sadness, and that navigating right and wrong makes us both vulnerable and strong.

References

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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>. All submissions may be sent to thealanreview@gmail.com.

Winter 2018: "All" in the Family: Conceptions of Kinship in Young Adult Literature Submissions due on or before July 1, 2017

The idea of family is complicated by the reality of life. While some may envision family as consisting of those to whom we are related by blood, others might hold a more inclusive definition. Family might be associated with home and safety and tradition and love or connected to feelings of betrayal and loss and loneliness and anger. Although our unique experiences with family might conjure differing definitions and perceptions along the continuum, we all likely have some type of emotional response to the concept.

We wonder how YA literature might influence how young people make sense of their own families. How is family perceived and depicted—conventionally? contemporarily? What roles do parents and guardians, extended family members, siblings, neighbors, teachers, caregivers, etc. play in defining family? Is it true that "Everyone plays a purpose, even fathers who lie to you or leave you behind" (*More Happy Than Not*, Silvera, 2015, p. 84)? We are curious, too, as to how YA titles might help readers consider the moral obligation to stand by family. Is the family bond immutable, or can/should we cut ties and under what circumstances? Do we agree that "[N]o matter what, we're still family, even if we don't want to be" (*Gabi, A Girl in Pieces*, Quintero, 2014, p. 168)? As educators, we want to know how you have reached out to families to foster young people's reading and engagement with stories. How and why have you valued and celebrated the funds of knowledge and lived experiences of those in our students' families?

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