SUMMER 2018

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THE ALAN REVIEW

Editor **Wendy Glenn**
wendy.glenn@colorado.edu
University of Colorado Boulder

Assistant Editors **Ricki Ginsberg**
ricki.ginsberg@colostate.edu
Colorado State University

Danielle King-Watkins
danielle.king@uconn.edu
University of Connecticut

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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.

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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**
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SUMMER (June) Issue Deadline:	**NOVEMBER 1**

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

From the Editors

Dollars and Sense?: Economic Disparities in YAL

Some might agree with Billy Idol: "It doesn't matter about money; having it, not having it. Or having clothes, or not having them. You're still left alone with yourself in the end." Others, like Franklin D. Roosevelt, might subscribe to the belief that "Happiness is not in the mere possession of money; it lies in the joy of achievement, in the thrill of creative effort." These words, however, reflect the voices of those with money, those who have the privilege of deciding that the money they possess isn't all that it's worth. We can't shake the steady voice of Nelson Mandela who advises us to remember that "Money won't create success, [but] the freedom to make it will."

When it comes to money, our local and global realities are complicated. We talk of the top 1%, those in positions of power by virtue of their hefty investment portfolios. We learn of the vastly different living wage earned by people around the world. We hear of families in our own communities without homes, of jobs lost, of educational opportunities denied, of institutional oppression that limits access and mobility.

In this issue, contributors consider the complexities of economics and how they are taken up in young adult literature. They examine questions related to the relationship between fiction and our lived realities: How do authors represent class systems in the settings they create? How often is race conflated with socioeconomic status? What are the implications of such representations for young adult readers? How can we support students' critical reading and understanding of wealth and poverty and their role in politics and policies, in literature and life?

We open this issue with the powerfully memorable keynote address delivered by A.S. King at the 2016 ALAN Workshop in Atlanta, Georgia. In "On Making Innovators," King invites readers to learn from, be inspired by, and celebrate teenagers in hopes of supporting them in becoming the innovators, rebels, and visionaries our world needs if we are to do better.

In "(Socio)Economics, Power, and Class: A Collaborative Conversation," three YA authors, Sarah Carroll, Pablo Cartaya, and Kara Thomas, address explicitly and candidly the intersections of (socio) economics, power, and class in both their literature and their lives. They consider how we might rethink narratives perpetuated by society and how story offers opportunities to invite readers to engage in complicated and sometimes controversial conversations.

In their article, "Taking Out the Trash: Complicating Rural Working-Class Narratives in Young Adult Literature," Karly Marie Grice, Caitlin E. Murphy, and Eileen M. Shanahan explore intersectional understandings of race, class, and place. They analyze three recently published texts and consider how these texts complicate assumptions and provide pedagogical opportunities to (re)consider counter-narratives of the white, rural, working-class adolescent experience in the United States.

Sean P. Connors's and Roberta Seelinger Trites's "*Legend*, Exceptionalism, and Genocidal Logic: A Framework for Reading Neoliberalism in YA Dystopias" presents a critical framework that readers (and their students) might use to read neoliberalism—an economic philosophy that privileges free-market capitalism and emphasizes individualism at the expense

of the collective—in young adult dystopias and other texts for adolescents. Their work illustrates the complex readings that can come from examining literature through an economic lens of analysis.

Katie Rybakova's "Using Young Adult Literature with First-Generation College Students in an Introductory Literature College Course" analyzes the perceptions of six first-generation, rural college students as they use young adult literature as a scaffold for canonical texts. Her article serves as a justification to more strongly and intentionally incorporate YAL in college environments in order to facilitate conversations among students.

In her article, "'Now I See Them as People': Financial Inequity in *Eleanor & Park*," Alice D. Hays follows one student's experiences while engaging with Rainbow Rowell's (2013) novel within a social-justice-based curriculum. Hays analyzes the ways in which this student's perceptions of poverty were challenged through the experience of reading YAL, which speaks to the power of texts to engage students in important conversations about poverty and economics.

Sarah Hardstaff's "Whose War? Symbolic Economies in Conversations about Conflict in Mildred Taylor's *The Road to Memphis* and Cynthia Voigt's *The Runner*" draws upon symbolic economics in conversations about conflict in two classic young adult texts. Her work builds upon current analyses of economic issues and themes centered on questions of socioeconomic inequity and injustice to explore how certain types of economic logic and ideas shape texts linguistically, working to reinforce or subvert their ideologies.

In her article, "A Hair Closer to Freedom: Retellings of Rapunzel as Self-Rescuer," Corinna Barrett Percy examines three retellings of the original Grimm tale, arguing that Rapunzel's hair in the contemporary versions serves as a strength and weapon rather than a cause of subjugation. Percy draws upon anthropological theory to demonstrate how the protagonists (in relation to their hair) engage in the coming of age process of confinement, metamorphosis, and reemergence.

Bryan Gillis, in his Book in Review: A Teaching Guide column titled "Understanding and Connecting Our Ways of Being in the World: Promoting Sensitivity and Understanding in Classrooms with Undocumented Latinx Students," features two YA texts, *Saint Death* (Sedgewick, 2016) and *Disappeared* (Stork, 2017). Gillis explores how YAL that portrays the experiences of undocumented Latinx youth can serve as a powerful tool with the potential to move teachers and students toward a better understanding of each other's ways of being in the world.

In his Right to Read column, "Who Decides What You Can Teach?," Victor Malo-Juvera invites readers to better understand the ways in which academic freedom works—and is limited—in school and university communities. Drawing upon legal precedents and other court proceedings, the aims and activities of teachers' unions, and recent legislative decisions and influences, Malo-Juvera informs and advocates for action among teachers at all levels.

The Layered Literacies column, "The Beyond Books Project: Preparing Teachers and Students for a World of (In)Equities," explores how we might use texts as a framework to discuss and consider the complexities of equality and economic disparity. Lotta Larson and Shelbie Witte highlight the Beyond Books project, which uses traditional and nontraditional texts along with digital and online resources to highlight local and global inequities.

We express heartfelt thanks to our outgoing column editors. Bryan, Victor, and Shelbie, your wisdom, care, and passion have resulted in writings that make a significant contribution to the journal and field. We appreciate you.

In their collaborative conversation, "What We Have and Who We Are: (Socio)Economics and Identity," YA authors Kayla Cagan, Love Maia, and Lilliam Rivera explore the connections between (socio) economics and personal identity. In their discussion, they share personal connections to this topic, as well as how it is portrayed in their novels in meaningful ways.

In reading this issue, we invite you to explore questions about the norms that underpin our views of how the world works when it comes to money: Do those with financial equity benefit inequitably? Are they "untouchable, immune to life's troubles" (Maggie Stiefvater, *The Dream Thieves* [2013], p. 66)? Is it true that all young people have a chance, as Matthew Quick implies in *Boy 21* (2012)?: "Someday an opportunity will come. Think about Harry Potter. His life is terrible, but then a letter arrives, he gets on a train, and everything is different for him afterward. Better. Magical" (p. 73). Can we find truth in the advice to

"Take care not to listen to anyone who tells you what you can and can't be in life" (Meg Medina, *The Girl Who Could Silence the Wind* [2012], p. 79)?

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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.

Summer 2019: What's Now? What's New? What's Next?
Submissions due on or before November 1, 2018

The field of young adult literature has exploded over the past few decades. As a result, we have enjoyed increasing numbers of memorable stories written by authors willing to trust their readers with complexity and challenge. We have learned from colleagues who have implemented innovative approaches to teaching and thinking about this literature and its implications for the young people who read it. And we have begun to think carefully and critically about whose voices are present and not present and how literature both reflects and has the potential to shape the sociocultural realities in which we live and work.

In our final issue as editors of *The ALAN Review*, we aim to create space for reflection, contemplation, and anticipation around young adult literature. We invite you to consider where we are, what we've accomplished, and what we all might tackle in our collective pursuit of scholarship and teaching. As we engage in this work, we find inspiration in the words of Nicola Yoon: "I was trying so hard to find the single pivotal moment that set my life on its path. The moment that answered the question, 'How did I get here?' But it's never just one moment. It's a series of them. And your life can branch out from each one in a thousand different ways" (*Everything, Everything*, p. 305). And we are reminded that we can (and must) do better in this work, knowing that "Sometimes you can do everything right and things will still go wrong. The key is to never stop doing right" (Angie Thomas, *The Hate U Give*, p. 155). Given our shared commitment to books, young people, and a better tomorrow, we are hopeful that our forward momentum will impel us to move the field ahead in ways that foster equity and social justice for all. As Renee Ahdieh intones, "When I was a boy, my mother would tell me that one of the best things in life is the knowledge that our story isn't over yet. Our story may have come to a close, but your story is still yet to be told. Make it a story worthy of you" (*The Wrath and the Dawn*, p. 387).

As always, we also welcome submissions focused on any aspect of young adult literature not directly connected to these themes. Please see the ALAN website (http://www.alan-ya.org/page/alan-review-author-guidelines) for submission guidelines.

A.S. **King**

On Making Innovators

Keynote address delivered at the 2016 Workshop of the Assembly on Literature for Adolescents of the National Council of Teachers of English, Atlanta, GA

Last week my work was called "unapologetically strange" by the *New York Times.* It was, to me, one of the biggest compliments anyone could give. I already knew I was strange, but I'm fucking thrilled to find out I've stopped apologizing for it.

Today, before you (in my new flannel), I give no apology for being who I am, who I've been for nearly half a century. Being asked to speak to my ALAN brothers and sisters and being given the opportunity to talk about this theme is one of my proudest moments. I thank you all for coming to my favorite conference of the year, and I thank Jennifer [Buehler, ALAN President, 2016] for asking me to open today's workshop.

I will warn you in advance: I am difficult to live tweet accurately.

How do we make innovators? As parents and teachers and members of this society—how do we make rebels and revolutionaries?

The start lies in our own minds, I think. I write a lot about boxes and how human beings are conditioned to label other human beings and how rare it is for us to accept changes within those pre-labeled boxes. I often say that teenagers are more open-minded—I say this because so many adults I know just can't change their minds. Doing so is often interpreted as some sort of weakness. We fear it. We hear our whole lives this clear idea that to be adult is to be right. We fight change. We light ourselves on fire if we make a mistake. All the while, the children are watching.

So what do I mean when I say the start to making innovators lies in our minds? It's that moment we take before we judge kids or fear how they will fare; we skip the warnings of how hard life will be and instead smile, hug them, and tell them that we will gladly kick the world's ass alongside them. It's that moment when we hear the pain and anger in students' voices, but rather than telling them our opinion about their situation, we sit quietly and let them express it in any way they can because as human beings, we don't grow or heal unless we express. And we believe what they say is their truth. We *believe* them, and we believe *in* them.

My moment was when my ninth-grade English teacher allowed me to write my first-person point of view assignment from the point of view of a can of succotash rather than rolling her eyes and telling me to be more normal. I'd been told before ninth grade to be more normal, but this teacher opened her mind for me, and I am forever grateful. Little did either of us know that one day I would also write from the point of view of our hometown pagoda and win an award for it.

Think back to David Bowie in 1972. Think about how many people thought he was a freak just for being alive and wearing skintight bodysuits. Think back to Prince in the early 80s and how the Parents Music Resource Center came after him for daring to write sexually free (or explicit—you choose) lyrics. It's now 2016. We have already accepted these two people as genius—as innovators who took risks that paid off.

Arthur Schopenhauer (1818) said: "All truth

passes through three stages. First, it is ridiculed. Second, it is violently opposed. Third, it is accepted as being self-evident." When I was writing this speech, I thought of the year we've had. On one hand, I think about the innovators we've lost, and on the other hand, I think about what's to come now that a threat exists to silence future innovators based on whose voices will be allowed to be the loudest.

Here's what I say to students all over the country. I say: I didn't want to write a 200-word essay from the first-person point of view any more than you did. I decided to make it interesting. I wrote it from the point of view of a can of succotash. A specific can. This particular can was the last can on the supermarket shelf during a blizzard. It felt lonely because nobody likes succotash. Or at least I didn't.

Let's deconstruct.

Why did Amy write about succotash? What was Amy really doing? She was transferring her ninth-grade emotions onto a can of succotash. How did Amy feel about Amy when she wrote that essay? She felt lonely, cold, alone, unwanted. She hated Amy because she felt like everyone hated Amy because Amy was annoyingly strange. Just like succotash.

This is an accurate description of my ninth-grade reality. I'd been making my own weeknight dinners since I was 10 years old, and I spent most of my time sneaking cigarettes in the cornfield around my house or reading books and writing things down in my louver-doored bedroom closet. I knew if I needed help, I had only myself to count on. From the outside, I couldn't have looked as at-risk as I was, so no teachers knew anything about my reality. When I acted out, they probably thought I was being dramatic because it's the first thing we think and say about teenagers in this society, isn't it? Especially teenage girls. But I wasn't being dramatic. I spent most of my nights alone in my house eating whatever I could make and watching M*A*S*H. Hawkeye Pierce was my mother. Some of you may have read that somewhere before.

I'm trying to tell you something. I'm trying to tell you that I make a living out of the same thing I was doing in ninth grade. This year, I released a book about a tornado. It's not just any tornado. It's my tornado. My life on paper. That's what my books are. Little pieces of me. I tell students: "If I was doing this in ninth grade, some of you are, too." If I just wrote down my life story, it would be depressing. But if I write it from the POV of a can of random freaky vegetables, it becomes both easier to write about and more interesting.

This is my process. Pure emotion. I plan nothing. Never know what's coming on the next page. Never know the end until I get there. My process is based solely on trust in a very untrustworthy world.

I trust my characters to tell their stories, and they trust me to do it with the same lack of fucks I had in ninth grade. Their voices come into my brain and then out of my fingers as I type. The minute I overthink, plan, or plot, the characters abandon me and shut up. It happened this year. I took too long, overthought; the kid shut up and stopped telling me what to write. I wrote 54 pages total of that book, and it was dead on page 20.

This is my process. Pure emotion. I plan nothing. Never know what's coming on the next page. Never know the end until I get there. My process is based solely on trust in a very untrustworthy world.

So it goes.

I commandeered a school bus when I was nine years old. Third grade. It was gifted class day. We were bused to gifted class once a week, and that morning my teacher told us that gifted class had been cancelled for the day. And I wasn't having it. *Fuck that. I want out of this place. I already know how to multiply, I have shit to express, and I can express it in gifted class.*

So when I saw the usual gifted bus pull up outside the school building, and I saw my friends from gifted looking confused, I lined them up like any other week, and I figured why not? I remember standing in front of my classmates talking to the bus driver through the bus's doorway. I remember how high up he was in the bus and how little I was on the road's tarmacadam. He told us that class had been cancelled, and I told him, "No! It's not. We're going." And for some messed up reason, he believed me—which, in my life at that age was a miracle because no one ever believes nine-year-old girls—and he got us on the bus, and we drove to the school where our gifted class . . . wasn't happening that day. The other school's principal turned the bus around, and we drove back.

This is an innovator.

Picture me at age five standing in front of a 1970s TV, the kind with legs and clunky channel-changing dials. I was remote control. I was remote. I stood barely as tall as the top of the console right in front of Walter Cronkite. The most important half hour of our day—the news. Real news. You remember the kind.

I stood there, and I told my parents how I felt. And they didn't care how I felt. They yelled at me to move. They threatened. But little Amy knew they were too exhausted to physically move her. I'd talk louder as they complained and then, once I'd said all I needed to say, I'd finally go. They ignored me, but I wouldn't be ignored. I was a freak from day one. In my own house.

I knew what my mother had told me was true: no matter what I do in life, I will be doing it as a woman, and people will expect me to act accordingly. And so, I have made it my business to act any damn way I want. And no, I'm not sorry.

We are an army now—freaks since birth. Children who needed love and understanding and not just a new pair of sneakers. A hug would have been nice. One time it would have been calming to cry when I felt sad and not be told that crying made me look ugly. One time it would have felt lovely to have someone ask me how I really was. I was anxious. I was defiant. I was tired before I hit fourth grade.

I was the youngest in a family of risk takers, so part of this comes naturally to me, because as much as my parents messed me up, they taught me the beauty of self-sufficiency. It's always a balance in my therapist's office. On one hand, I lived in a tunnel of emotional abandonment, and on the other, I knew how to make my own dinner at age 10. I saw self-employment as normal. I saw my mother as the first woman in her boardroom in 1978. And I heard her stories. And I knew every day was hard, surrounded by men who didn't take her knowledge seriously and at the same time required her to wear a girdle. She prepared me for life as a woman by telling me the truth—which was: no matter what I do in life, I will be doing it as a woman, and that will really piss some people off.

As a Surrealist writer, being female isn't always a picnic. I'm mislabeled a lot. I end up in the fantasy section where my work is bound to piss off some trusting reader who expected werewolves or dragons. I'm often misunderstood, and I land on those awful "authors you never heard of but should have" lists. Shit wouldn't be this hard to shelve if I thought more like women are supposed to think—or if I had a different undercarriage, as if the marriage of my brain and my hands is somehow rerouted through my glands.

In my first 15 years of writing, I got a lot of rejection letters. About 400 or so. Through these letters, I learned two important things:

1. Women are not meant to be weird. In one letter, I was told that writing was "hard work," and in another, I was told, "This is too strange for your audience." Up until then, I thought my audience was anyone who wanted to read a book, but apparently I was wrong.
2. There isn't enough romance in my books to prove that I am, in fact, a woman. The explanation was, "Readers of female fiction expect certain things." I remember thinking "Wow. Female fiction. I had no idea vaginas could write books." I did a lot of kegels after that just in case I could teach mine to work a keyboard. So far, no luck.

I knew what my mother had told me was true: no matter what I do in life, I will be doing it as a woman, and people will expect me to act accordingly. And so, I have made it my business to act any damn way I want. And no, I'm not sorry.

Still not sorry about the bus thing, either.

Since I'm listing the things I'm not sorry about, I'd like to go on record saying I love young adult fiction and I'm not sorry about it. Every year, I am asked too many times by adults if I might one day write a "real book." I've been told by heads of English departments that they will not include this sort of writing on their reading lists. I ask them which young adult books they've read, and they look at me blankly. When I moved back to America in 2004, I'd never heard of YA fiction, and when one of my books was sold as a young adult novel, I was warned—almost scared off—by sentiments like these. Then I read

M. T. Anderson's (2006) *The Astonishing Life of Octavian Nothing, Vol. 1*, and I went from being iffy about YA to knowing I'd found my place. Why? Because I want to find that kid who's writing from the point of view of a can of succotash.

Where will I find her now? Will she be busy prepping for her Keystone standardized test so she can be assessed and graduate by regurgitating some bullshit about what some dead white author was thinking when he wrote a book? Will she be so busy prepping, the way you are all so busy prepping, for a test that undermines not only her ability to think critically but undermines everything you are as teachers?

Dammit, you know how to assess. You are in a constant state of assessment. You're teachers.

The people who make the tests aren't even educators. It's a cartoon looney world of kids-for-cash, and respect for teaching has come to an all-time low in my lifetime—a criminal act—moving backward, upside down, and inside out. And still, you get your asses out of bed in the dark and stay up late grading because every one of those kids has potential.

Your jobs have grown more challenging for many reasons, but the most noble that I see is that you've somehow found a way into the cracks of the Common Core, and you still look for cans of succotash. For that, I thank you.

My husband spends more than eight weeks per year on test prep in a school where a student and his brother just last week landed in juvenile detention for robbery because their mom couldn't afford rent. *What does a standardized test score show us about that?* It shows us there are kids out there who give fewer shits about what some dead guy thought while he wrote a book than they do about helping their family eat or staying alive in their neighborhoods. Eyed by every person they pass, eyed by cops in every car, they wonder if every day could be their last. How the *fuck* do we standardize *that*?

