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From the Editors

Advocacy, Activism, and Agency in Young Adult Literature

Given their age and perceived lack of power in an adult-run world, adolescents can experience helplessness, cynicism, and frustration resulting from not being able to address issues that anger or exasperate them or to evoke change in the face of obstacles over which they have little or no control. As teachers, however, we recall moments of insight and passion and optimism displayed by our students in response to literature. We believe that stories can empower readers, and we wonder just how far-reaching such empowerment can extend, especially in classrooms and libraries that invite young people to question, to argue, to imagine what is possible—and what they can do to achieve it.

For this issue, contributors share examples of how they promote advocacy, activism, and agency among students (and/or their teachers, families, etc.) using young adult literature. They examine key questions: How are these efforts depicted and advanced by YA authors? How do readers witness and respond to such efforts? How might YAL be used to inspire action in the classroom and larger community? Can story serve to better our world and the lives of those who live here?

As you read and ponder the pieces in this issue, we invite you to listen to the voice of Emil Sher's teen protagonist when he chooses to take responsibility for a challenging dilemma before it becomes too late for action: "I wanted to clean up the mess. . . . The mess would keep spreading like those huge oil spills that turn blue water black and leave birds so covered with oil they never fly again" (*Young Man with Camera*, p. 108).

We begin this issue with four authors we respect greatly—Sara Farizan, Alex Gino, Bill Konigsberg, and Ami Polonsky—in a written discussion titled, "Advocacy, Sexual Orientation, and Gender Expression: A Collaborative Conversation." These authors talk about sexual and gender identities and expression and how they work to fight discrimination in their books and in their lives.

Sean P. Connors's "An Invitation to Look Deeper into the World: Using Young Adult Fiction to Encourage Youth Civic Engagement" invites readers to tap into their students' passion for young adult literature to encourage civic engagement. Connors shares a class project that intersects issues of social justice and dystopia and culminates in a digital video essay with real-world purposes.

In their article, "Below the Surface Level of Social Justice: Using Quad Text Sets to Plan Equity-Oriented Instruction," William Lewis and Jill Ewing Flynn push teachers to provide students with opportunities to think deeply about social justice themes through young adult literature paired with three additional texts in a Quad Text Set framework. They argue that such an approach facilitates strategic, deliberate literacy instruction and places texts in conversation with each other to invite students to consider social justice while fostering advocacy, activism, and agency.

In "Toward Intersectional Literacy Practices: Interrogating Homonormativity through Reading Sáenz's *Aristotle and Dante*," Ryan Schey draws on queer of color scholarship to theorize intersectional and activist reading practices for interpreting LGBT-themed

literature. He uses Sáenz's (2012) *Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe* as an example and outlines two cultural models for understanding the intersections of ethnicity and non-heteronormative sexualities in the novel. Schey writes that these models have the potential to interrogate and disrupt heteronormativity and homonormativity in classrooms.

Jody N. Polleck and Carla España, in their article "Revolutions and Resistance: Creating Space for Adolescent Agency and Advocacy through a Critical Reading of Sonia Manzano's *The Revolution of Evelyn Serrano*," explore how educators might use texts, such as *The Revolution of Evelyn Serrano* (Manzano, 2012), to support secondary students' development of political consciousness. The authors argue that linking novels with contemporary resistance movements can invite readers to interrogate oppressive practices in and outside the US and explore historical legacies of activism, including the role of youth as change agents within their communities.

In their piece titled "Racism, Privilege, and Voice in *All American Boys:* A Counter-narrative of Resistance and Hope," Jennifer Goulston Zwillenberg and Danielle Gioia examine critically the scholarship on race talk, racial stereotypes, and privilege to analyze Jason Reynolds and Brendan Kiely's *All American Boys* (2015). They describe how educators can use this novel to engage students in race-oriented conversations, specifically concerning the topic of police brutality.

Mike P. Cook, Beatrice Bailey, and Lienne Medford, in "*March* and the Struggle for Historical Perspective Recognition," share the experience of three teacher educators as they introduced social studies teacher candidates to John Lewis's graphic memoir *March* (Lewis, Aydin, & Powell, 2016). The authors describe how the text fostered the development of perspective recognition and helped students consider pedagogical possibilities for their own future classrooms, as well as reflect upon (non)empathetic responses to Lewis's life and role in the civil rights movement.

In his Book in Review: A Teaching Guide column, "A Vocabulary of Intimacy: Building and Nurturing Healthy Adolescent Relationship Skills," Bryan Gillis explores the complexities inherent in adolescent relationships. Using two texts, *Honestly Ben* (Konigsberg, 2017) and *Manicpixiedreamgirl* (Leveen, 2013), Gillis examines the adolescent relationships represented in each and provides innovative teaching strategies for educators using these texts with their students.