And yet, every one of us will connect with one book if we are allowed to. If only the people in charge could stop for a minute and remember that relevant, contemporary books are not dangerous—not as dangerous as the message that we should all learn the same thing in the same way at the same time in the same class with the same teacher. All while those same people in charge take money from poorer districts and make sure *those* kids will never hit the right percentile. . . so they can buy their schools private and standardize *those* kids in a different way.

Prince's classroom was wherever his piano was. Hendrix's was wherever his guitar was. Steve Jobs didn't graduate college. Aretha Franklin dropped out at 15 to care for her first child . . . and she later became the first woman inducted into the Rock 'n Roll Hall of Fame in 1987. Which says a lot about the Rock 'n Roll Hall of Fame, but I digress.

These people commandeered the bus. Their own bus. And as a former bus-commandeering remote control, I want to tell you something you likely already know. Many of us don't give a shit about school or grades. Two English teachers in particular are to blame for why I'm standing in front of you today. I thank them every time I see them. I wish there had been more of them, but as the daughter and wife of teachers, I know that teachers have too much to do to help some kid who has no giveashit. We know you see us. We are smart, and you know it. We are wasting your time, and you know it.

And yet, every one of us will connect with one book if we are allowed to. If only the people in charge could stop for a minute and remember that relevant, contemporary books are not dangerous—not as dangerous as the message that we should all learn the same thing in the same way at the same time in the same class with the same teacher.

I ask you: Trust us the way I trust my characters. Trust us to find our way even if it takes 15 years of rejection and failure. Even if it never comes. Many innovators never get heard in the big-risk game of what we call "the arts." But if I wasn't standing here—if I was still writing and failing—I'd die happy trying.

I nearly didn't graduate high school. About a week before last senior day, I was slapped from my stoner reality by my hippy geometry teacher from tenth grade who told me to pay attention in American Political Systems, the class I had to pass to get

my diploma. Do you know what I had to do to pass the class (ironic in political times like these)? I had to memorize the Constitution. Do you know how I did it? With a full-time job every day after school delivering pizzas? I put it on a cassette tape. I made a poem out of it. I rapped it like Chuck D, and I did manage to graduate . . . in the bottom quarter of my class. My college advising guidance counselor, who'd listened to me talk about my home life but didn't believe it because *our family looked so damn good*, told me I had no chance of any career. I may as well just keep delivering pizzas.

We all know that when you give a student a book, it is part of the cure to loneliness. But there is an even more powerful escape—and that is to *write it down*.

You know what? I was thrilled. *Thrilled.* I needed no more shrill drills of memorizing more bullshit; tips and customers who said thank you seemed more civilized, and it energized me. But I went to college because my parents said I had to. Some rebel I was. Then I got kicked out for something I didn't do, and girls in my dorm knew what to say to make me cry myself to sleep at night, and never once did my parents or my 99th percentile scores come and knock on my door. Not weak enough for sympathy, not preened enough for dean's pet. Let her fail.

And I did.

Failure is spectacular for risk takers. Failure is the trophy no one wants but us. Give your trophies to the ones who can memorize what the dead author was thinking when he wrote his book. Let me alone so I can find out what I was thinking when I wrote the book I wrote. You'll never know. You can't test me. I'm test-proof.

What did David Bowie mean when he wrote "Space Oddity?" Was he even talking about space? I don't care because the song is beautiful. And that's the rub. We teach this analytical thinking in the arts, and we get analytical thinkers in the arts, but we don't get flow—we know too much; we sow seeds of what we think are flowers, but we grow weeds. Lament those kids, and you are blind to what they have to offer.

The first sentence of the essay I wrote in ninth grade was: *Succotash is the loneliest item on the shelf.* Loneliness has not gone away. Not in teenagers' lives, not in our adult lives. Social media hasn't filled the gap. Nothing fills the gap. Part of the human experience is to be lonely. I ask you to challenge yourselves today—I ask you to look at teenagers, no matter how many trips to Europe they may take per year, no matter how many priors they have on their record, and recognize that they have something to say about isolation that you and I may have never read before. We all know that when you give a student a book, it is part of the cure to loneliness. But there is an even more powerful escape—and that is to *write it down*.

I had some mediocre teachers in my life—we all have. And while some of them really messed me up and made me retreat to the dark side of being an at-risk kid, in the end they are a huge part of why I ended up who I am. Because of their closed minds and their repeat lesson grinds, I zoned out and reached in and into myself, and I found the one thing worth living for, and it was me.

My life on paper. Humble servant to my lifelong questions about what we're all doing here.

There's a quote carved on my mentor's gravestone: *Never be swayed by anything but by your own work and vision.*

And here I am in an industry of truth that prefers its truth *lighthearted, romantic, and fun!* And here you are in school systems swayed wildly by things that have very little to do with education. But we all have our own work and vision, and it's time to remind ourselves that we are not the level of respect others give us, but rather the level of respect we give our own ideas.

We all do magic here. You have the most important job in the world. You educate and you boost and you love and you nurture and you teach kids how to commandeer a bus. And you protect the kids in the skintight bodysuits singing "Ziggy played guitar," and you keep a safe space for every teenager—a safe space that is more relevant and necessary every single day in modern America.

Me? I just write books. I share pieces of my life with you and your students because maybe we share the same tornado. Maybe by me talking about my tornado, I can help one person—just one—avoid a tornado. This wasn't some bright new idea for me. I've

written about domestic violence since that very first "weird" book. I'm tired of people blowing it off. I'm tired of the oversimplification of things. Oversimplification leads to normalization. And again, in modern America, this is the last thing we need: normalizing hate, normalizing violence, normalizing the ever-present eye-rolling our culture sends to those who don't fit their box—especially teenagers. Normalizing leads to apathy. Apathy leads to cynicism. In the end, victims skip the middle man and simply blame themselves.

The first time I was chased into my parked car in a panic, manically reaching for all four door locks on hands and knees from the back seat, is something I do not remember. I was about 27 years old. I remember it happening; I see my hand slapping the plastic grey and waiting for the click and looking behind me to see if I'd made it in time. But I don't remember why this happened. The episode. The argument. The road to here—inside a tornado that some days stays in other states, but other days comes right into my body and twists me into knots.

Remembering can be awful business.

I can't count the number of times it happened, but I know it was more than twice. This is the brain at work—the normalizing of a life that one is forced to live. This is how psychology keeps us safe when we are not safe. Our brains forget. To see it from the outside is to ask: Why didn't you? How could you? You should have—or why wouldn't you? To see it from the outside is to back away slowly from the conversation because it makes most people uncomfortable.

This may seem random but . . .

Do you know what makes me uncomfortable? The school to prison pipeline—a reality rarely talked about and often given an eye-roll because a certain segment of our society thinks that those kids somehow deserve what they get. From September to December of 2015, three students in a "credit recovery" for-profit charter school in the small city of Lancaster, Pennsylvania, died from gang violence. During the same time, in the classroom, students were asked to free write. And when a 15-year-old boy shared his piece, he told of watching his brother die on the sidewalk after a drive-by back when he was eight years old. Told from this perspective, it's a story. But from inside that young man's tornado, this is real life.

There is a huge difference between my tornado and his. Mine is handpicked—a half-rotten apple that may still be of use, at least in its seeds. His tornado is unavoidable poverty—it's everywhere and nowhere depending on who you ask, and we mask it with statistics and gas-lighting calls of thugs and drugs, and it dissolves away from us as we buy our steakhouse dinners, organic quinoa, and ice cream cones because we have the luxury to do so. But that boy—eight years old—in the fold of his formative years experienced something that none of us is really willing to discuss beyond the fuss of a Facebook repost. Talking about poverty and the millions of kids at risk inside its sinkhole is too often an act of the short attention span. We need to use our voices to fast-track this truth to self-evident.

Then, we ask students to *write things down*. Because he did, this young man. *He wrote it down.* Once on paper, his tornado is our tornado. That's the magic of shooting the truth of our lives out of a pen. It's never easy. But the science behind this boy's resilience is simple. The more times you write it down, the more times a story is told, the longer it holds on, and the stronger the boy gets.

Innovation is the child of necessity. We realize things when we need to. And if we write it down, we invent a new space in which to live. We broaden our square footage.

None of it will bring back his dead brother.

And eventually I had to get out of the back seat of my car.

People have told me that I'm too serious—but I never minded that because I've been serious since single digits. I'm that family member who brings up child trafficking at the holiday party while dipping my cookies into eggnog. I don't like when my books are referred to as "too serious," but I've never had a teenager say that to me. Only adults.

But then, for the last couple of weeks [since the election], I've gotten a lot of adult correspondence concerning my novel *Glory O'Brien's History of the Future* (2014); people said, *It's happening! It's happening now! A.S. King, can you write us out of this mess?*

Oh. So now y'all are feeling serious, huh?

It's like being a Prince fan since *Dirty Mind* when *Purple Rain* came out.

It's like growing up in Ziggy's stardust, then watching girls with big hair doing the floppy 80s dance to "China Girl."

I want to scream "*You are late to the game*!" but then I realize that everyone, including me, is late to some game, somewhere. Innovation is the child of necessity. We realize things when we need to. And if we *write it down*, we invent a new space in which to live. We broaden our square footage. We increase how comfortable we are in our unavoidable tornadoes. And we increase the number of people who bear witness to our prickly existence until they can't deny us our own realities any longer.

Write it on a sticky note, and stick it to your mirror. You are marvels. You are marvels. You are marvels.

During the time of my life when I was in the back of that car, I didn't know what to think. No one knows what to think when nasty weather touches down. So I wrote novels about spacewomen who were ten feet tall. This is the psychology of need. Of innovation. Of a victim-blaming culture that doesn't like to get too serious because maybe its mascara might run.

The only way to scrape back the feeling in our numb lonely limbs is to *write it down.* This is an act of protest. It is an act of self-preservation. It is an act of kindness to ourselves—and an act of encouragement to others. When we give ourselves permission to say what's really happening in our world, we give others permission to look squarely at their world, too. Maybe then we will realize that we are lonely. Maybe then we will realize that making mistakes isn't weak, it's strong. Maybe then we will realize that we are all being chased by a tornado, and not one of us can run fast enough . . . and maybe it's time to let the funnel come and consume us so we can *feel.*

Victor Hugo (1877) said: "An invasion of armies can be resisted, but not an idea whose time has come."

Teachers, you have the right ideas. You know a can of succotash when you see it, and you know that education is being bought and sold while poverty is crushing the core of our children. At the same time, you're asked to prep students for big-cash companies' tests and use your own money to buy copy paper and classroom supplies. You are living in a tornado that you can't avoid, but what you do daily to shield your students from it is what I admire most. They have their own tornadoes, and you have yours. But your classroom is shelter for all of us.

What a marvel . . . that your cynicism hasn't taken over. What a marvel . . . that you juggle a new ridiculous initiative your administration dreamed up last week with everything else you already have in the air. What a marvel . . . that you still wake up in the dark and greet our children at the door with a smile that assesses their every move, reads the screens on their chests. What a marvel . . . you are. You commandeer the bus every damn day.

Write it on a sticky note, and stick it to your mirror. You are marvels. You are marvels. You are marvels.

You are innovators, rebels, and risk takers because you choose to open young minds to serious ideas, and you ask so much when you often get so little. But you ask all the same because you know asking is everything. One time, in first grade, I asked my school librarian a question: "Did Max really get on the boat and sail over a year and in and out of weeks to the wild things or was it a dream?" And instead of spouting some analytical garbage, she answered the best way anyone ever could. She said, "I don't know. What do you think, Amy?"

And I have spent the rest of my life writing my answers down.

How do we make more innovators? Rebels? Visionaries? We lead by example like we always have. We make the path to self-evident shorter by trusting students, trusting ourselves, and never underestimating their individual genius. We ask them to *write things down*. In turn, they will learn to trust themselves that little bit more. They will stand up and seek—even if it's long after they leave your classroom. They will have our collective power behind them. An undercurrent of encouragement and empathy that never falters, no matter how weary we get with the world. We lead by example, and we fight a good fight, even if we die trying.

And we dance while we do it because being a rebel is fun.

And we talk about serious things because the world is a serious place, and your students already know that. It's about time we took their loneliness

seriously—especially considering that we live in a time when the second leading cause of death of those aged 15–19 is suicide. It's about time we write our own Common Core of compassion and build it into every lesson.

Because in the end, this is their bus. And we can be their Bowie.

Because in the end, truth is nothing to fear.

Because in the end, there are too many voices struggling to be heard, and it's our job to give those voices a chance to thrive.

In the end, we chose to dedicate our lives to teenagers, to help them, to urge them to tell us about their tornadoes while the rest of the adult world clicks its teeth and claims drama, as if *real* loneliness is a right reserved only for them. We grow succotash. We expand minds. We write and read and think and discuss, and we listen to that slice of society most adults ignore.

We don't just believe teenagers, we learn from them.

We don't just listen to teenagers, we're inspired by them.

We don't just endure teenagers, we celebrate them.

And I think I can speak for all of us in the room when I say: We're not sorry.

Thank you.

A.S. King *has been called "one of the best YA writers working today" by the* New York Times Book Review. *King is the author of several highly acclaimed novels, including* Still Life with Tornado, I Crawl through It, Glory O'Brien's History of the Future, Reality Boy, and Everybody Sees the Ants. *She earned the 2012* Los Angeles Times *Book Prize with* Ask the Passengers *and was included on the 2011 Michael L. Printz Honor Book list for* Please Ignore Vera Dietz. *She is a faculty member in the Writing for Children and Young Adults MFA program at Vermont College of Fine Arts and spends many months of the year traveling the country speaking to high school and university students. After more than a decade living self-sufficiently and teaching literacy to adults in Ireland, she now lives in Pennsylvania.*

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Sarah **Carroll,** Pablo **Cartaya,** and Kara **Thomas**

(Socio)Economics, Power, and Class:

A Collaborative Conversation

From the Editors: In this collaborative written conversation, we are honored to feature the words of Sarah Carroll, Pablo Cartaya, and Kara Thomas, three YA authors whose work explores the complex intersections of (socio)economics, power, and class. We appreciate their willingness to engage so thoughtfully and candidly in a discussion about these difficult topics.

As to process, we generated and sent the authors a series of questions and then compiled their initial responses into a single document. The authors revised the conversation in a shared document to solicit questions, elaborations, and revisions until all were satisfied with the end result. We hope readers enjoy the thoughtful insights offered by these authors.

What role do (socio)economics and class play in your novels?

Sarah: Misplaced values in a materialistic society and the role that socioeconomics play in the lives of individuals are reoccurring themes in my work. In general, my characters' search for themselves occurs within the limitations presented by their socioeconomic backgrounds. My primary aim is to draw the reader into the story of the individual, and once immersed, to hold a mirror to society. My first novel, *The Girl in Between* (2017), is told from the point of view of a young homeless girl who lives with her Ma in an abandoned mill that is about to be torn down. It deals with homelessness, grief, addiction, and forgiveness. The text opens and closes with the words "I'm invisible" to highlight the fact that those who struggle in plain sight in our society often go unseen.

I chose the other end of the socioeconomic spectrum in my follow-up novel, *The Words that Fly Between Us* (in press, 2019). The story follows the 12-year-old daughter of the developer who bought the mill featured in *The Girl in Between*, and it deals with bullying, the power of words, and the easy arrogance of those who caused the financial crisis of 2007–2008.

Pablo: I have a culture-specific-micro-obsession (is that a term?) with socioeconomics in my work. Allow me to explain.

In my novel *The Epic Fail of Arturo Zamora* (Viking, 2017), a very wealthy Latino land developer named Wilfrido Pipo comes into town to convince the community that his über-stylish, wealth-centric building is going to be good for the community. Arturo, the novel's 14-year-old Latino protagonist, takes charge in protecting his working-class, independently owned neighborhood from the greedy developer. An epic battle for the soul of the community ensues, pitting the über-wealthy Wilfrido against the working class Zamora clan led by the tenacious Arturo. The battle is about money, and money, above most things, has the power to be a separator of people—to divide them into factions based on status, wealth, and power.

I didn't set out to write a novel about class or socioeconomic disparity within cultures. It just

came out of the bedrock that I was creating. I realized after writing *The Epic Fail of Arturo Zamora* that I actually have a keen interest in the challenges that socioeconomics present within a culture.

I'm Cuban American, and within my own community, there exists a clear delineation of socioeconomic status. There are socioeconomic divisions that linger from our inherited colonial past. Throughout history, there are established hierarchical norms of mobility. I want my characters to inhabit the spaces that challenge these gaps and, I hope, to make headway in changing the dynamic.

Kara: *The Darkest Corners* (2016) is set in a Pennsylvania town that has been hit hard by the decline of the steel industry. Tessa, the main character, grew up in a low-income family; shortly after losing his job, Tessa's father is sent to prison for armed robbery, leaving her mother to care for two children on her own. Tessa often thinks of herself as "low class" or "white trash," and these feelings are exacerbated when she reconnects with her childhood friend, Callie, who comes from a middle-class family.

In *Little Monsters* (2017), Kacey, the main character, has lived her whole life moving from apartment to apartment with her working-class, single mother. When Kacey moves in with her birth father and his new family, she is struck by their upper middle-class lifestyle. For Kacey, her new family's socioeconomic status is emblematic of the stability she's been craving for most of her life.

Did you address (socio)economics and class with intention as you considered and crafted your novels?

Sarah: Absolutely. With *The Girl in Between*, my aim was to help the reader step over the begging cup and learn the story behind one family's path to homelessness. By linking my following novel to my first novel, through the developer, I aimed to directly contrast the socioeconomic settings to further highlight the responsibility that we as individuals play in addressing socioeconomic equity.

Pablo: I think of character first. Then I focus on what that character is trying to tell me about his or her world. From there, a story plays out, and I go from being an observer of this character's world to an active participant in discovering the events that shape that character's worldview. The family in *Marcus Vega Doesn't Speak Spanish* (Viking, in press, 2018), for example, is not wealthy. Marcus engages in some sketchy money-making schemes to help his mom make ends meet. I counter-play this with him physically walking through his neighborhood and seeing the enormous houses that make up part of his community. As he searches for his father in Puerto Rico, he finds family members who aren't defined by what they have but rather who they are. This helps him define his own worldview. Ultimately, my characters aren't motivated by money or a rise in social status but rather they come to see a focus on the strength of family and community as the true measure of success.

Kara: For me, it is impossible to write mystery-thrillers without considering the socioeconomics of crime. In *The Darkest Corners,* a killer in Fayette, Pennsylvania, targets runaways, sex workers, and women struggling with addiction. The media do not pay attention to the murders until an attractive, young, white college student from a middle-class family goes missing. When crimes occur, class factors into the ways in which the media portray the victims. I wanted to examine this phenomenon in my novels. In *Little Monsters,* Kacey observes of her friend Bailey's disappearance, "At least if she is missing, she's the type of girl people will actually look for"—meaning that Bailey is attractive, white, middle class, and from the suburbs.

How do you perceive the relationship between economics and power?

Kara: I think, unfortunately, that those with the most economic resources have the most power, which contributes to inequity in our society. The most powerful and influential people often are the wealthiest, while those with less economic capital feel like they don't have as much of a voice in decisions that are being made about issues that affect them, such as health care and fair wages. The middle class is shrinking, and the wealthy continue to get wealthier.

Economics and power directly impact young adults and the decisions they make about their futures. Most middle-class and low-income students cannot afford the astronomical costs of attending college, especially prestigious universities. There is a mentality in society that everyone can pull themselves up by their bootstraps, but what do you do if you don't have boots? I think a lot of young adult literature as of late is bravely taking a look at this question.

Sarah: Personally, I firmly believe that freedom of choice only comes with financial freedom. It is all about luck. For example, I'm a woman. If I had been born in any century other than the 20th or 21st, I would not have received the education I needed to become financially independent and would not then be able to support myself during the first six years I spent learning the craft of writing. Also, I'm Irish and from a middle-class background. If, instead, I had been born into a subsistence farming family in a war-torn country, I might enjoy neither a stable upbringing nor a quality education.

My incredible good fortune to be born healthy and happy and in the right place at the right time are the reasons I have been afforded these opportunities. That, and one other major choice: I decided I would never, ever, be in debt to a bank. Instead, I would take the bus until I could afford a car. I would live on a boat until I could afford a house. I would quietly elope rather than take out a loan to pay for an extravagant wedding. So I believe financial freedom is a huge factor when it comes to success. However, success is difficult to define. Financial freedom, even harder.

This is well-illustrated by the American Dream—the idea that if you play by the rules and work hard, there is ample opportunity to better yourself and your own socioeconomic environment. But what if the rules mean that you become so indebted to the bank (college fees, purchasing property) that you are shackled to working long hours or to an unloved career path in order to earn as much money as possible to reduce your debt? This is a form of wage-slavery that is promoted by the banking industry.

What then if you get sick? What if you can't pay your bills?

True financial independence is the privilege of the very few. Those few are the ones in a position to amass more money rather than debt. And it is there that the power lies, while the most vulnerable are allowed to slip through the cracks, their struggles invisible. This is something Kara discussed above—how can you pull yourself up by your bootstraps when you have no boots?

Pablo: Kara and Sarah are bringing back dark, debt-ridden memories from my college years! I *wish* I would have had the foresight to ignore credit card debt early in my life. Unfortunately, the moment I walked onto a college campus at the age of 18, I was given a credit card and told to spend, spend, spend and just pay minimums! *Ugh*. I've only now, after many years in debt, been able to climb out of that hole. The system is built for most of us to always be looking up. Unless you are proactive about it (looking at you, Sarah), you won't climb out of the debt hole.

The ability to regulate fiscal policy is directly reliant on power or, to be more specific, on those *in* power. Power needs to control economics in order to survive. Those who manage the purse strings, so to speak, dictate who gets what and where it goes. This isn't a new phenomenon. It dates back to antiquity. The word "class" is derived from the Latin word, *classis*, which was a term Roman census takers used to categorize citizens by wealth. It was the empire's way of organizing society into hierarchical divisions. Think, too, about sumptuary laws. These laws have been around for thousands of years! According to *Black's Law Dictionary*, sumptuary laws were made for the purpose of restraining luxury or extravagance. Throughout most of civilization, however, sumptuary laws were in place as a way to control social rank and station. These laws were enacted the world over—in Ancient China, Feudal Japan, Europe (throughout the Middle Ages all the way to the Victorian Age), even in the early years of the American colonies—and were enforced to remind people of where they belonged on the socioeconomic ladder.

Sociologist Max Weber divided class into three components: class, status, and power. Class

was a person's economic position. Status was a person's prestige or popularity in society. And power was a person's ability to get one's way despite the resistance of others. When all three are serving a particular person or group, it's easy to see how economics and power create an Olympic-sized gap between the haves and have-nots.

So why go into all of this? And more important, what can be done? Literature for young people is a good place to start. If stories are written about characters who challenge historical socioeconomic norms, then we can start creating a new normal. If fiction is a mirror of the world at a given moment, then it can also be a reflection of what we want it to look like.

What narrative of class do you think is perpetuated in our society? How might literature help readers rethink this narrative in more complex ways?

Pablo: The narrative is much as I mentioned in the last question referring to economics and power. A class system works to keep those at the top in positions of power by creating the economic policies and laws that shape the rest of the population into acceptance of their power. The disaffected members of society are often so because they feel there are limited economic opportunities. The United States has been stagnant on mobility for quite some time now, while the cost of living continues to rise. There is a gradual frustration occurring in the middle and lower classes. Why is this? Why have the wealthiest Americans enjoyed the benefits of economic growth, while the rest have stayed stagnant or gotten worse? To answer this, I think literature, especially children's and young adult literature, plays an integral role in shaping the outlook for the future. Writing characters who are empathetic to class and community will give readers the opportunity to see themselves in stories. I can list a number of brilliant authors doing this in their work, but I'm afraid I'm running out of space!

Kara: I think that our society places significant emphasis on class and often perpetuates the narrative that if you work hard enough, you can move up on the class ladder. For a while, it seemed that "wealth as aspiration" was also the dominant narrative in fiction for teens. However, there has been a decline in interest in the aspirational wealth narratives, such as those found in *Gossip Girl* (Von Ziegesar, 2002), where characters name-drop designer products to display their status. I believe young people especially are looking for stories that mirror their own lives, and they have been able to do so with the arrival of complex stories such as *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* (Alexie, 2007), *Eleanor & Park* (Rowell, 2013), and *We Were Liars* (Lockhart, 2014).

Sarah: As Kara said, our society places significant emphasis on class and often perpetuates the narrative that if you work hard enough, you can move up the class ladder. The American Dream, however, fails to take into account the crippling effect that lack of access to money, a job, a home, good mental or physical health, or even love, can have on the individual.

Equally, I think modern media must take responsibility for perpetuating the idea that those from under-developed nations are childlike and helpless (think of the countless advertisements that use images of wide-eyed children from African or Asian countries who are begging for your help).

Literature can help to address these narratives. As Harper Lee (1960/2010) wrote, "You never really understand a person [. . .] until you climb inside of his skin and walk around in it" (p. 30). I believe this is where the power of literature to change that narrative lies, by allowing the reader to walk in the shoes of a three-dimensional, rounded (if flawed) character that is dealing with a reality very different from that of the reader—to allow the reader to feel and understand another's struggle. With this understanding, individuals can begin to question their place and role in society and society's responsibility to the more vulnerable.

Conversations about the connections between economics and power are difficult, complicated, and sometimes controversial. What do you hope your readers gain from considering these ideas?

Kara: I would hope that readers are able to view literature, and also the world, through the lens of socioeconomic status and class in order to exam-

ine who really has power and why and how these dynamics can be called into question in order to promote equity.

Sarah: I was once given the task by my high school English teacher to write an essay on the idea that life is not about answering questions but questioning answers. In these post-truth days, this idea is more pertinent than ever. I would hope my readers question the narrative that society and the individual are in no way to blame for allowing the struggles of the most vulnerable to go unseen. I would like readers to question their role in creating a socially equitable and just world.

Pablo: To not see this as an "us versus them" scenario but rather a "How do we move forward together?" narrative. It's not about making the wealthy poor or throwing the entire economic ladder down. Mobility is good. Striving for success is important. Having income to buy a house, living a healthy fruitful life, enjoying economic freedom—these are all worthwhile goals. I think where it gets muddled is when we lose sight of our communities. It all comes down to that, doesn't it? Communities that look out for each other on the local level become stronger. Economically. Socially. Educationally. Also, please pay attention to the facts! According to the National Center for Children in Poverty (Jiang, Granja, & Koball, 2017), children represent 24 percent of the population, but they comprise 34 percent of all people in poverty. That's insane! We need to be aware of these truths and tell these stories, as well. We have to write stories where *everyone* from every background, up and down the ladder, has a seat at the table.

Sarah Carroll *is the author of* The Girl in Between (2017)*, published by Kathy Dawson Books/Penguin Random House. Her next novel,* The Words that Fly Between Us*, is due out in early 2019. Before turning to writing, Sarah lived and worked in Tanzania, where she established a hostel and worked alongside local community projects. She currently lives on a houseboat in Ireland with her family.*

Pablo Cartaya *is the award-winning author of the* The Epic Fail of Arturo Zamora *(Viking, 2017);* Marcus Vega Doesn't Speak Spanish *(Viking, in press, 2018); and two forthcoming titles in 2019 and 2020, to be published by Kokila, a new imprint of Penguin/Random House whose mission is to "add depth and nuance to the way children and young adults see the world and their place in it." He holds an MFA from Vermont College of Fine Arts and a BA in English from Loyola Marymount University. Pablo is lead faculty at Sierra Nevada College MFA in Writing for Children & Young Adults and frequently speaks around the country on identity, culture, and community. Visit him at www.pablocartaya.com.*

Kara Thomas *is the author of* The Darkest Corners (2016) *and* Little Monsters (2017)*, both published by Delacorte Press. Her next novel,* The Cheerleaders*, will be released this summer 2018. She graduated from Stony Brook University in 2011 with a degree in English and Secondary Education and is currently pursuing a Master's of Library and Information Science at Long Island University. She lives in Eastern Long Island with her husband and rescue cat. You can find out more about her books at www.kara-thomas.com.*

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Karly Marie **Grice,** Caitlin E. **Murphy,** and Eileen M. **Shanahan**

Taking Out the Trash:

Complicating Rural Working-Class Narratives in Young Adult Literature

Perhaps one of the most well-known texts that centers on life in a rural, southern town is Harper Lee's (1960/2006) classic *To Kill a Mockingbird*. This text is a mainstay in classrooms around the United States. Readers are captivated by Scout's tales of growing up with Jem, Dill, and Boo Radley in Maycomb, Alabama, and her life as the daughter of the honorable and iconic Atticus Finch. One character who receives little attention but whose actions drive one of the major plot points is Mayella Ewell. She is the eldest daughter of Robert E. Lee Ewell. If Atticus Finch is one of the most iconic characters in literature, Bob Ewell may be one of the most hated—emblematic of the racist, misogynistic attitudes that plagued the South during this time period. This family is referred to as "the disgrace of Maycomb for three generations" (p. 40). The Ewells flaunt their lack of formal education and live in such disarray that "the plot of ground around the cabin look[s] like the playhouse of an insane child" (p. 228).

Even today, Mayella is still representative of white people from poor, rural communities and the ways in which they are perceived by some members of society. A girl like Mayella would be assumed to have little or no education and may be seen as classless and rude, "a withered branch of the American family tree . . . a fungus growth, they could weaken the entire stock of southern society" (Isenberg, 2016, p. 180). Indeed, Mayella and her family would today represent the "white trash" or "redneck" stereotype of rural, working-class whites. This becomes problematic when the Ewells are the only narrative of rural, white, working-class characters that students are exposed to in literature. Tragically, they have become an archetype for the rural, white working class.

Oftentimes, authors use rural whites in poverty as the villains or comic relief (Isenberg, 2016). As a result of such representations, students in our classrooms may view the plight of the poor as self-inflicted and deserved, thus distinguishing this group of marginalized people as deficit and open to derision (Coleman, 2012). Even when negative images do not come to mind, and "even though the white poor are many, living in suburbs and rural areas, they remain invisible" (hooks, 2000, p. 4) or "easily forgotten" (Hicks, 2005, p. 213). In order to have other, more varied representations of rural whites in poverty, we argue that teachers and librarians will have to look beyond the Ewells and *To Kill a Mockingbird*. We do not advocate that teachers remove *To Kill a Mockingbird* from curricula, but we do advocate that they provide students with counter-narratives of working-class, rural, white characters.

In recent literature, *Hillbilly Elegy* (Vance, 2016) has proven itself pertinent, particularly to those of the Appalachian working class, inciting controversy and stirring emotions in readers. J. D. Vance details his early life growing up in Breathitt County, Kentucky, and his later move to Middletown, Ohio. Vance concedes that at 31 years of age, it is somewhat "absurd" (p. 1) that he has already written a memoir; however, the book's 65-week span on the *New York Times* bestseller list suggests that his story strikes a chord with readers, perhaps particularly with white, rural,

working-class America. As white scholars who either came from rural working-class environments ourselves, or are teaching white students who come from rural working-class environments, our interest in this topic is both personal and academic. hooks (2000) argues, "We live in a society where the poor have no public voice. No wonder it has taken so long for many citizens to recognize class—to become class conscious" (p. 5). Vance has tried to give voice to a particular group of poor Americans. His account of "hillbilly culture . . . blended a robust sense of honor, devotion to family, and bizarre sexism into a sometimes explosive mix" (p. 41), offering readers an understanding of a group of people who are hesitant to open up to those they deem to be outsiders. He highlights what it was like to be a student in rural Appalachia.

Specifically, we felt that these three narratives were representative of working-class teens without implying that class was the defining descriptor of the characters' lives.

Class has reemerged as a point of discussion in America's classrooms and is a valuable topic to address given that our students identify with these groups and/or will be taking classes with others who identify with these groups. According to the school report card for Breathitt County, Kentucky, during the 2016–2017 school year, 78.5% of students were on free or reduced lunch. County-wide, 3.4% of students planned to attend college, 1.8% planned to attend either vocational school or work while attending college part time, and 10.0% planned to work full time after graduation; however, the overwhelming majority of students' post-graduation plans—84.8%—were "unknown" (Kentucky Department of Education, 2017). The communities that Vance and hooks discuss are still very much a part of the national student population, and they face their own set of unique challenges and pressures. Vance's text, in particular, provides a contemporary context in which students might discuss the complex issues that the rural, white, working class face.

In this article, we use three central texts for young adult readers—*The Serpent King* (2016) by Jeff Zentner, *Ramona Blue* (2017) by Julie Murphy, and *The Smell of Other People's Houses* (2016) by Bonnie-Sue Hitchcock—to highlight key themes of white, rural, working-class, adolescent experiences. We chose these texts in particular because they feature white working-class protagonists. We knew that the authors of these three texts describe explicitly the ways in which class affects the protagonists' lives without class being the sole focus of the narratives. Specifically, we felt that these three narratives were representative of working-class teens without implying that class was the defining descriptor of the characters' lives.

We wanted to analyze texts that might also complicate the seemingly single-story representation of working-class struggles as belonging to people of color, so we intentionally chose narratives that focused on white families. The books we found featuring working-class whites were often set in rural towns. As such, we hoped our work could not only highlight white, rural, working-class characters as an often overlooked and ostracized group, but could also delineate a marker of other potentially available white, working-class YA counter-narratives in the field. Finally, as relatively recent publications, these three texts have not, to date, had much academic attention, so we hoped to use this article to spotlight their content and potential within future classrooms and scholarship.

Our methodological approach involved a recursive cycle in which each researcher read and coded the three texts to consider portrayals of counter-narratives of rural working-class whiteness in each of the texts. The initial codes that suggested the presence of counter-narrative elements in some but not all of the texts were: strong family bonds, the role and power of religion, sexuality, children as financial providers, teen pregnancy, the need to escape one's hometown, white privilege, and substance abuse. For the purposes of this article, we chose to focus on the themes of strong family bonds, the need to escape one's hometown, children as financial providers, and white privilege. The other initial codes (the role and power of religion, sexuality, and teen pregnancy) were not consistent across all three texts, so we eliminated them. We did, however, choose to focus on the theme

of white privilege and how it is (or is not) addressed within the three texts, even though it was not a theme that was present in all three of the texts. We felt that it was ethically important for us to consider the presence or absence of this theme because of our intentional choice to focus on white, rural, working-class characters. Last, we eliminated the theme of substance abuse because we determined after the coding process that it did not qualify as a counter-narrative element since it is consistently portrayed in texts about rural communities already.

Class, Space, and Race in the US Context

Writing in 2000, bell hooks argued that "[a] changing class reality that destabilizes and in some cases will irrevocably alter individual lives is the political shift that threatens. . . . Class is the pressing issue, but it is not talked about" (p. 5). Heeding hooks's warning, we push for a move forward to develop even more class-conscious individuals and institutions. Unfortunately, many Americans make broad assumptions about where people in the greatest economic need are geographically located. Scholars discuss the public's perspectives about the low socioeconomic levels of urban environments due to the physical proximity of people and the heightened visibility of poverty within cities (Deavers & Hoppe, 1992; Milbourne, 2004).

In addition, the prevalent media representations of inner-city economic strife lead people to create correlative associations between lower-class families and city living; this, in turn, leads to a glossing over of rural spaces in studies concerned with poverty and the working class (Deavers & Hoppe,1992; Edin & Shaefer, 2015; hooks, 2000; Milbourne, 2004; Moore, 2001). These assumptions, however, belie the realities surrounding socioeconomic conditions within rural environments. In 2016, the percentage of families living below the US poverty rate in metropolitan areas (12%) was slightly lower than nonmetropolitan areas (16%) (Kaiser Family Foundation, 2017). Further complicating broad assumptions about poverty are statistics that show that the South has the highest percentages of poverty by state, with some nonmetropolitan areas reaching percentages in the low to mid 20s (Bishaw & Benson, 2017; Kaiser Family Foundation, 2017). Eight of the ten states with the highest poverty numbers in 2016 exist within the United States' Southern Delta and Appalachian areas, the settings of Vance's memoir as well as two of our three focal texts (Hansen, 2017).

Amidst these intersections of class and space, race and space are messily intertwined. Race by itself is a fraught concept, particularly the racial category of "white." Scholars illuminate the fallacy of concrete biological notions of race, but they also acknowledge the very real implications of race as a social construct (Mahiri, 2017; Smith 2003). Within the United States, the concept of whiteness was constructed as an ever-moving target of legal categorization that defined who could be free, own land, and vote (Mahiri, 2017; Mukhopadhyay, 2008; Smith, 2003). In fact, the term "Caucasian" itself is a space-based term originating from the pseudoscientific racist practices of Johann Blumenbach in 1775 who argued the Caucus region between Europe and Asia contained the most beautiful people (Mukhopadhyay, 2008).

Unfortunately, many Americans make broad assumptions about where people in the greatest economic need are geographically located.

A number of US legal cases have attempted to define whiteness, including the landmark 1920s naturalization cases of Takao Ozawa and Bhagat Singh Thind, where Ozawa and Thind attempted to be defined as white and Caucasian, respectively, based on racial definitions like Blumenbach's (Smith, 2003). Ozawa, of Japanese descent, was denied citizenship rights because his physical appearance of whiteness through fair skin was not supported by a Caucasian region ancestry; Thind, however, was denied the same rights despite his Caucus region ancestry because the court argued he did not appear to fit "the common man's" understanding of whiteness. In other words, he did not look "white" as the white men of the court understood whiteness to be (Smith, 2003). Through these confusing legal re-defining practices, whiteness as a privileged identity could continue to be policed to limit rights to a select group of people already in power. The mercurial shifts in definitions of whiteness have drawn upon aspects like skin color, other physical features, countries of origin, and religious back-

grounds. These definitions are not formal and contain an ever-growing list of signifiers that unclearly qualify what whiteness is and is not.

Yet while whiteness is illusory in its definition, it is still clearly discernable through the privileges that exist in society, especially regarding housing and education. Cities are natural sites of racial and ethnic diversity due to their histories as immigration hubs. Further, a conflation of non-whiteness with urban environments emerged due to historical, inequitable privileges of whiteness in non-urban areas (Smith, 2003). Jim Crow laws led to the Great Migration of black families toward Northern and Midwestern cities and also to racist exclusionary housing practices, such as redlining, that came to define post-WWII suburbia and its origin with Levittown (Smith, 2003). As such, inequitable legal and housing practices reshaped the actual racial demographic geography of the United States as well as assumptions of class, space, and race.

If we hope as a country to truly reckon with class, we must do so in a way that understands its intersections and context.

Although the denotations of the terms "urban" and "rural" are specifically connected to population density and physical proximity to city centers, often within popular discourse (and especially within educational discourse), "urban" and "rural" take on more connotative racial and cultural meanings. For instance, in Dyan Watson's (2011) interviews of teachers participating in an urban education program, she found that teacher participants' understandings and use of the term "urban" "was constructed as a code word for *race,* specifically black and Latina/o and often for *poor*" (p. 50, emphasis in original). The conflation of blackness with poverty and its overrepresentation in the media are what hooks argues has erased the fact that "[w]hile black folks disproportionate to our numbers are among the poor, the vast majority of the poor continue to be white. The hidden face of poverty in the United States is the untold stories of millions of poor white people" (2000, p. 117).