In this issue's Right to Read column, "Standardized Censorship," Victor Malo-Juvera and Lisa Scherff explore the influence of "curricula, policies, standards, norms, and goals that prioritize standardized testing, remove academic freedom from teachers, and support the continued Othering of marginalized peoples based on constructs such as color, race, gender/gender identity, sexual orientation, immigration status, age, or religion" on classroom instruction. They offer a view of the realities of teaching in a time when external influences hold significant sway.

Shelbie Witte partners with Katie Rybakova in the Layered Literacies column, "Digging for Deeper Connections: Building Multimodal Text Scaffolds." These authors challenge readers to consider how they might incorporate authentic texts into reading ladders (Lesesne, 2010) to embrace the multimodality of the 21st century lives of their students. The column features three reading ladders along with a guide for practitioners seeking to create their own ladders.

Our final piece is a collaborative conversation between three YA authors, Brendan Kiely, Kristin Levine, and Isabel Quintero. In their conversation, titled "Fighting for What Is Right: Characters Who Take Risks and Challenge Assumptions," they discuss how they address explicitly issues of agency and activism in their writing and craft characters who challenge assumptions and become change agents. These authors share candidly the responsibilities, risks, and consequences that come with the encouragement of activism in their work.

As evidenced by the articles included in this issue, we recognize the challenges inherent in advocating, acting, and assuming agency, but we find hope in Kekla Magoon's reminder: "The river moves, but it follows a path. When it tires of one journey, it rubs through some rock to forge a new way. Hard work, but that's its nature" (*The Rock and the River*, p. 283). We hope this issue encourages you to enact ways of teaching young adult literature that achieve positive social change.

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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.

Fall 2018: The Psychology of YA Literature: Traversing the Intersection of Mind, Body, and Soul
Submissions due on or before March 1, 2018

Mental illness, the effects of violence, trauma, and other psychological issues permeate the lives of the young people with whom we work and the families and friends who exist around them. Young adult authors have taken up these topics in their writings, providing space and opportunity for readers to find solace and support and to develop understandings that complicate their existing assumptions and beliefs.

In this issue, we invite you to consider how YA authors explore, for example, what it means to feel lost, to be in that "moment when I know that I should scream. But screaming would be hard. And blackness would be easy. Black picks me" (E. K. Johnston, *Exit, Pursued by a Bear*, p. 47). Or to feel worn out, to have "no emotions left: I was a candle that'd burned all the way down" (Rahul Kanakia, *Enter Title Here*, p. 181). Or to want something you can't have due to forces out of your control: "I want to grab your hand, allow you to pull me through, to take us wherever you want to go, fill my calendar with your smile and laugh the way we used to" (Eric Gansworth, *If I Ever Get Out of Here*, p. 12).

As educators, we invite you to describe your efforts in using YA literature in the classroom. Perhaps your work might help students build richer understandings of the mind, body, and soul and learn to challenge, as noted by David Levithan, how "some people think mental illness is a matter of mood, a matter of personality. They think depression is simply a form of being sad, that OCD is a form of being uptight. They think the soul is sick, not the body. It is, they believe, something that you have some choice over. I know how wrong this is" (*Every Day*, p. 119). We wonder how your work can offer hope. Yes, it is a "hard cycle to conquer. The body is working against you. And because of this, you feel even more despair. Which only amplifies the imbalance. It takes uncommon strength to live with these things. But I have seen that strength over and over again" (*Every Day*, pp. 119–120).

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Winter 2019: How We Play the Game: YA Literature and Sport
Submissions due on or before July 1, 2018

Sport, culture, identity, and power are intimately related. Sport can both reaffirm and challenge societal beliefs, strengthening and calling into question existing ideologies related to gender, race, and class. While it might be true that "it's a long race and you can always outwork talent in the end" (Matthew Quick, *Boy 21*, p. 8), the relationship between sport and socioeconomics, for example, is real: sport is an industry driven by profit, and young people pay to play. Working hard sometimes isn't enough to gain access, leading us to wonder who gets to participate and if and how such issues are addressed in YA literature.

Sport can also unite and divide people—with real consequences. It's true that the team element of sport can connect people in memorable ways, as "it's amazing how two thin pieces of clothing can hold such deep memories. Laughter, pain, victory, defeat, friendship, fatigue, elation . . . they're all there, but only to the person who's worn the uniform" (Wendelin Van Draanen, *The Running Dream*, p. 187). But it's also true that sport can perpetuate inequities across people and across time, as evidenced by this scene from Sherman Alexie's *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven:* "Last night I missed two free throws which would have won the game against the best team in the state. The farm town high school I play for is nicknamed the 'Indians,' and I'm probably the only actual Indian ever to play for a team with such a mascot. This morning I pick up the sports page and read the headline: INDIANS LOSE AGAIN. Go ahead and tell me none of this is supposed to hurt me very much" (p. 179). For this issue, we invite you to consider the presentation of sport in YA titles and how YA sports literature might be used to foster a more nuanced understanding of the game and its players, its history and institutional norms, and its impact on life on and off the court.

As always, we also welcome submissions focused on any aspect of young adult literature not directly connected to these themes.