Even as race, class, and space are interconnected within *assumptions* of urban contexts, the three categories intersect in some *realities* with respect to whiteness, poverty levels, and rural contexts. As the US Census Bureau statistics for 2016 show, "non-Hispanic whites living in rural areas had higher poverty rates than those living in urban areas" (Bishaw & Posey, 2016). Nancy Isenberg (2016) takes her exploration of these intersections even further as she explores the ways in which limitations surrounding land ownership reinforced class stratification in the early US colonies and added to the creation of a stigmatized lower class of "white trash" (p. xv). These settlers found refuge on the least tenable lands, such as the swamps of the Carolina Low Country and the rocky and wild Appalachian mountain range, ultimately linking the white poor with specific rural geographic locations.

While class, race, and geography interconnected for these white, rural, working-class, early Americans, stigma muddied the waters of identity and agency as some people believed "[c]lass was congenital" and the result of bad "bloodlines that made poor whites a notorious race" (Isenberg, 2016, p. 137). From these American origins, the white, rural poor became conflated with the "white trash" stereotype and its corresponding characteristics of lazy, loud, and lascivious individuals who live in unfavorable homes. These tropes have lingered into 21st-century media representations, from Cletus, the slack-jawed local in *The Simpsons* (Groening & Brooks, 1989–2017) to individuals in the reality show *Here Comes Honey Boo Boo* (Lexton, Rogan, & Reddy, 2012–2014). While race, gender, religion, and sexuality continue to be integrated into discussions of critical literacy and engagement in social and educational discourse, class is still often an easy target for derision. J. Mark Coleman (2012) describes this dilemma with students in his own classroom as they often see poverty as a result of an individual's "bad decisions or personal deficits" (par. 9). This view is deeply ingrained in the American mythos of meritocracy that Edin and Shaefer (2015) argue stands counter to welfare programs and reinforces a blaming-the-victim view of class inequity.

If we hope as a country to truly reckon with class, we must do so in a way that understands its intersections and context. As authors, we want to make it clear that we are by no means arguing that the plight of the rural, white working class is more important than the circumstances of other minoritized groups or people in other geographic settings. However, having taught and lived in rural areas and worked with

students belonging to the white working class, we take to heart hooks's call for a transformative interracial approach to class equity "rooted in a politics of resistance that is fundamentally antiracist, one that recognizes that the experiences of underprivileged white folks are as important as those of people of color" (2000, p. 118). As such, we argue that an intersectional, anti-oppressive approach to class equity requires an analysis of multiple counter-narratives that serve to complicate single stories of race and class; however, instead of stopping there, we also argue that this analysis cannot ignore the importance of reckoning with white privilege, which is present regardless of class inequity.

Textual Analysis

The three examples of recent young adult publications we explore herein each feature white, rural, working-class adolescents. In *The Serpent King* (2016) by Jeff Zentner, friends Dill, Travis, and Lydia are growing up in small-town Tennessee. The teens within this text find their lives heavily influenced by their families. While Lydia grows up in a pleasant, upper-middle-class home with supportive parents, Dill and Travis both have troubled relationships with their fathers and find themselves working tirelessly to help their families make ends meet. Bonnie-Sue Hitchcock's *The Smell of Other People's Houses* (2016) is a multi-voiced narrative with four narrators: Ruth, Dora, Alyce, and Hank. The characters explore their positionality to their working-class families and their rural Alaskan home in varying ways—from a protective fondness to a defensive escape. Last, *Ramona Blue* (2017) by Julie Murphy centers on Ramona, a rising high school senior in Eulogy, Mississippi, as her understanding of her identity, sexuality, and future becomes more fluid—all while she balances two jobs and helps her pregnant sister prepare for a new baby.

These three texts each convey the complexities of rural working-class life in a far more nuanced manner than we can explore within the space provided here. For the purposes of this article, however, we focus our analysis on the ways in which the three focal texts exhibit the specific themes of the need to escape one's hometown, strong family bonds, and children as financial providers. Furthermore, conceptions of race beyond whiteness are explored in both *The Smell of Other People's Houses* and *Ramona Blue* in interesting and important ways, particularly the ways in which the texts challenge readers to be conscious of white privilege. We conclude by providing pedagogical implications for the study of class, race, and place with adolescents in the form of text choices and writing assignments.

The Great Escape

Popular culture includes the story of a small-town young person dreaming of a big future in the big city. Sometimes this entails a career in show business, sometimes a serendipitously acquired job, sometimes a college acceptance, and sometimes it is just "getting out of town." But youth from rural working-class communities face a unique set of challenges if they decide they want to leave home. Vance (2016) discusses what this process looked like for him growing up in Ohio: "[I]t was all around us, like the air we breathed: No one in our families had gone to college; older friends and siblings were content to stay in Middletown, regardless of their career prospects; we knew no one at a prestigious out-of-state school; and everyone knew at least one young adult who was underemployed or didn't have a job at all" (p. 56).

But youth from rural working-class communities face a unique set of challenges if they decide they want to leave home.

Perhaps even more significant are the stigmas attached to those who do leave for better opportunities. Vance writes, "Hillbillies have a phrase—"too big for your britches"—to describe those who think they're better than the stock they came from. . . . The sense that they had abandoned their families was acute, and it was expected that, whatever their responsibilities, they would return home regularly" (p. 30). The characters in both *The Serpent King* and *Ramona Blue* are all too aware of the stigmas Vance describes. In addition to stigmas, the characters face fears of starting something new; hooks (2000) details this explaining, "While it was definitely easier for folks from poor white backgrounds to assimilate visually, we all experienced estrangement from our class origin as well as the fear of losing touch with the worlds we

had most intimately known" (p. 119). Despite their readiness for a fresh start, the characters experience dual fears of both the unknown and of losing touch with their roots.

Youth from rural, working-class backgrounds who attend four-year universities are often first-generation college students (Byun, Irvin, & Meece, 2012). Contending with accusations and personal worries of getting "too big for [their] britches" on top of the anxiety that accompanies a major life transition like going to college can be completely overwhelming and defeating for rural youth. In *The Serpent King*, Lydia has always felt misplaced in Forrestville and longs for a life in New York City. She is the only child of an upper-middle-class family. Both of her parents are college-educated and employed; her father is the Forrestville dentist.

For many youths, these effects alone can be a driving force behind the desire to escape, but with this decision come associated feelings of survivor's guilt, even if the intentions of leaving are to increase future earning potential, as is true for Dill, or to benefit the entire family.

Lydia had long made her dreams known to her best friends Travis and Dill. However, the start of senior year has each of the friends feeling her impending departure more acutely. Dill gives Lydia an especially difficult time about getting out. When she brings up college, Dill is either "silent and taciturn about it" (p. 30) or the two get into an argument about whether or not Lydia is leaving Dill and Travis behind. Lydia is undeterred by Dill's guilt trips and the rest of the senior class's implications that she sees herself as "too good" for Forrestville. She pushes Dill to consider his own college prospects, often times pushing too hard, and she fails to see the challenges he faces. While Lydia has loving and supportive parents, Dill is the son of an incarcerated pastor and an overworked mother who is trying to convince him to drop out of high school, work more hours, and help pay for the family's debts. When Dill raises the topic of college with his mother, she immediately shuts down the idea, reminding him of the futility of comparing himself to Lydia. His mother's warning exemplifies Vance's earlier statements as she tells Dill, "Someday you'll learn you're no better than your own name" (p. 46).

The titular Ramona of *Ramona Blue* navigates similar concerns. For Ramona, neither her parents nor her sister attended college, and she had no plans to be the first to break this tradition. Much like Dill and Travis in *The Serpent King*, Ramona envisions her future in Eulogy, Mississippi, caring for her father, sister, and niece while her friends leave Eulogy (and her) behind for college. Like Dill, Ramona does not have enough money for college and also feels a tremendous sense of guilt around abandoning family members who depend on her. While music serves as both a creative outlet and a career prospect for Dill, swimming becomes an outlet for Ramona and eventually serves as a vehicle for scholarships. Ramona's friend Ruth encourages her to think about a future beyond Eulogy and tells her, "There's no reason you should be stuck here forever. I know you're over this place. It's so obvious" (p. 245)—a conversation nearly identical to one Dill and Lydia have in *The Serpent King*. Ramona, like Dill, is frustrated with her friend, "'No reason? Are you serious?' I ask, trying not to raise my voice. 'I have plenty of reasons. I have no money, no car, a knocked-up sister, mediocre grades. . . . I can keep going,' I tell her" (p. 245).

In addition to navigating the direct effects of poverty, Ramona and Dill, like many teens across the United States, experience what Dehaan and Deal (2001) describe as the "indirect" effects of poverty, which are "mediated through the parental relationship. Experiencing poverty is often associated with decreased marital satisfaction, harsher parenting practices, and depressed mood" (p. 53). For many youths, these effects alone can be a driving force behind the desire to escape, but with this decision come associated feelings of survivor's guilt, even if the intentions of leaving are to increase future earning potential, as is true for Dill, or to benefit the entire family. In *The Smell of Other People's Houses*, Alyce is tempted to leave in order to fulfill her lifelong dreams of becoming a dancer, but she expresses guilt over leaving her father behind to fend for himself without her, something that we will address further in a later section. Ruth's temptation to escape is found in the arms of a

rich boy who smells of "cedar and Tide" (Hitchcock, 2016 p. 12). The way Ruth describes her own home's smell as "the faint scent of mold in secondhand furniture" stands in contrast to the idealized, escapist description of her boyfriend's house, where "everything was fresh, like it was just flown in from Outside, and there were no rules" (p. 12), making clear that part of his appeal is the chance he might offer to help her escape from the trailer park where she lives with her grandmother. As for Hank and Dora, their desire for escape is more directly connected to the indirect effects of poverty that Dehaan and Deal describe, as both search for ways to escape their abusive home lives—Dora by clinging to her friend's home as a temporary safe haven, Hank and his brothers by running away; even Hank's little brother Sam dreams of escape through (possible) attempted suicide.

The Family Ties That Bind

As teens come of age, there is often a rejection of or moving away from family, a realization or forgiveness of the family's wrongdoings, or the cultivation of parental relationships that become more like friendships. Each of the three focal texts feature families that reflect the destabilization of the heteronormative nuclear family—that is, a family with married, heterosexual parents and multiple children. Instead, adults are drawn in more complex, humanizing ways that do not define the mothers and fathers as good or evil (i.e., flat) characters. This follows a trend in young adult literature today in which parents are more layered and well-rounded and the relationships between the teen protagonists and their parents are more complex than we have seen in the past (Rebellino & Stamper, 2018).

While parents in young adult literature are often absent or only semi-present in teens' lives, within our three focal texts, non-nuclear and intergenerational family structures provide strong familial support. Friends, neighbors, and grandparents provide family ties that help to foster the strong sense of community often cultivated in rural areas. As family is broadly defined in texts about rural working-class communities, pride operates in complex ways and becomes a tie that binds people together. Vance (2016) illustrates this through memories of his grandmother, recalling, "She loathed anything that smacked of a lack of complete devotion to family" (p. 41). For instance, "even though you never start a fight, it's maybe okay to start one if a man insults your family. This last rule was unspoken but clear" (p. 66). Despite the aforementioned feelings of wanting to escape, characters are often paradoxically fiercely defensive of their non-nuclear families, which helps establish the notion that in rural working-class communities, family is foundational to an individual's identity.

While the concept of family is complicated in its move away from the nuclear or traditional concept, the family unit in rural working-class literature is by no means "broken." Rather, the families in the three focal texts highlight how the bonds of family in rural communities are not always bound by blood, yet are strong roots in each of the characters' lives. In *The Serpent King*, Dill, Travis, and Lydia serve as family for each other, emotionally championing and lifting each other, such as when Lydia encourages Dill to go to college or when the trio fiercely defends its members from the mockery of peers. The teens also provide one another financial support in unconventional ways, as seen when Lydia's father drives Dill to see his father in prison, hires him in the family dentistry practice, and buys excessive firewood from Travis. Dill even takes Travis in when he has nowhere else to live. Similarly, in *The Smell of Other People's Houses*, Dumpling and Bunny's family takes Dora in, and the nuns provide shelter and emotional support for Ruth and her grandmother in their times of need. In *Ramona Blue*, Freddie's grandmother Agnes and his late grandfather raise Freddie when his parents are unable to care for him. Agnes even plays a maternal role for Ramona and Hattie, hosting Hattie's baby shower and helping Ramona get involved with swimming. Further, Freddie, Ruth, and Saul all provide emotional support and understanding for Ramona, particularly as she comes to better understand her sexuality. In these ways, the focal texts serve to show the complexity of the family unit in lower socioeconomic areas and how, through nontraditional arrangements, community is fostered.

As family is broadly defined in texts about rural working-class communities, pride operates in complex ways and becomes a tie that binds people together.

In addition to the multifaceted family unit, the texts all mirror a characteristic often apparent in rural lower-class communities: supporting or defending family members for better or for worse. Individuals frequently demonstrate particularly strong loyalty to their families, even under conditions in which the readers may have expected the characters to turn away. In *The Serpent King*, Dill honors his parents by visiting his father in jail and being honest with his mother about his plans for college because it is the right thing to do. Despite the absence of his father's physical presence and the emotional rift between him and his parents, he does not waver in his loyalty (though his mother's notions of loyalty may differ). In *Ramona Blue*, Ramona and her sister Hattie vow to always support each other, and Ramona even considers putting her own life on hold in order to financially support Hattie and her child. Ramona proclaims to herself, "I am reminded of my priorities. Before I belong to anyone, I belong to Hattie. I belong to my sister. I belong to our life in this little town" (p. 297). Even though this vow is mostly one-sided, Ramona feels a sense of responsibility for pregnant Hattie and stands in when both their mother and Hattie's boyfriend are absent. In *The Smell of Other People's Houses*, Ruth honors her grandmother by naming her newborn baby after her, even after their years of misunderstanding and lack of communication. Loyalty to one's family is a guiding theme through these chosen texts and throughout many rural working-class communities.

In these focal texts, the parents' inability to earn enough money to provide the basic needs of their families creates in the teen characters an onus to contribute to the livelihood of the family as a whole.

Bills to Pay, Mouths to Feed

The protagonists in each of our focal texts see their jobs as contributing to the survival of their family. Given the foundational role of the family to rural working-class identity and the characteristic fierce family loyalty, this role as family provider takes on an even greater responsibility. Altogether, the stakes are higher surrounding the characters' employment. If a job interferes with a character's ability to perform at school or achieve another personal goal, such as athleticism (swimming for Ramona) or artistic success (music for Dill and dancing for Alyce), the working-class characters face stress on the more fundamental level of *need*—namely, the physiological and emotional human needs for food, warmth, rest, and security. In these focal texts, the parents' inability to earn enough money to provide the basic needs of their families creates in the teen characters an onus to contribute to the livelihood of the family as a whole. In this way, the responsibility to the family's livelihood takes precedence over the character's individual success, and devotion to the family unit clashes with individual identity development.

In *Ramona Blue*, Ramona frequently comments about how tired she is from working her multiple jobs delivering newspapers on her bicycle in the early morning and bussing tables at a local restaurant at night. Ramona comments, "[G]rowing up, most kids wonder what they will do for a living. But for me, there was never any worry over what the job would be, just how soon I could start" (p. 9). Her understanding of her future is one that consists of as many jobs and shifts as possible, but all of it serves to benefit her family. While her father encourages her to be young and blow her paychecks on "something foolish" (p. 44), Ramona instead describes the number of times she drained her savings to save Hattie. While Hattie is the one to get pregnant, not Ramona, Hattie's pregnancy immediately leads Ramona to begin planning for the family's survival—hers, Hattie's, her niece's, and her dad's—even as Ramona fears the added layers of stress. This self-sacrifice in the name of family success also occurs for Alyce in *The Smell of Other People's Houses* when she makes the initial choice to help her father on his fishing boat instead of going to her much-anticipated dance audition.

Both Dill and Travis in *The Serpent King* face more troubled relationships with their role as family provider, a role that is forced upon them as opposed to willingly taken up, as it is with Ramona and Alyce. Even though Dill's mother holds multiple jobs as a maid and gas station attendant, her salary is still not enough to allow the family to survive and to pay off the debt Dill's father accrued before being arrested. Even though Dill did not contribute to the debt, his

mother reminds him regularly of his family duty. Both Dill and Travis comment that they are the only people who their mothers have for support. In Travis's case, his father beats him and his mother. Travis expresses feeling trapped in the abusive home when Dill urges him to call the police on his father: "Travis gave a quick, bitter laugh then drew his breath in. 'No. The lumberyard would shut down. I'd lose my job. My family would lose its income. My mom couldn't get by on the little sewing jobs she does'" (p. 231). As a result, both Dill and Travis endure physical and emotional abuse while working long hours and still attending high school in order to help their families survive. Altogether, the teens' exhaustive working lives in our focal texts represent the struggles of the American working poor who, despite holding multiple jobs and working overtime, for one reason or another still fall short of financial security (Edin & Shaefer, 2015).

This alternative family financial structure, where the teen plays a crucial role in providing for the family, ultimately affects the power dynamics between the adults and children. As much as Ramona and Alyce care for their fathers, for example, both describe the men in ways that suggest the daughters have to take on a protective role instead of the other way around. Dill's and Travis's relationships with their fathers, as well as Dora's relationships with her own irresponsible and alcoholic parents, reflect what Vance (2016) sees in his older 15-year-old sister while growing up: she was the "one true adult in the house . . . . I depended on her so completely that I didn't see Lindsay for what she was: a young girl, not yet old enough to drive a car, learning to fend for herself and her little brother at the same time" (p. 83).

White Privilege within Poverty

Thus far, we have addressed how our three focal texts highlight complex themes and serve as counter-narratives to the single-stories of white, rural, working-class families. These narratives work in much the same way as Vance's (2016) memoir, and unsurprisingly the themes explored in the fiction above appear in *Hillbilly Elegy*, as well. However, we feel the need as white educators working toward anti-oppressive pedagogy to highlight the fact that race is rather unproblematized within Vance's memoir. Vance does not acknowledge the privilege of his whiteness and how it served him and his family within his work. He interrogates the stereotypes of class and space, but takes his whiteness as a given and invisible norm. As Sensoy and DiAngelo (2012) comment, "Once again the significance of race and the advantages of being White are being denied. Further, this discourse assumes that Whites and people of color have the same reality, the same experiences in the same context, and that the same doors are open" (p.123). As in *Hillbilly Elegy*, race as a factor is overlooked in *The Serpent King*. Dill and Travis have plenty of hardships, but facing racial prejudice is not one of them. Our other two focal texts, however, include characters and conversations that challenge readers to become aware of the narrators' white privilege even as they face socioeconomic struggles. Murphy's and Hitchcock's incorporation of various points of view provide an intersectional approach to class which stands in contrast to Zentner's all-white narrative.

This contemporary example provides readers opportunities to consider important cross-racial aspects of privilege and racism that might be misunderstood to be relics of the past, as in discussions of more historical texts like *To Kill a Mockingbird.*

In *Ramona Blue,* Ramona and her friends decide to have a fun night out and sneak through a fence for a pool party in someone else's backyard. Ramona hides the details of the pool's ownership from Freddie, leading him to believe that the pool belongs to a friend. Unfortunately, the owner arrives and threatens to call the police and tells the teens that he has a gun, so they make a run for it. At first, the scene has the potential for a problematically colorblind experience as the white teens giggle down the road. Freddie, however, becomes quiet. When Ramona asks what is wrong, Freddie addresses the white privilege involved in the act and her failure to see how the experience could have put his life in danger:

> Maybe sneaking onto private property is just some kind of stupid antic for you, but from where I stand, that's how black kids get shot. . . . You can't pretend to be color-blind or some shit when it's convenient for you, okay? I'm black. This is the skin I wear every damn day. You're my best friend. You can't tell me that you don't see that my black life is not the same as your white life. . . . Maybe you haven't

> thought about things like this before, because you don't have to. I get that. But when I tell you I'm uncomfortable, I need you to listen, okay? (p. 160).

This contemporary example provides readers opportunities to consider important cross-racial aspects of privilege and racism that might be misunderstood to be relics of the past, as in discussions of more historical texts like *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

In *The Smell of Other People's Houses*, all of the narrators can be identified as coming from a working-class background, but three of the four narrators are white. As Dora, an Eskimo girl serving as the one narrator of color, explains, "Being poor may be enough to make us all look like a bunch of mismatched, unfashionable orphans, but it isn't enough to make us all friends" (pp. 25–26). While none of the characters in the text have problem-free lives, the three white narrators' white privilege can be contrasted with Dora's experiences of racism. Dora faces the same class-based struggles as the other narrators, but she also faces racism from her classmates. Ruth's boyfriend mutters, "Does anyone else smell muktuk?" as Dora walks into the classroom, which Dora comments is "such an old racist joke I can't even give him points for trying" (p. 27). The teasing continues when the white girls in her school make fun of Dora's snow boots, which she purchases because the "rich white girls wear [them]" (p. 32). They subsequently tease her about trying to look like them. Alyce, Ruth, and Hank all face many of the same issues as Dora, including abusive parents and making personal sacrifices for the good of their family, but only Dora has to face this racism as well. By choosing multi-voiced narration for her novel, Hitchcock structurally organizes her text in a way that provides readers with a comparison of how class, space, and race intertwine.

Middle Grade (MG) and Young Adult (YA) Fiction

- Hinton, S. E. (1967). *The outsiders*. New York, NY: Penguin. (YA)
- Patron, S. (2006). *The higher power of lucky*. New York, NY: Atheneum. (MG)
- Rowell, R. (2013). *Eleanor and Park*. New York, NY: St. Martins. (YA)
- Vanderpool, C. (2010). *Moon over manifest*. New York, NY: Yearling. (MG)
- Voight, C. (1982). *Dicey's song*. New York, NY: Atheneum. (MG)
- Weeks, S. (2006). *Jumping the scratch*. New York, NY: Laura Geringer Books. (MG)
- Whaley, J. C. (2011). *Where things come back.* New York, NY: Atheneum. (YA)
- Woodson, J. (2012). *Beneath a meth moon*. New York, NY: Penguin. (YA)

Nonfiction

- Bartoletti, S. C. (1996). *Growing up in coal country*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.
- Edin, K. J., & Shaefer, H. L. (2015). *$2.00 a day: Living on almost nothing in America*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.
- Walls, J. (2005). *The glass castle*. New York, NY: Scribner.

Figure 1. Further reading

Classroom Connections: Considering the Intersections of Class, Race, and Space with Adolescents

Examining the lives of and the issues impacting rural working-class people in our country has practical implications for teaching, learning, and advocacy. Providing access to texts in school libraries and making intentional text choices in classrooms can serve to address issues of class, race, and space with adolescents. Literature that illustrates the economic, social, religious, and political aspects of working-class life for whites in rural areas is important for all students to read—both rural whites and non. Young adult and children's literature set in rural areas has largely existed as texts about farming (e.g., *Charlotte's Web* [White, 1952/2006] and *A Day No Pigs Would Die* [Peck, 1972/1994]). While there is certainly validity in sharing these stories, these farming texts capture different issues related to living in poverty in rural areas than do texts specifically about the working-class whites living in small towns or rural communities where farming is not predominant. Furthermore, a reliance on farmhouse narratives of rurality feeds central assumptions of an idyllic, rural, working-class life (Milbourne, 2004). A list of fiction and nonfiction texts for middle readers and young adults about rural working-class people and families that can supplement classroom libraries is provided in Figure 1.

Students need to see themselves and others in a multitude of texts that portray the complexities of social issues and families that constitute rural working-class life. We need texts that help to complicate single stories so that they do not exist as the single narrative that students have about any one group of people (Ehst & Hermann-Wilmarth, 2014). It is important to remind audiences that white, working-class people can exist in texts as more than comedic relief and

that they are not defined by archetypal stereotypes of illiteracy and laziness. To help fight single stories and bridge the gap between schools and the communities of which they are a part, teachers should find ways to incorporate texts that highlight cultural and class-based issues into their classrooms (Hayes, 2017).

In addition to the texts read and provided in schools, another pedagogical implication for teaching adolescents the ways in which class, race, and space intersect might entail the inclusion of text-based writing prompts and projects that ask students to consider the role of class and race in their own lives and communities. The teaching of texts about rural, working-class families also needs to change to reflect the types of students in our classrooms and the experiences and ideologies of the authors of the texts. As Appleman (2015) suggests, "[W]e cannot simply change the texts that are taught; we must change how they are taught" (p. 182). Teachers can ensure that students consider texts and the issues presented in them differently by incorporating class writing and discussions that explicitly ask students to critically question how people are represented in the texts. Questions might include:

- How does the text contradict generally accepted truths?
- How does the text maintain the status quo by reinforcing existing hierarchies?
- Is there economic diversity in the text?
- Is there racial diversity within the socioeconomic groups represented?
- How do characters from different socioeconomic classes interact with each other?
- Which socioeconomic class and racial group does the work claim to represent?
- Whose values are being reinforced or justified in the text?
- What are the privileged identities within the text? How are these addressed or represented?
- Are there characters who experience both privilege and oppression (i.e., experiencing racial privilege and socioeconomic oppression)?

Writing and discussions can also be centered around inquiry units where students consider the economic issues that impact the lives of people in their community. Based upon our own experiences teaching and learning alongside students in rural, working-class communities, some of these inquiry topics might include: coal mining, factory jobs and their shift overseas, the heroin epidemic and other substance-abuse-related issues, and the evolution of religion in public spaces. Drawing on both fiction and nonfiction, students can read about issues that matter to them and their peers, conduct research, and present their findings or take a position in the public sphere for the purpose of social action or advocacy.

To date, well-meaning teachers have used texts like *To Kill a Mockingbird* to teach critical literacy and empathy without realizing that they might be perpetuating a single story about white, rural, working-class Americans. Indeed, Lee's novel has had a lot of success with rural students, allowing them to see themselves and their values represented in the canonical landscape where they are otherwise largely invisible. However, we question whether students are so attached to this single narrative—as flawed and dated as it is—because it is the only mirror they have. Instead of relying on a single mirror, we are asking teachers to diversify the reflections of the rural working class that their students see.

Referencing the harmful narratives perpetuated about people on welfare, despite a lack of substantial evidence, Edin and Shaefer (2015) write, "Sometimes evidence, however, doesn't stand a chance against a compelling narrative" (p. 14). Throughout this article, we have provided readers with powerful and compelling counter-narratives to these stereotypes. By using young adult literature like the texts featured here and encouraging students to develop critical class consciousness through reading and writing, we hope that today's teachers will not be complicit in passing the buck on economic inequity in the United States.

Karly Marie Grice *recently earned her PhD at The Ohio State University and is currently an assistant professor of English at Millikin University in Decatur, Illinois. Her research and teaching interests include multicultural children's and adolescent literature, comics and multimodal texts, and teaching for social justice. She previously taught high school English in Anderson, South Carolina.*

Caitlin E. Murphy *is currently a PhD candidate in the Literature for Children and Young Adults program at The Ohio State University. Her research interests include reciprocal disclosure between teachers and students and the role that literature plays in eliciting those exchanges, youth incarceration, and humanizing pedagogies in the English classroom. She earned her MEd from Wake Forest University. Before working on her doctorate, Caitlin taught*

high school English for eight years, five of which were in rural Kentucky.

Eileen M. Shanahan *recently earned her PhD at The Ohio State University and is currently an assistant professor of Literacy at Eastern Kentucky University. Her research and teaching interests include understanding how discourse shapes teacher learning, teaching English language arts from a social justice perspective, and argumentative writing instruction. She previously taught eighth-grade language arts in Charlotte, North Carolina, where she also served as a middle school curriculum coordinator.*

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Sean P. **Connors** and Roberta Seelinger **Trites**

Legend, Exceptionalism, and Genocidal Logic:

A Framework for Reading Neoliberalism in YA Dystopias

Authors of young adult speculative fiction have the opportunity to create whole new worlds and, indeed, brave new worlds. But for the past decade, it has been books about authoritative and repressive regimes, rather than beautiful worlds, that have held great currency with young readers. We have consequently begun to ask our students why they are drawn to dark and cynical speculative fictions, especially dystopias. Many of them tell us that they appreciate how young adult dystopias confirm their cynicism and their lack of faith in their own futures, given the state of the economy since the Great Recession began in 2008, the persistent threat of terrorism, and the challenges that climate change and other environmental issues pose to human well-being. The perceived corruption inherent in the presidential election of 2016 has further deepened their cynicism. For many of our students, the pessimistic tone of young adult dystopian fiction is an accurate reflection of the lack of potential they perceive in their own lives. At the same time, and we argue somewhat paradoxically, many of our students also report being drawn to the genre because it reconfirms their faith in the individual's ability to rise above (and overthrow) oppressive social systems.

Dystopian fiction's contributions to the project of social criticism are well documented. In a standard work of literary criticism, *The Dystopian Impulse in Modern Literature,* Booker (1994) argues that "[t]he modern turn to dystopian fiction is largely attributable to perceived inadequacies in existing social and political systems" (p. 20). Echoing this point, literary critics Hintz and Ostry (2003) describe the genre as inviting "people to view their society with a critical eye, sensitizing them or predisposing them to political action" (p. 7). If, however, as Trites (2000) argues, YA novels are one of the social mechanisms that indoctrinate teenagers into working within capitalistic institutions, then teachers and students themselves would do well to ask what political and economic ideologies young adult dystopian fiction invites adolescents to adopt.

Against this backdrop and in this age of globalization when young adult dystopias (and young adult novels, more generally) generate enormous profits for publishers, movie studios, and international corporations, we wonder, Are students being fully prepared to evaluate the neoliberal ideologies underpinning much of the dystopic fiction that they read? We define neoliberalism as an economic philosophy that, among other things, privileges free-market capitalism as the economic engine of the world and emphasizes individual entrepreneurship over the social welfare of the larger collective. We contrast it with more progressive ideologies that argue that social justice is best served when collective forces provide social support, especially for the disadvantaged, in terms of people's long-term needs through such mechanisms as healthcare, social security, and public education. If neoliberalism privileges the individual as entrepreneur, progressivism privileges how the entire population can be best served through government interventions. Our goal in this essay is to help both teachers and students raise their awareness about the frequency—and the complacency—with which young adult dystopias manipulate readers into accepting a singular econopolitical worldview.

In this article, we present a critical framework that we suggest teachers and students can use to identify neoliberalism in young adult dystopian fiction. Although our focus is on the dystopic, we argue that this model can also be used to analyze the economic politics of young adult fiction in other genres, including realism. Given the genre's cultural prevalence, however, and the reality of space constraints, we will confine our discussion to dystopic fiction. In the sections that follow, we define neoliberalism at greater length and examine what our review of the literature and analyses of many young adult dystopias have led us to identify as four of its attendant forces. In response, we highlight a series of questions that readers can ask of young adult fiction in the service of determining whether it reflects, or resists, neoliberal ideals. We then apply these questions to a recent and commercially successful work of young adult dystopian fiction, *Legend* (Lu, 2013), to illustrate how reading for neoliberalism makes available to teenagers complex ideological readings that subsequently enable them to understand how young adult novels can both reinforce and subvert neoliberalist ideologies. To conclude, we discuss the implications of reading neoliberalism in young adult fiction for teachers and students.

[O]ur critical framework for reading neoliberalism in young adult literature is in part concerned with attending closely to representations of social institutions in individual novels for the purpose of examining how they are shown to impact people's lives.

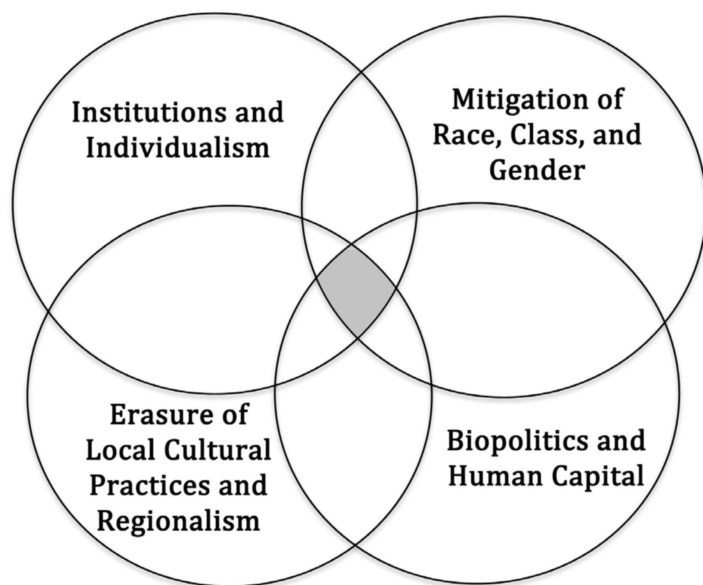

Figure 1. Attendant forces of neoliberalism

Critical Framework for Reading Neoliberalism in Young Adult Fiction

Our review of scholarship on neoliberalism, coupled with our close reading of many young adult dystopias, have led us to identify what we suggest are four concomitants of a neoliberalist worldview (see Figure 1 below). We begin our discussion with the work of noted anthropologist David Harvey, who provides a standard definition of neoliberalism and highlights what we regard as one of its attendant forces. According to Harvey (2005), neoliberalism is based on an assumption that "individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills" thrive when they are unfettered by social institutions, so neoliberalism purports to empower the individual by freeing every citizen-as-entrepreneur from the shackles of institutionalized regulations (p. 2). In doing so, it privileges the economic power of the individual over the economic power of collective forces and positions institutions traditionally entrusted with protecting the rights and interests of people—for example, government or public education—as a threat to individual freedoms.

As evidenced by the upper-left portion of the Venn diagram in Figure 1, our critical framework for reading neoliberalism in young adult literature is in part concerned with attending closely to representations of social institutions in individual novels for the purpose of examining how they are shown to impact people's lives. As an example, in The Hunger Games trilogy (2008, 2009, 2010), one could argue that author Suzanne Collins depicts government (as represented by either the Capitol or District Thirteen) as an institution that, if not oppressive, at the very least limits individual freedoms. At the same time, the narrator, Katniss Everdeen, describes the education system in Panem as complicit in this oppression insofar as it prepares young people to participate in an unjust economic system that exploits their labor in order to

produce goods and resources for consumption by a colonizing power. A first question that we therefore suggest teachers and students can ask of individual works of young adult fiction is: *What institutions are depicted in a work of young adult fiction, and how do the protagonists experience them?*

Pomerantz and Raby (2015), scholars in Girlhood Studies, link neoliberalism to young adult literature when they demonstrate how, in the realm of popular culture, it has resulted in the emergence of a specific type of individual: the "smart supergirl" (p. 291) or "post-nerd smart girl" (p. 287). Reflecting a second aspect of the critical framework shown in Figure 1, Pomerantz and Raby argue that in emphasizing individual agency, neoliberalism ignores the role that social systems play in advantaging some people and marginalizing others, with the result that:

> modern-day girlhood is now defined by individualism, consumerism, hypersexuality, and the belief that girls can do, be, and have anything they want without fear of structural inequalities such as sexism, racism, or homophobia interfering with their individual efforts to achieve success. As a consequence, *such structural inequities have now come to be seen as individual rather than social problems*. (p. 288, emphasis added)

In Pomerantz and Raby's analysis, characters such as Gabriella Montez from *High School Musical* (Barsocchini, 2006) are super smart, beautiful, strong girls who succeed within their social context because of their own individual talents—and without ever giving credit to those social structures that have helped make it possible for them to succeed, such as their schools or their middle-class status (pp. 296–297). This focus on individual talent also serves to mitigate, if not erase, the effects of constructs such as race and social class. A second question that teachers and students can therefore ask of young adult fiction is: *How are social constructs such as race, class, gender, and age dealt with in a work of young adult fiction, and to what extent are they acknowledged as empowering and/or marginalizing the protagonist(s)?*

A third piece of the critical framework that we propose using to read neoliberalism in young adult literature is based on an assumption that in an age of globalization that favors homogenization over cultural distinctiveness, it is also important to ask how neoliberalism impacts the local. According to Australian critics of children's literature Bradford, Mallan, Stephens, and McCallum (2008), globalization "compress[es] space and time" in ways that make a large corporation-run "single globalised marketplace and village" entrenched rather than promoting individually owned entrepreneurial efforts (p. 40). One need think only of how many locally owned and operated stores have been displaced by Walmart to understand this concept. Through its insistence on building a globalized marketplace, neoliberalism threatens to erase the local. As international corporations (think McDonald's or Subway) target consumers around the world, locally owned businesses and cultural practices, such as eating regionally specific foods, suffer. For these reasons, Bradford and her colleagues advise that any attempt to critique neoliberalism in texts for children and adolescents begin by acknowledging how globalization homogenizes the world (p. 41). Thus, a third question in the framework that we propose using to critique neoliberalism in young adult fiction is: *To what extent does a work of young adult fiction acknowledge or erase local cultural practices and regionalism*?

In a neoliberal economy, the market (rather than concerns for individual well-being) comes to regulate all biological phenomena—people, animals, the environment—with the outcome that a town like Flint, Michigan, can end up with tainted drinking water as a result of biopolitical decisions made by elected leaders who privilege profit over the collective well-being of local citizens.

Our framework for reading neoliberalism in young adult literature also includes a recognition of how neoliberalism encourages business enterprises to expand economic production by moving into new territories, which in turn creates environmental tensions (Pellizzoni & Ylönen, 2012, p. 4). Strip-mining in West Virginia and fracking in South Dakota, for example, have created long-term environmental effects that impact the people who live in these regions. That said, the ever-encroaching nature of industrialization also has ramifications that are biopolitical, in the sense that Foucault (2008) uses the term. As defined

by Foucault, *biopolitics* refers to all of the laws and statutes that regulate the human body, animal welfare, the environment, or any biological phenomenon, including such things as food regulations, hospital safety standards, and laws that mandate clean water. In a neoliberal economy, the market (rather than concerns for individual well-being) comes to regulate all biological phenomena—people, animals, the environment—with the outcome that a town like Flint, Michigan, can end up with tainted drinking water as a result of biopolitical decisions made by elected leaders who privilege profit over the collective well-being of local citizens.

Legend exemplifies how neoliberalism and progressivism are poles along a spectrum; the book is not entirely neoliberal, but neither is it as committed to progressivism as it might initially appear.

As this example suggests, the term *biopolitics* implies that a relationship exists between biological forces and government control. As evidenced by Figure 1, our proposed critical framework for reading neoliberalism in young adult literature is thus concerned with examining how biopolitics provide a logic for organizing and regulating society. This phenomenon operates at the heart of popular young adult dystopian series such as Divergent (Roth, 2011, 2012, 2013) and Uglies (Westerfeld, 2005a, 2005b, 2006, 2007). In both instances, the premise on which these books are based involves governments that manipulate the biophysical properties of people's bodies and brains in order to control them. Both of these series critique biopolitical government controls by demonstrating how governments that emphasize exceptionalism have the potential to engage eventually in metaphorical or literal genocide.

Moreover, in a neoliberal economy, "immaterial production" (e.g., the production of information or knowledge) begins to replace material production as the core of the economy, so that people themselves become the raw material (or human capital) on which governments and corporations depend. Breu (2014), a literary critic grounded in Marxist theory, reads Foucault's work as suggesting that neoliberalism prioritizes the production of any individual (including immaterial production) as a cog in the economy, such that even the individual's biologically situated body is regulated through economic forces (p. 15). For example, in The Hunger Games trilogy, the workers in District Twelve provide *material* production to the neoliberal economy in the form of coal, but the workers of District Three provide *immaterial* production in the form of the knowledge production that leads them to create new technologies. A fourth question, then, that teachers and students can ask in the service of investigating the neoliberal in young adult fiction is: *How are biological phenomena used to organize people in a work of young adult fiction, and to what extent do they determine a person's worth to society?*

Collectively, the above insights into the relationships among economic forces, social structures, the impact of globalization on the local, and biopolitics serve as a basis for the analytic questions presented in Figure 2 and provide a framework that we suggest readers can use to evaluate whether a work of young adult fiction is critiquing or condoning neoliberal values. In the sections that follow, we apply this framework to a previously mentioned work of young adult dystopic fiction, *Legend* (Lu, 2013), a novel that we suggest both typifies the plot structures of recent dystopias in which super-special individuals triumph over a repressive regime and also obliquely endorses neoliberal economic politics.

Moreover, we have elected to examine Lu's novel because we read it as demonstrating how a focus on individual exceptionalism can unwittingly result in a genocidal political logic. Our goal, therefore, is to use *Legend* as an example to demonstrate when a typical

1. What institutions are depicted in a work of young adult fiction, and how do the protagonists experience them?
2. How are social constructs such as race, class, gender, and age dealt with in a work of young adult fiction, and to what extent are they acknowledged as empowering and/or marginalizing the protagonist(s)?
3. To what extent does a work of young adult fiction acknowledge or erase local cultural practices and regionalism?
4. How are biological phenomena used to organize people in a work of young adult fiction, and to what extent do they determine a person's worth to society?

Figure 2. Framework for reading neoliberalism in YA dystopian fiction

young adult dystopia endorses, and when it resists, neoliberal values. In that regard, *Legend* exemplifies how neoliberalism and progressivism are poles along a spectrum; the book is not entirely neoliberal, but neither is it as committed to progressivism as it might initially appear.

Finally, because dystopic fiction has a long tradition of contributing to the project of social criticism (Booker, 1994), we regard novels such as *Legend* as offering an accessible entry point for those interested in exploring the economic politics of young adult literature.

Reading Neoliberalism in Marie Lu's *Legend*

Institutions and Individualism

Legend, the first novel in a dystopian series of the same name, takes place in the distant future and is set in Los Angeles, California, now part of the Republic of America. Due to rising sea levels produced by climate change, the city is periodically inundated by floodwaters; it is the poor, relegated to slums along the shoreline, that experience the consequences most severely. A government edict requires that all children, upon turning 10, take the Trial, a standardized test that is used to determine their opportunities in life. Children who score between 1450 and 1500 attend one of the Republic's four elite universities upon completing high school. Those with a score between 1250 and 1449 are permitted to attend high school and are later assigned to a college. A score between 1000 and 1249 prohibits citizens from attending high school; instead, they are assigned undesirable (and often dangerous) jobs and are condemned to "join the poor" (p. 7). Although the official government narrative is that children who fail the Trial are sent to labor camps, the reader learns that they are in fact put to death in a genocide meant to "cull the population of weak genes" (p. 246).

Narrated in the first person, *Legend* employs two focalizers: Day, a 15-year-old prodigy from an impoverished family who escapes death after ostensibly failing the Trial and who thereafter engages in a campaign of subversion against the Republic, and June, a 15-year-old prodigy from a wealthy family who, upon completing her military training, is charged with bringing Day to justice after he purportedly murders her brother, Metias. June succeeds in doing so only to discover that Metias was in fact murdered by the military after he learned that the Republic was exposing people in economically disadvantaged neighborhoods to strands of the plague to assess their effectiveness as bio-weapons for use in the Republic's war against its enemy, the Colonies. At the conclusion of the novel, June helps Day escape from prison, and the two embark on a journey to Las Vegas, where they plan to seek help from the Patriots, an underground resistance group.

The text . . . openly critiques authoritarian governments, but it also positions institutions, such as schools, as little more than training grounds where people are transformed into government-manipulated pawns. In this way, the text critiques governments that do not foster individualism or promote the type of free enterprise that depends on individualism.

The first question in the framework (see Figure 2) that we present for reading neoliberalism and its attendant forces in young adult fiction is: *What institutions are depicted in the text, and how do the protagonists experience them?* In *Legend,* government and school represent two of the institutions that Day and June experience, and they are both portrayed as hostile to individual freedoms. As noted, a government edict requires that all 10-year-olds take a standardized exam, known as the Trial, which decides their fate in life. Although the test is ostensibly used to identify talented individuals, the government instead uses it to reproduce the status quo and preserve its grip on power. Thus, even though Day earns a perfect score on his Trial, the government, having recognized "something dangerous in him. Some defiant spark, the same rebellious spirit he has now" (p. 202), falsifies his test score and fails him. Having been identified as an exceptional individual who is not easily controlled and whose immaterial production is hence not easily harnessed and commodified by the government, Day is subsequently subjected to medical experiments conducted by military doctors and left for dead. The text thus openly critiques authoritarian governments, but it also positions institutions, such

as schools, as little more than training grounds where people are transformed into government-manipulated pawns. In this way, the text critiques governments that do not foster individualism or promote the type of free enterprise that depends on individualism.

June also earns a perfect score on her Trial, but because she comes from an upper-class background, which permits her to live comfortably, the government does not perceive her as a threat to the social order. More important, June, unlike Day, is permitted to attend school, an institution that, as depicted in the novel, exists to produce conformity by immersing students in official government propaganda. Far from learning to think critically, June is instead taught to accept ideologies to which those in positions of power expose her without ever questioning them. She parrots her professors, for example, when she reiterates their argument that "better genes make for better soldiers make for better chance of victory against the Colonies" (p. 13), and unlike Day, she is ignorant of the fate that awaits children who are sent to the government's labor camps.

In *Legend*, institutions such as government and school do not exist to empower people; quite the opposite, they impede people's ability to capitalize on their utmost potential, thus reflecting the neoliberal view of public institutions as hostile to individuals.

The institution of school is depicted as hostile to the individual in other ways, as well. Although she is assigned to the Republic's premier university to be groomed for a future as an officer in the military, June's coursework fails to challenge her. When she formulates her own challenges to test her abilities, she draws the ire of her instructors. Bored with drills meant to prepare her to climb walls while carrying weapons, June leaves campus and instead "scale[s] the side of a nineteen-story building with a XM-621 gun strapped to [her] back" (p. 13). This results in her being sent to the Dean's office, where she is reprimanded for her actions and assured that her behavior will not be tolerated when she is assigned to a platoon. In contrast, Thomas, a friend of June's who is considerably less capable yet willing to mindlessly comply with expectations his superiors impose on him, manages to climb up in the ranks of the military. In *Legend*, institutions such as government and school do not exist to empower people; quite the opposite, they impede people's ability to capitalize on their utmost potential, thus reflecting the neoliberal view of public institutions as hostile to individuals.

Mitigating the Influence of Class

A second question that we suggest teachers and students can ask in the service of reading neoliberalism in young adult fiction is: *How are social constructs such as race, class, gender, and age dealt with in the text, and to what extent are they acknowledged as empowering and/or marginalizing the protagonist(s)?* We argue that it is possible to read June and Day as embodying the qualities of the neoliberal hero and as exemplifying what Pomerantz and Raby (2015) refer to as the superspecial individual.

As explained, both June and Day are child prodigies—legends—who, as a result of their intellectual and physical exceptionalism, manage to rise above other people in their society and break free from the chains of conformity. June makes a name for herself after earning a perfect score on her Trial, an accomplishment that results in her attending "the country's top university at age 12, four years ahead of schedule," and graduating early after she skips her sophomore year and earns perfect grades (pp. 12–13). Likewise, although Day purportedly fails his Trial, the reader learns that he is in fact the only other person besides June to earn a perfect score. Indeed, his talents are so prodigious that the Republic, fearing the threat that a working-class genius poses to its grip on power, attempts to kill him. Despite this, Day manages to escape and eventually goes on to wage a sabotage campaign against the Republic. By himself, he steals large sums of money from Republic banks (p. 167); by himself, he vandalizes the Department of Intra-Defense (p. 168); and by himself, he sets fire to fighter jets intended for the warfront (p. 168). In these ways, Day is the antithesis of his older brother, John, who conforms to the expectations his society establishes for him and who once instructed Day, "*You never fight back*. Ever" (p. 275, emphasis in original). Exceptional individuals, Day and June both refuse to comply with their society's conformist expectations, and the text positions readers to respect them as a result.

As the above reading suggests, June and Day represent the exceptional individual that Pomerantz and Raby (2015) argue has arisen in popular culture in response to neoliberalism. As evidenced by their perfect scores on the Trial, they are both "supersmart," and their individual accomplishments mark them as "superspecial" in their society. Despite this, neither June nor Day fully acknowledges the role that social systems play in supporting them. June, for example, recognizes that Day "doesn't act like a desperate street kid," and she wonders whether "he has always lived in [the] poor sectors" (p. 130), yet she is largely unaware of how her own social positioning as a member of the upper class privileges her. Rather than acknowledge how the opportunity to attend an elite high school and university might have advantaged her, June instead insists that her intellectual and physical attributes are innate, a result of "what the Republic considers *good* genes" (p. 13, emphasis in original).

In much the same way, Day's lower socioeconomic background poses few (if any) obstacles for him in the novel. He and his family may be considered poor, but his unique talents enable him to come into large sums of money whenever necessary, whether through criminal activities or otherwise. Although the military's access to weapons and technology permits it to oppress people who inhabit the city's slums (p. 252), these same resources pose few (if any) obstacles for Day, who succeeds in spite of them. In much the same way, the character of Thomas, who grew up in poverty, attributes his rising through the ranks of the military to his own hard work. As he tells Day, "*I'm* from a poor sector too. But I followed the rules. I worked my way up. I *earned* my country's respect. The rest of you people just sit around and complain and blame the state for your bad luck" (pp. 218–219, emphasis in original). His assessment neglects to acknowledge, however, that Metias, June's brother and an officer in the military, "had been the one to recommend Thomas (who had a high Trial score) to be assigned to the prestigious city patrols, despite his humble background" (p. 40). In these ways and others, the social class system in the storyworld that Lu imagines neither advantages nor disadvantages characters. Instead, consistent with a neoliberal worldview, their accomplishments are presented as attributable to their unique talents and perseverance, with the result that June and Day are able to understand themselves as "the same person born into two different worlds" (p. 304).

Significantly, although the text positions the reader to empathize with people who toil under the Republic's oppressive class system, it never meaningfully interrogates the capitalist system that is responsible for (re)producing social inequity. Instead, there are occasions when the text seemingly invites the reader to envy June for her material comforts. For example, when she attends a military ball with Thomas, June explains, "I ended up choosing a corseted sapphire dress lined with tiny diamonds. One of my shoulders is covered in lace, and the other is hidden behind a long curtain of silk." Thomas's "cheeks turn rosy" when he catches sight of her, but June is unable to understand "what the big deal is," given that she has "worn nicer dresses before" (p. 175). True, June appreciates that her ability to wear such a dress is emblematic of her privilege; it occurs to her, for example, that the "dress could've bought a kid in the slum sectors several months of food" (p. 175). Likewise, when she drinks out of an antique glass "imported from the Republic's islands of South America," she reflects, "Someone could've bought a plague cure with the money spent on this glass that I use to drink water out of" (p. 251). She subsequently "hurl[s] it against the wall" so that it "shatters into a thousand glittering pieces" (p. 251). She wants to reject her own materialism but does not think about how to transform her anger into a productive action that helps others. While June appreciates the injustice of an economic system that privileges some people and oppresses others, her critique of it is only symbolic, and hence superficial; shattering an expensive glass that can be replaced or feeling guilty about wearing fine clothes yet all the while continuing to participate in an unjust system does little to disrupt the social structures that permit poverty.

Significantly, although the text positions the reader to empathize with people who toil under the Republic's oppressive class system, it never meaningfully interrogates the capitalist system that is responsible for (re) producing social inequity.

In much the same way, Day, whose family experienced poverty, boasts about having used money he came into after robbing a bank to purchase "a nice

pair of boots" on the black market, along with "an entire outfit, brand-new shirts and shoes and pants" for Tess, a young girl he protects (p. 71). Upon catching sight of June dressed in her military regalia (just moments before he is scheduled to be executed, no less), Day is struck by the "[s]hining, luxurious epaulettes draping from each of her shoulders. A thick full-length coat made from some sort of rich velvet. Scarlet waistcoat and elaborate, belted boots" (p. 284). In these ways, the text celebrates the materialistic aspects of capitalism, even while ostensibly critiquing it. Although June and Day have experienced intense grief, having lost both of their parents and a brother each to a regime bent on preserving a rigid class system, Day is nonetheless able to assert that, "Money is the most important thing in the world, you know. Money can buy you happiness, and I don't care what anyone else thinks. It'll buy you relief, status, friends, safety . . . all sorts of things" (p. 136, ellipses in original). At no point does the novel critique or problematize this assertion and the materialism it implies. Instead, it allows it to stand as fact, thereby perpetuating the neoliberal assumption that amassing financial resources matters far more than maintaining personal relationships or demonstrating social responsibility.

Although librarians, teachers, and others who work with young adult literature sometimes point to *Legend* as an example of a text that acknowledges diversity and multiculturalism, we read it as, for the most part, erasing the local.

Locality, Culture, and Race

A third question that teachers and students can explore in the service of evaluating whether young adult dystopias reflect and/or resist neoliberal values is: *To what extent does the text acknowledge or erase local cultural practices and regionalism?* Although librarians, teachers, and others who work with young adult literature sometimes point to *Legend* as an example of a text that acknowledges diversity and multiculturalism, we read it as, for the most part, erasing the local. As explained, *Legend* is set in a future Los Angeles—part of a country known as the Republic of America, formed after the fall of the United States. In this sense, Lu acknowledges the specificity of the story's locale by occasionally referencing places and landmarks that readers in the know will associate with Los Angeles. June, for example, passes a military academy housed in the former Walt Disney Concert Hall (p. 39); Day's mother is said to hold a position as a janitor at Union Station, an important train station in Los Angeles (p. 50); and references are made in passing to Sacramento (p. 39), Stanford University (p. 7), and other locales in both California and the American West. Other than these few specific references to geography, however, the majority of the novel occurs in a setting that could be any North American megatropolis.

To a lesser extent, there are instances when Lu appears to reference her Asian American heritage. At one point, June and Thomas meet for lunch in a cafe where they dine on "pork edame" (p. 236), a dish that is common in parts of Asia (p. 236). Likewise, June describes the space where her brother's funeral is held as decorated with "white carpets; round white banquet tables overflowing with white lilacs," while those in attendance are said to "wear their best whites," as does June, who is adorned in "an elaborate white gown" (p. 60). Although it is possible to read these traditions as alluding to those Chinese customs that associate the color white with death, Lu offers an alternative explanation that ignores Chinese rituals altogether. Recalling her older brother, June explains:

> Metias once told me that it was not always this way, that only after the first floods and volcanic eruptions, after the Republic built a barrier along the warfront to keep the Colonies' deserters from fleeing illegally into our territory, did people start mourning for the dead by wearing white. "After the first eruptions," he said, "white volcanic ash rained from the sky for months. The dead and dying were covered in it. So now to wear white is to remember the dead." (p. 61)

In offering this explanation, Lu effectively erases any reference to specific aspects of Chinese funerary practices. Few other references to Chinese or Chinese American cultural practices occur in the novel.

In much the same way, *Legend* largely erases race or racial identity. Day is said to have "some Asian blood" (p. 180), and June describes him as "a mix of Anglo and Asian" (p. 125), yet his primary defining features are his blonde hair and blue eyes. Likewise, although Day describes June as "a little paler than other girls I see in the sector," with "large dark eyes that shine with flecks of gold," her race is otherwise

ambiguous. As Day explains, "I can't tell *what* she is, which isn't unusual around here—Native, maybe, or Caucasian. Or something" (p. 112, emphasis in original). Beyond this, with the exception of the heir-apparent to the Republic of America, who is also said to have "some Asian blood" (p. 180), few if any other references are made to the race of characters in the novel. Indeed, in regard to cultural and racial specificity, there is little to prevent *Legend* from reading like it is set in a futuristic Mall of America. In *Legend*, race is elided, and as we will demonstrate in the next section, social stratification is instead accomplished in the novel through a biopolitical system that privileges eugenics.

Biopolitics, Human Capital, and Genocidal Logic

The final question in the framework that we have presented for reading neoliberalism in young adult dystopias invites readers to ask: *How are biological phenomena used to organize people in the text, and to what extent do they determine a person's worth to society?* In regard to this question, we argue that *Legend* is critical of neoliberalism's tendency to view humans, animals, and the environment as fodder for consumption by governments and corporations. In the novel, biopolitics, especially in the form of eugenics, offers the government a rationale for using biological phenomena to engineer a socially stratified society.

People in this dystopia are placed into social castes according to the perceived quality of their genes, an assessment that is made via the Republic's administration of a standardized test known as the Trial. Those who earn the highest scores eventually work for the government; those who earn the lowest score are killed. Following their death, government scientists examine their remains for the purpose of studying their imperfections and improving the genetic quality of society. In this way, a person's worth is determined according to the person's perceived usefulness to government and industry, a fact that Day makes clear when he explains, "An inferior child with bad genes is no use to the country" (p. 8).

The government's use of biological phenomena to organize and control society takes a second form in *Legend*, as the reader learns that the Republic is secretly targeting families in working class and poor neighborhoods with strands of a plague that initially spreads among animals in underground slaughterhouses and that military scientists subsequently cultivate and weaponize in government laboratories. The plague is then disseminated either via the city's water system or through an elaborate network of underground pipes that surface beneath people's homes in impoverished parts of the city. By using the plague as a bioweapon, the Republic is able "to cull the population of weak genes, the same way the Trials pick out the strongest" (p. 246).

A deconstructive tension thus lies at the biopolitical center of *Legend*: on one hand, the text wants to assert that genocide is wrong, but on the other, it asserts that some people simply are biologically superior to other people.

June learns the truth about the Republic's eugenics program when she reads a series of journal entries that her older brother, Metias, left for her online before he was assassinated by the military. In addition to discovering the truth about the plague, June comes to understand that her parents were murdered after her father, a scientist for the military, discovered the truth about the government's intentions. For her, the plague comes to serve as a metaphor for the government. She explains:

> The plague has gotten its claws around all of us, in one way or another. The plague murdered my parents. The plague infected Day's brother. It killed Metias for uncovering the truth of it all. It took from me the people I love. And behind the plague is the Republic itself. The country I used to be proud of. The country that experiments on and kills children who fail the Trial. (p. 250)

June is horrified at the government's casual attitude toward genocide, so she subsequently decides to align herself with Day and the Patriots, a small band of freedom fighters dedicated to overthrowing the Republic's leadership. Especially in its emphasis on eugenics, *Legend* is a thinly veiled allegory for the horrors of the type of genocidal thinking that led to the Holocaust. The text makes clear that no government has the right to murder its citizens or to use them for biological experimentation. Although *Legend* frequently exhibits, as we have argued, neoliberal tendencies, in this ideology, it strongly asserts an ethos that governments govern best when they protect citizens, rather than harm them.

While we read *Legend* as criticizing the practice of using biological phenomena to arrange people in hierarchical relationships, and though we regard it as simultaneously condemning a neoliberalist assumption that regards people as human capital to be exploited by those in positions of power, it is worth noting that the novel nevertheless also invites the reader to identify with characters who are themselves biophysically exceptional people. That is, the novel, which is narrated in the first person using June and Day as focalizers, does not position the reader to understand events from the perspective of characters who are less physically and intellectually capable. Instead, it positions the reader to identify with characters who stand out in their society as superspecial people (Pomerantz & Raby, 2015), and in doing so, it reifies, even if unwittingly, the neoliberal assumption that exceptional individuals, rather than institutions or the collective, are best positioned to combat oppression and injustice. A deconstructive tension thus lies at the biopolitical center of *Legend*: on one hand, the text wants to assert that genocide is wrong, but on the other, it asserts that some people simply are biologically superior to other people. Unfortunately, we fear that any biopolitical system that asserts that some lives (in this case, June's and Day's) are more exceptional than others ultimately becomes vulnerable to something of a genocidal logic by which superspecial people are positioned to have more power and more rights than inferior peoples.

Implications of Inviting Students to Read Neoliberalism in YAL

Left unquestioned, neoliberalism too often leads to a logic by which superspecial individuals and their "right" to have their entrepreneurial economic interests protected are prioritized over those who are not as obviously successful in economic terms. Moreover, neoliberalism creates the impression that material and economic success are purely individual accomplishments, the inverse of which implies that people who are experiencing economic hardship are somehow entirely responsible for their situation. Inquiries into the nature of neoliberalism thus afford readers the opportunity to question the econopolitical forces that shape how whole groups of people—such as undocumented immigrants, the poor, members of minority groups, or prison inmates—are treated by the body politic. We believe that when young people learn to become aware of the econopolitical assumptions in the novels they read, they are better positioned to interrogate, critique, and possibly change unjust econopolitical structures at work in their own lives.

Given the influence of neoliberalism in the United States and other Western nations, it is not surprising that young adult literature and other texts for adolescents reinforce neoliberal values. Hollindale (1988) distinguishes between a text's surface ideology, wherein an author communicates personal beliefs and values directly to readers via explicit ideological statements (pp. 10–11), and passive ideology, which encompasses an author's unexamined assumptions (p. 12). As Hollindale explains, "A large part of any book is written not by its author but by the world its author lives in" (p. 15). If this is the case, we argue that educators benefit students when they support them in naming the economic politics that shape the world they live in and when they assist them in examining the ideologies at work in the literature they read.

And let there be no mistake: neoliberalism impacts contemporary young people in a myriad of ways beyond the books they read. It is evident in mandates that charge schools with preparing students to be "college and career ready," a direct reference to the emphasis that neoliberalism places on human capital, as though the sole purpose of education is to prepare cogs for the global economy. It is evident in the barrage of annual standardized assessments given at every educational level and the way that our society conceptualizes learning as an individual undertaking and regards knowledge as quantifiable. Reflecting a logic of biopolitics, students' performances on standardized tests may be used to determine their academic track in school, the consequences of which are considerable so far as their future education is concerned. Neoliberalism is also discernable in prepackaged curricula that erase the local by ignoring regional, cultural, and linguistic differences. Beyond that, its influence is felt in movements that aim to defund and privatize public institutions that young people experience, such as public schools, libraries, and universities.

Ultimately, if teenagers and college students understand the globalized neoliberal forces pressuring them to become cogs in an economic system, they may feel empowered to resist, to critique, and to understand the benefits of other economic systems, including those that treat people fairly, even if they are

underprivileged. Most important, when young people understand that the fiction they experience has the potential to manipulate them ideologically, they can be empowered to critique the failures of neoliberalism that are currently shaping their educations and their own economic futures.

In our introduction, we described the cynicism of the students we teach. Many of them recognize the black-and-white moral universes at work in dystopic fiction; good and evil—and the way that good can be twisted easily into evil—are at the heart of *Legend* and other popular young adult dystopian series, such as The Hunger Games, Divergent, and Uglies. The prevalence of political evil in these novels too often confirms teenagers' willingness to believe that our country's problems are also insoluble. We want instead to invite young readers to think about dystopias less as a confirmation of their own cynicism and more as a way to understand the complexity of the econopolitical institutions that will shape their futures.

We also mentioned in our introduction that our students paradoxically report being drawn to young adult dystopia because the genre reaffirms their faith in the individual's ability to overthrow oppressive social systems. We interpret this as evidence of just how pervasive neoliberal ideology is in contemporary society. Complex social problems, such as racism, classism, sexism, and heteronormativity (all of which are founded on an assumption that some people are of more worth than others), are systemic problems, and as such, addressing them requires a collective, rather than an individual, effort. At the same time, one need only consult our current social and historical context to appreciate that our well-being as individuals is inextricably bound up in the health of our society. Thus, our hope with this framework for reading neoliberalism in dystopic fiction and other genres of young adult literature is to encourage young readers into a type of critical inquiry that ultimately brings more pleasure than mere cynicism does: a type of inquiry that recognizes the complexity of the world, but that also acknowledges that only by fully recognizing and embracing that complexity and setting aside our individual interests to work with others can we ever hope to change unfair social, political, and economic systems.

Sean P. Connors *is an associate professor of English Education at the University of Arkansas. His scholarship and teaching focus on the application of diverse critical perspectives to young adult literature. He recently edited* The Politics of Panem: Challenging Genres, *a collection of critical essays about The Hunger Games series. He is a former editor of* SIGNAL.

Roberta Seelinger Trites *holds the rank of Distinguished Professor of English at Illinois State University. She is the author of* Waking Sleeping Beauty: Feminist Voices in Children's Novels *(1997),* Disturbing the Universe: Power and Repression in Adolescent Literature *(2000), and* Literary Conceptualizations of Growth: Metaphors and Cognition in Adolescent Literature *(2014).*

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Katie **Rybakova**

Using Young Adult Literature with First-Generation College Students in an Introductory Literature College Course

Some perceive young adult literature (YAL) as lacking in scholarly merit and being "non-literary" in comparison with more traditional canonical texts (Beumer Johnson, 2011). This could not be further from the truth. Scholars and educators alike have written articles identifying how YAL is used in their classrooms to the benefit of their students (Beumer Johnson, 2011; Cook, 2016; Robbins, 2015; Wolk, 2010). In a college level literature class, however, as opposed to a class geared toward exposing preservice teachers to YAL, the emphasis on the canon can perpetuate students' reading experiences from traditional high school reading curricula (Amicucci, Williamson, DeCapua, & Hrebik, 2015). Typically, this means that those who never identified themselves as readers in high school repeat prior experiences with canonical texts; that is, they find little relevance to their own lives and conclude that reading is insignificant with respect to their future careers in general (Amicucci, Williamson, DeCapua, & Hrebik, 2015).

First-generation college students, particularly those from rural environments (Scott, Miller, & Morris, 2016), begin as college freshmen disproportionately underprepared as readers and writers in comparison with their non-first-generation peers (The Council for Opportunity in Education, 2016). These readers, prime examples of students described by Amicucci et al. (2015), are in need of a curriculum that utilizes scaffolding for encouragement and motivation, draws upon YAL in a way that connects to their own lives, and employs strategies that honor their voices rather than dictating how they analyze texts. Essentially, first-generation college students from rural environments are in need of differentiated text choices rather than strictly traditional canonical texts.

The purpose of this study and resulting narrative is to showcase the ways in which first-generation college students perceive the use of YAL in an Introduction to Literature college course, specifically as a scaffold into more complex texts, some of which are canonical. Furthermore, our results support the need for instructors to facilitate conversations rather than dictate which texts have (or do not have) literary merit. Ultimately, this essay serves as a justification for strong and intentional incorporation of YAL at the college level—whether it be in a class geared toward preservice teachers or not—as a component that stands alongside the canon and includes texts worthy of being read and discussed in an academic environment.

We are moving into an educational paradigm in which academic achievement and personal success are outweighed by the need to be able to collaborate and function effectively in team environments (Prensky, 2016). Prensky's discussion of this new paradigm also emphasizes the need to break away from the traditional vacuum in which we teach content; our world no longer needs emphasis on intellectual development but rather on students working together to improve the global condition. To transfer this to a literature

classroom would mean that students are not simply reading and discussing texts, but using the texts to improve themselves and the world around them.

Furthermore, an expansion of what we expose students to in terms of the types of texts they read is necessary for us to become more inclusive of different authors, genres, and relevant topics. This requires an emphasis on critical literacy practices, an ideology that positions language as a power construct and inherently lacking in neutrality (Behrman, 2006). But before students engage in rhetorical analysis and other forms of critical analysis, they need to be able to *finish* the texts, identify and analyze themes, and then apply the analysis to real-world problems; in other words, they need to find personal and professional relevance in these scholarly discussions. In many ways, the new paradigm that Prensky (2016) suggests requires additional rigor, in that students move from appreciating literature to using it.

Young adult literature, or texts that have a readership of those who are as young as 10 and as old as 25 (Cart, 2008), provides one avenue for exposing students to the canon more accessibly. This is where the typically fast-paced, current, and relevant content of YAL—content that is crafted in ways that deserve literary praise—can be used as a scaffold to identify how the canon demonstrates timeless, relevant themes. While YAL can and should be used in every college classroom, here I explore how this practice is beneficial for an underserved and understudied population: first-generation college students from a rural environment.

Literature Review

Teaching with Young Adult Literature

The Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) regards young adult literature as "valuable not only by its artistry but also by its relevance to the lives of its readers" (Cart, 2008, para. 9). Incorporating relevant and accessible texts into classroom spaces in order to begin building skills with other complex texts is not a novel idea. Scholars such as Lesesne (2010) emphasize the need for scaffolding, not only to meet students where they are, but also to continually build students' lifelong readership through the use of reading ladders—texts that are combined into a module or unit of study that build upon each other and are grouped in various ways, perhaps by theme or by author. Witte and Rybakova (2017) discussed the use of reading ladders in teaching canonical texts, such as *1984* (Orwell, 1950), by 1) using Lesesne's (2010) reading ladder teaching application; 2) scaffolding YAL such as *Delirium* (Oliver, 2011) and considering elements such as common theme, required and elective texts, and multimodality; and 3) analyzing how the texts situate themselves with respect to text-to-text, text-to-self, and text-to-world connections. Rybakova and Roccanti (2016) addressed the connections between YAL and the canon and discussed how the two work together to help students develop both aesthetic and efferent reading skills (Rosenblatt, 1995). To accentuate the value of utilizing YAL as a scaffold holistically in the classroom, Serafini and Blasingame (2012) described the changing ways in which novels are written, particularly in the sense that children's literature is now perceived as being more aligned with mainstream literature and that "as the novel evolves, so too should the strategies and instructional approaches we use" (p. 148).

But before students engage in rhetorical analysis and other forms of critical analysis, they need to be able to finish the texts, identify and analyze themes, and then apply the analysis to real-world problems; in other words, they need to find personal and professional relevance in these scholarly discussions.

In the college environment, scholars and practitioners note the ways in which they have used accessible texts to scaffold more complex texts or skills. Scott (2012) used fairytales to scaffold complex archetypal narratives in an Introduction to Literature course at the college level. Amicucci, Williamson, DeCapua, and Hrebik (2015) identified how they used students' preferences for contemporary texts, such as novels written by James Patterson, to suggest their next, more traditional text, such as work by Edgar Allen Poe (p. 14). Others, while not specifying the use of young adult or contemporary literature as a scaffold, attended to the need to "stop thinking that American and British

Literature could be 'covered' and that our students could be 'filled' with these texts" (Kalata, 2016, pp. 54–55). Curiously, while significant scholarship exists about scaffolds in the high school English classroom, little is written about using YAL as a scaffold in the college level literature classroom, and the literature is silent around such work with first-generation college students, despite a noted decline in their reading and English college readiness on ACT scores in the last five years (The Council for Opportunity in Education, 2016).

What Works for First-Generation College Students

First-generation college students (FGCS) are classified as those whose parents have earned a high school diploma or less (McFadden, 2016). In general, FGCS research focuses on student retention and persistence rather than pedagogical applications that have been used with this population (Tinto, 2006). Factors such as emotional well-being, academic performance, and engagement have been identified as influences on the academic performance and retention of FGCS (McFadden, 2016; Tinto, 1993). FGCS are also more likely to drop out of college compared to their peers (Tinto, 1993; Wiggins, 2011).

Furthermore, creating a non-canonical category that functions in opposition to a binary category of "great" canonical literature is not useful because literature (and the study of it) is personal and thus subjective (Templin, 1995).

In addition to being considered FGCS, the participants in this study were also from a rural environment and attended a college in a rural area. Researchers such as Beasley (2016) and Scott, Miller, and Morris (2016) point to additional barriers for FGCS from rural environments, such as the lack of a college-going tradition, both within the family and within secondary institutions. Furthermore, Beasley (2016) discussed the level of influence that cultural legacies have on college-going decisions and behaviors of FGCS in rural communities. Scott, Miller, and Morris (2016) identified that, in addition to general college costs, some of the barriers for these students include the costs of travel and low-performing secondary schools. It is essential, then, specifically for FGCS from rural environments, that parents are highly involved and continually encourage college participation.

Unfortunately, few articles identify specific pedagogical techniques for this population. There are, however, generalized articles about what works for first-generation college students. Ku, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, and Hayek's (2006) literature review identified engaging, student-centric, and active pedagogical applications—problem solving, peer-to-peer tutoring, and class collaborations—as effective strategies for marginalized communities and first-generation college students. This information both accentuates Prensky's (2016) ideas of a classroom that focuses on collaboration, not academic achievement, and provides a holistic conceptualization of pedagogical approaches that require students to begin critically analyzing literature at an accessible level to develop a growth mindset.

Pedagogical Choices: YAL versus The Canon

The pedagogical approaches in the class described in this study included research-driven practices. Traditionally, academic literacies involve the teaching of conventions, structure, and style; as Miller stated (2005), "Pedagogy retains common topics applied to and by the ancients—for instance, rigor, discipline, coverage, originality, moral improvement, developmental progress and the installation of eloquence that marks both power and status" (p. 457). In the eyes of a traditionalist literature professor, Miller's (2005) statement acts as a justification for teaching *only* texts that are considered canonical and considering *only* the canon as worthy of study (Wolk, 2010). However, these justifications, in addition to being outdated, do not hold up in scholarship. Knowing the literary canon, as opposed to having technical and professional knowledge, is no longer seen as the main avenue to success and is at best culturally marginal (Guillory, 1993).

The canon has never been something "other than an imaginary list; it never appears as a complete and uncontested list in any time and place" (Guillory, 1993, p. 30). In essence, this means that the literary canon is socially constructed. Furthermore, creating a non-canonical category that functions in opposition to a binary category of "great" canonical literature is not useful because literature (and the study of it) is

personal and thus subjective (Templin, 1995). Consider, along with the quotes from these scholars, the dates of publication for these arguments. While many scholars and academics recognize these considerations as self-evident, we continue to have to justify our curricula (i.e., the inclusion of YAL) to the gatekeepers of tradition, whose arguments often start with "We have always done it this way" or "I have been teaching this class for twenty years." When I use canonical texts in my course, the aim is not to juxtapose their literary merit with YAL but rather to investigate a particular genre or theme in depth through different forms of writing (the very definition of scaffolding). The texts that students read are perhaps less important than the academic literacies and conversations they engage in.

Context and Methods

Role of the Researcher

Prior to discussing my data collection and analysis strategies, it is critical that I outline my own subjectivities as a qualitative researcher. First, the participants in this study were also my students at the time that data were collected. This serves as a limitation in that I already had an established relationship with the participants. I attended to this limitation by reiterating to participants that completing the interview would in no way impact their grade in the course. Additionally, I believe in the effectiveness of using YAL in the classroom, regardless of the age level of the learner. As an instructor who considers herself within the paradigm of social constructivism, I also believe that learning is inherently social and that people learn through conversation, not lecture.

My interests in studying first-generation college students peaked when I moved to a school where I taught many first-generation college students, and I wanted to know more about how to best attend to their learning needs. Furthermore, I believe there is an absence of voice from first-generation college students in the current literature, especially from rural environments. I attended to my own biases and interests by including all of the relevant participant comments. My goals were to share all commentary in response to the themes outlined in the narrative, regardless of whether it situated positively or negatively within my paradigm of thinking.

Course Readings and Context

Prior to describing the methodologies of this qualitative inquiry, I outline the course readings and context. Because many of the participants referenced the specific texts we read and attended to questions about how I scaffolded related texts, it is imperative that I briefly summarize my selections as well as my intent in selecting and utilizing them. The course was set up so that students read three different modules: dystopian, bildungsroman (coming-of-age stories about psychological and/or moral growth), and existentialist, where we also identified major literary time periods. Within each module, I used Lesesne's (2010) pedagogical approach of reading ladders, where each text acted as a scaffold for the next text.

The texts that students read are perhaps less important than the academic literacies and conversations they engage in.

We began with the dystopian module, which included (in sequential order) *Unwind* (Shusterman, 2007), *Lord of the Flies* (Golding, 1954), and *Fahrenheit 451* (Bradbury, 1951). Because all three texts represent themes of silence and elements of totalitarian government/control common in dystopian literature, each acted as a scaffold to continually extrapolate on these themes in class discussions. We then moved into the bildungsroman module, where we discussed *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* (Chbosky, 1999), *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time* (Haddon, 2013), and *The Catcher in the Rye* (Salinger, 1945). These texts allowed us to focus on common coming-of-age themes among people in different marginalized communities (e.g., people suffering with mental health issues and those with disabilities). We finished with *Looking for Alaska* (Green, 2005), *The Call of the Wild* (London, 1903), and *The Metamorphosis* (Kafka, 1915) as existential texts that deal explicitly with questions of life and death. We took a step back during this module to consider how philosophical questions and philosophy intersect with literature.

The nine texts represent titles across the range of canonical, contemporary adult, and young adult literature. The canonical texts selected for this course

mirrored those often taught in AP Literature and were chosen with the assumption that students may have read or at least heard of these texts before. Because the skills that students would hone during this semester included critical analysis and academic discourse, both of which students had indicated were familiar during an informal pretest from the first week of class, the choice to incorporate YAL scaffolds and texts that students may have been familiar with was intentional.

The findings highlight participant perceptions of their favorite texts from the course, as well as their perceptions of the instructional use of scaffolding with YAL.

Data Collection and Analysis

Qualitative data were collected during a spring college semester from a private college in the Northeast where the majority of students are first-generation college students. The participants were taking the 15-week, college-level Introduction to Literature course (of which I was the instructor) and were purposefully selected to ensure that 1) both first-generation college students and non-first-generation college students participated and 2) gender was accurately represented. Consent forms were distributed in the second month of the spring semester; out of 19 total students, 10 returned consent forms to be a part of the data collection.

Although data sources included both interviews and one-page written responses generated by students, in this article, we focus exclusively on the interview data. I successfully conducted eight participant interviews. (Two participants were unable to attend the interview session due to personal emergencies.) Interviews were conducted in an office on campus after all warnings for the semester were distributed and before official final grades were released. (As part of a college policy, the instructor issues "warnings" over the course of the semester that indicate concerns and/or the current grade in the course.) The interviews were open-ended in structure and included 12 opinion-based questions. On average, the interviews lasted between 20 and 30 minutes. The questions were centered on themes from the novels in the course, teaching methods and styles, students' first-generation college student status, and literacy practices in general. All data from the interviews were reviewed, analyzed, and then coded into emerging themes, including perceptions of YAL, the canon, reading identity, FGCS, interest, and learning.

Because the focus of this study was on first-generation college students (as opposed to the larger study that included both FGCS and non-FCGS), data on the participants who were not classified as FGCS were omitted, leaving six participants for this study. By focusing only on first-generation college students, I am able to speak explicitly to their needs. The participants included in this narrative (all identified by pseudonyms) are Murphy (sophomore), Larry (sophomore), Connor (junior), Alexandra (freshman), John (sophomore), and Rebecca (freshman).

Although I was instructing an Introduction to Literature class, not all of these students were freshmen in college. Four self-identify as male, and two self-identify as female. All except Murphy were traditional-age college students. Larry was a Secondary English Education major, Alexandra was an Elementary Education major, Murphy was a Management major, Connor was a Security and Cyber Defense major, John was a Sports Management major, and Rebecca was a Criminal Justice major. All six considered themselves to be "non-readers" in the academic sense. Interestingly, Rebecca and Connor commented that they had read books outside of school and enjoyed reading those texts but did not identify themselves as readers. All of the participants had grown up in the area or near the area where they went to school. Murphy, Larry, Connor, and Rebecca all commented that they did not do well in high school academically, while Alexandra and John commented that they "did what they needed to" to graduate high school.

Findings

Perceptions of the Texts

The findings highlight participant perceptions of their favorite texts from the course, as well as their perceptions of the instructional use of scaffolding with YAL. I begin with Table 1, which contains a list of the participants' favorite and least favorite texts. The answers vary greatly, and several participants chose canonical texts as their favorite texts. Most reasons for selec-

tion do not go far beyond "I liked it" or "I didn't like it." However, according to Miller (2010), showcasing preferences for a particular kind of text is the starting point in building lifelong readers.

Because many of these participants did not identify themselves as avid readers (or readers at all) at the outset of the study, these preferences were a sign that they had at least begun to develop preferences for what they read. It was clear that participants had read the texts assigned because of the multiple assessments associated with each text, including a quiz, Socratic Circle participation, and a one-page analysis. In her interview, Alexandra said:

> I've never read so many books in a semester! But I like it! I mean the books we are reading are good, and I would not have thought to read them, so now I want to, like, start reading more. Like it kind of caught my attention, like wow I should start reading more books.

Others echoed this sentiment. Murphy mentioned in his interview that he is able to "connect things and see things [he] didn't necessarily see before," and John said that he couldn't believe that I had managed to get him not only to read a book but to like it.

Most participants chose *Lord of the Flies* as their least favorite text. The participants who expanded on this decision talked about how the text is dry or unrealistic. Some, like Rebecca, mentioned that they couldn't "connect to it." Connor said, ". . . because he's talking about each blade of grass individually, in one sentence, and I'm like, 'Please stop. I can't possibly process all of that.'" The texts cited as least favorites also seemed the least relevant to the participants. Sandra pointed out that her least favorite texts were selected due to their writing style and lack of relevance to the themes.

Larry was the one participant who chose *Lord of the Flies* as his favorite text, which was interesting because he equated his favorite text with the one that he did the best with academically. While in most discussions he would refer to other texts when discussing the specifics of each book, during the discussion on *Lord of the Flies*, Larry initiated conversation more often and pointed out several times that he "didn't catch this the first time" or "now that I read it, I get why . . . ." Since he had been exposed to *Lord of the Flies* in high school (but admitted that he had just read the Sparknotes version), he felt confident talking about the book in class. *Unwind* topped the list three times, even though *Unwind* was Murphy's least favorite because it was "gloomy."

None of the participants mentioned *Fahrenheit 451*, *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time,* or *The Metamorphosis* as a favorite title, and only Murphy discussed *The Call of the Wild*, with which he had a specific, personal connection. Interestingly, out of the texts used in the class, these four texts that go unmentioned are categorized as adult rather than young adult texts. Aside from *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time,* they are also more traditional texts. The books that participants had the most extreme reactions to were mostly YAL, with a mix of both contemporary and canonical. The readability concerns discussed by participants (i.e., dry, hard to digest) were exclusive to the canon, despite the multiple prereading strategies leading up to the reading of the texts.

Perceptions of Scaffolding

In addition to asking participants what they thought of the texts, I also asked them whether they were aware of the scaffolding that occurred in the class and whether they felt like it was effective or successful. In the question itself, I identified different texts that were used to scaffold with each other, mentioning how *Unwind* served as a scaffold for *Lord of the Flies* and *Fahrenheit 451*.

Most of the participants mentioned the positives of this scaffolding. Murphy said, "I think that if it was just a text from the canon, it would be a little bit more difficult to tease out the themes and stuff like that." Alexandra mentioned that *Unwind* "felt like it kind of set up the stage . . . like what am I going to be reading next, what am I going to be learning about?" These two quotes, although both positive, specify different aspects of scaffolding. Murphy mentioned how scaffolding made textual analysis easier because he had already been exposed to the themes in the canon. Alexandra, on the other hand, talked about motivational factors. Asking "What am I going to be reading next?" spoke to her interest following her reading of *Unwind*. She wondered how we would continue analyzing themes of silence and power through totalitarian government structures in dystopian literature.

John also reacted positively, saying:

> I definitely liked the mix. . . . having a variety of reading is definitely important for a lot of students because you

Table 1. Favorite and least favorite books

Participant	**Favorite Book/Least Favorite Book**	**Reason(s)**
Murphy	*The Call of the Wild* [London, 1903] /*Unwind* [Shusterman, 2007]	Well, my favorite is *The Call of the Wild*, the one I am reading now, and I think it's because I have such a strong personal connection to it, and um, my least favorite . . . I think I'm going to have to say *Unwind*, only because it was, for me it kinda was a gloomy start (laughs). The times that I did read a lot was when I was in jail, especially when you are in your jail cell, and there is nothing else to do, and there is books, it makes the time pass. (laughs)
Larry	*Lord of the Flies* [Golding, 1954]/ *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* [Chbosky, 1999]	My favorite one is *Lord of the Flies*, definitely, just because I had that book as an assignment in class before in high school, my sophomore year, which is why I killed the quiz on it. Least favorite, I'd have to say, *Unwind* or *Perks of Being a Wallflower*. I don't know why, just wasn't attractive to me.
Alexandra	*Looking for Alaska* [Green, 2005] and *Unwind/Lord of the Flies*	Favorite would be . . . right now I like *Looking for Alaska*. I don't know if it will be my favorite but I like it right now. I really liked *Unwind*. It was so interesting and the whole time I was like wondering what would happen. My least favorite was probably *Lord of the Flies*. It was just . . . I don't know, I didn't really like it. It was kind of weird, and I was like what is going on right now? Why are people killing each other?!
John	*Unwind/Lord of the Flies*	Favorite definitely had to be *Unwind*. Actually, I wanna read the rest of that series. Not going to lie, it was a great book. Had me guessing the whole time. I would set a mark—I'm going to stop at this chapter—and then I'd get to that chapter, and go no, no, no, I need to keep going, one more. And then least favorite—*Lord of the Flies*. It's just so dry. I just couldn't do it. I did it once in high school . . . and I skimmed it. Definitely better skimming it than reading it. I just couldn't do it.
Rebecca	*Unwind* and *The Perks of Being a Wallflower/Lord of the Flies*	I really didn't like *Lord of the Flies*. I didn't connect to it, I didn't understand—like, I did understand it, I knew what was going on, but I didn't understand the actions, like how you could just turn that way. I don't know, I didn't like the idea of it. I don't like reading books that have that kind of killing in it and stuff. That's why I chose not to read *Call of the Wild*. I tried reading it in high school and I refused to finish it. I thought *Unwind* was really interesting. It was definitely a new look at everything. It kind of gave me more ways of looking at things. I really liked *Perks of Being a Wallflower*. I had already seen the movie so I was already expecting to like it. So to me that one was really good. And I already liked *Catcher in the Rye*, so I think reading it again was like, good for me. So I kind of like all of them. (laughs)
Connor	*Unwind/Lord of the Flies*	*Lord of the Flies* . . . a little bit drier. Are they [the canon] older books, though? They are definitely older books. So, not that it's literally old English, but some of it is a little bit different in terms of the structure of sentences, especially *Lord of the Flies*. The author uses way too many *ands* to join sentences. I was about to stroke out reading it. Like "Stop feeding information!" Cause when you read a sentence, you're kind of like storing it in your working memory, and he just kept adding things! I'm like, "I can't possibly get a vision," and then I started to appreciate that that must be a great movie, because of all those descriptors. They could have plotted that scene perfectly, because he's talking about each blade of grass individually, in one sentence, and I'm like, "Please stop. I can't possibly process all of that." And then *Unwind* was just a breeze in comparison. It read like you were telling a story to a friend. Kind of like, "This is what happened." So that was pretty cool. I'm going to say *Unwind* was my favorite. I most hell-bently read through [that one]. I enjoyed it. It was good. And then, I don't know. I liked *Lord of the Flies*; it wasn't horrible, it was just my least favorite to read.

> could ask any one of us in the class and we'll each have a different opinion on every book. So having a variety keeps everyone engaged, most of the time.

This quote offers another perceived benefit of scaffolding, engagement, which is different from analysis and motivation. John liked the Socratic circle discussions and thought that because there was a variety, everyone was able to make a connection to the book they really liked and felt like they understood well.

Rebecca's reaction to this question was positive, and she used the opportunity to compare this course to other classes she took before:

> It was definitely much more of an interesting mix than, like, when I took US History/English in high school, because they combined it. It was all or almost all books from the canon, and it's kind of dry. It's not as relatable. But like, *Perks of Being a Wallflower* and, like, *Unwind,* those kinds of books give you more, like, teenager things that we can relate to more. They kind of go into our time more. So it wasn't all, like, *Huck Finn*, from a time frame we weren't in so we don't personally connect with it as much. And we don't experience that time frame. Like we can only read about it or hear about it.

The participants mentioned analysis, motivation, engagement, and, through Rebecca's quote, the relatability of the texts. Rebecca was the only participant to mention explicitly the age of the characters in the texts. This was discussed in a positive way, as evidenced by the reference to "teenager things we can relate to more." None of the participants talked about the YAL in a negative light in comparison to the canonical titles.

One participant, Larry, used a more holistic approach to answer the original question:

> I think it's interesting because we almost have this perception of the canon as bad, but in actuality it was these guys who wrote these books that almost looked into the future and saw, how, how, I don't want to say twisted, but how different society is going to be from where they are to where we are now, so you see *Unwind*, which is, you know, in the future, so it kind of makes me wonder if *Unwind* is almost like a future canonical text. So these guys that wrote *Lord of the Flies* and *Perks of Being a Wallflower,* and you know, all of these books that we've read, *Catcher in the Rye,* these are 60-, 70-year-old books, you know, so sitting here now in 2017 saying hey, these are texts that are in the canon, but these guys [authors], there was no way that they would have known that, what our life is going to come to, so it almost scares me to think that *Unwind* could be the future of society.

Larry's comments showcase the way that he rationalized the canonical texts in comparison with contemporary texts (although he did misrepresent *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* as canonical). In class earlier that week, we discussed the canon and whether it would ever change. He was particularly interested in how contemporary texts would be read in the future and whether they would have the same "timeless" quality as the canon as it stands. We also discussed how the lasting value of some of the texts that we read, such as *The Catcher in the Rye,* was hotly contested and that some literary scholars do not consider some of these titles to be canonical. This comment showed that Larry had considered the holistic nature of literature and perhaps the importance of reading contemporary texts.

Their comments implied that they viewed these texts as having similar themes, but not as differing in literary merit.

The majority of the participants wanted me to explain further what I meant when I said I had intentionally used the texts as scaffolds so that they would get a variety of contemporary and canonical text exposure. Others had not considered this mix until I pointed it out. These quotes, taken together, show how the participants ultimately interpreted the use of contemporary YAL as a scaffold for reading the canonical works in the course. The participants pointed out the value of this mix from multiple perspectives, such as engagement, text analysis, motivation, and relatedness.

Implications

This research begins to add to scholarship about using YAL in the entry-level literature college classroom, specifically in classrooms that serve first-generation college students in rural environments. From the stated perceptions of the first-generation college students interviewed in this study, it is clear that they have a preference for contemporary YAL; they also indicated that using YAL as a scaffold is beneficial. More important, no participant indicated that the contemporary YAL read in the course was in any way childish or non-literary in nature. Many of the participants made

text-to-text connections between the contemporary YAL and the canonical literature. Their comments implied that they viewed these texts as having similar themes, but not as differing in literary merit. Furthermore, their preferences for contemporary texts over canonical texts support the value of including relevant texts in curricula in order to allow students to become invested in the literary themes and analyses.

After the class, many recognized that they had been exposed to different forms of texts, acknowledged their new abilities in reading and analysis, and expressed their motivation to continue to read.

For a literature class to be successful, an instructor must create a curriculum that suits students' needs and interests. Using contemporary YAL motivates students to read because it is accessible and relevant to them. Many of these participants did not identify as readers prior to taking this class. After the class, many recognized that they had been exposed to different forms of texts, acknowledged their new abilities in reading and analysis, and expressed their motivation to continue to read. YAL allows students to practice new and/or more challenging skills, such as critical analysis, with accessible and relevant texts before they are challenged to apply the same techniques to texts that require additional reading skills. The scaffolding strategy that worked in this particular setting was based on Lesesne's (2010) concept of reading ladders, where students studied an increasingly challenging set of novels within a particular scope and/or genre, such as dystopian literature or existentialist literature.

While the canon is important as a point of exposure and as a way to view a genre or theme holistically through different texts, we need to move away from an emphasis on academic content and move toward an emphasis on skill development that is grounded first in students' text preferences. We need to facilitate aesthetic reading before we can move into efferent reading—reading with the purpose of analyzing a text (Rosenblatt, 1995). Many instructors of literature are already incorporating these scaffolding techniques, but we need to be able to utilize this practice without having to rationalize it to those who have a more traditionalist view of teaching literature; scaffolding texts and using YAL in a classroom is not a practice meant only for secondary education and teacher preparation programs.

Scaffolding in teacher education and through the lens of pedagogical application is an explicit choice the instructor makes. In addition to text selection, it is important that instructors create space for readers to engage more actively in reading and discussion. Particularly important in the unique rural context in which I worked was continually asking questions like, "What do you think and why?" and "How does this pertain or relate to your life, future career, or our society now?" Surprisingly, a number of my students had never been asked these questions in the classroom setting.

What was particularly interesting in the data was that students were not aware that the YAL was used as a scaffold. When examples of scaffolding were given to students during the interview, however, they acknowledged this practice and the potential benefits—from academic to motivational—they saw from its use. Perhaps this speaks to the need to be more intentional and explicit about scaffolding with learners so that they are aware that many texts can be compared. While we did discuss overarching themes, being more intentional about comparing the texts in the module may have improved the students' learning. Holistically, this result further accentuates the implication that readers must first "buy into" reading a particular text and that enjoyment is a strong motivator in doing so.

This research incorporated a variety of participants, and the participants showcased here were first-generation college students in a rural environment. Their responses made it clear to me that they were seeking an education that was relevant to them and their future careers. With the exception of Larry, they viewed their favorite books as those that they deemed to be most relevant to their own personal and professional lives. This is a finding that fits with previous research on how to get students reading (Lesesne, 2010; Rosenblatt, 1995; Wolk, 2010) and applies to college students as much as it applies to students at other academic levels. While these findings are important in that they contribute to the research on specific pedagogical applications used with first-generation

college students in rural environments, they may also be relevant to reluctant readers, alliterate readers, and fake readers as well (Miller, 2010).

While strategies are important to help with practical applications of research, my intent in sharing these participant voices is to ensure that their voices are heard and honored, because while there are many statistics that attempt to describe FGCS, there are not many studies that allow the participants to speak for themselves.

Conclusions

YAL can serve as an access point to develop a rich conceptualization of a particular genre or theme for first-generation college students as well as others in a college classroom. Because YAL is easy to relate to, helps students engage in aesthetic reading, and is current and relevant to students, it helps students recognize themselves as readers and connect the same themes across different texts, whether those texts are canonical or not. It can and should be used for appropriate audiences, not only in secondary education but for entry-level literature courses in college as well. It is essential for scholars to continue to research different pedagogical methods and uses of YAL in the college literature classroom, particularly as they relate to first-generation college students in rural settings.

Katie Rybakova *is an assistant professor of Education at Thomas College and faculty member in the Center for Innovation in Education. She is the Maine Association for Middle Level Education Executive Director. She received her PhD from Florida State University in Curriculum and Instruction. Her interests include digital literacies and young adult literature.*

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Alice D. **Hays**

"Now I See Them as People":

Financial Inequity in *Eleanor & Park*

> "The part of the book that would talk about Eleanor and her normal feelings that everyone has, and then how poverty would get in the way of them made me feel different [about poverty] because it made me realize poverty affects all aspects of life, especially for teens."
>
> —Josephine, 10th grade

When Josephine (a pseudonym) was asked to focus on a social justice issue in her 10th-grade honors English course, she chose poverty. To establish context for her capstone participatory action research project, she read *Eleanor & Park* (2015) by Rainbow Rowell, a love story in which the protagonist lives in poverty. A case study of Josephine revealed that reading this book with a critical poverty lens can shift a student's takeaway, resulting in a potentially significant change in their understanding of this complex topic. Therefore, when I read the editors' call to consider the implications of financial inequity within young adult literature (YAL) and to discuss how educators can support the critical reading and understanding of wealth and poverty and their role in politics and life, Josephine came to mind. This article considers the pedagogical challenges and possibilities of exploring social issues like economic inequality through YAL in classrooms, especially classrooms in communities where discussion about social issues may be driven by conservative ideologies. Using a sociocultural identity framework coupled with a pragmatic approach, I discuss one student's reaction to a social-justice-based curriculum anchored by a YAL text.

Sociocultural Literacy and Identity

The purpose of this article is to describe an instructional activity that draws upon Gee's (2010) situated sociocultural approach to literacy, which argues that literacy is about ways of participating in social and cultural groups and needs to be understood and studied in its full range of contexts. More specifically, I argue that complex participation with literacy instruction both shapes and is shaped by the identity of the reader. Gee (2010) states that a culture does not simply teach members of the group to read and write in specific ways, but also to "act, interact, talk, know, believe, and value" in certain ways as well, ways that "go with" how they write and read (p. 4). Gee (2010) calls this shared communication and understanding "big d Discourse," while Moje, Lewis, & Enciso (2007) define these groups as discourse communities. As people move through these communities (Moje et al., 2007), or ways of being (Gee, 2015), participation within literacies may affect their sense of identity (Gee, 2001; Holland & Skinner, 2008; Moje et al., 2007; Moje, Giroux, & Muehling, 2017). Gee (2001) defines four aspects within core identity: N = natural identity, which one is born with; I = institutional

identity, which one is assigned; D = discourse identity, which is how one performs in one's culture; and A = affinity group identity, which one relates to through shared experiences. When classroom literacy practices blur the lines between these four aspects of identity, students can experience a complicated sense of identity.

Students bring to the classroom culturally influenced interpretations of what ought to be valued as well as knowledge derived from their social and family networks (Heath, 2011; Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 2009; Street, 1984). This includes ideological perceptions of people both within and outside their own culture, including social class. Although there has been a great deal of work in the literacy field related to race (Akom, 2009; Brayboy, 2005; Thomas, 2015) and gender (Alvermann, 2009; Connors, 2016; Simmons, 2012), there has been little that specifically focuses on social class and literacy (Finn, 2009; Jones, 2013; Payne-Bourcy & Chandler-Olcott, 2003; Thein, Guise, & Sloan, 2012). This may be in part because social class is less visible and more difficult to define than other cultural classifications (Thein et al., 2012). If, however, we are to heed the call to "support efforts by educators to teach about social injustice and discrimination in all its forms with regard to differences in . . . socioeconomic circumstance" (NCTE, 2010), it is critical that English language arts (ELA) educators consider the ways they choose texts and construct curricula in order to value a more diverse range of cultures, including social class, than is traditionally presented in the classroom.

Conceptually, the use of narrative YAL coupled with discussion-based learning can open the door for students to begin thinking about social justice issues.

Why YAL- and Activist-Oriented Curricula?

While much of our current ELA instruction focuses on standards-based strategies and skills, we can encourage students' self-discovery and future growth needed to explore difficult social issues, such as financial inequity, by using discussion-based learning with engaging literature (Applebee & Langer, 2011; Hayn, Layton, Nolen, & Olvey, 2016; Ivey & Johnston, 2013; Lesesne, 2007). Hayn, Layton, et al. (2016) call upon classroom teachers to develop curriculum based "on the concept that YAL has much to offer in improving and enhancing literacy skills" (p. 14). This idea is furthered by Ivey & Johnston (2013) when they write that "engaged reading offers the possibility of expanding the capacity for social imagination in the reader's own life, potentially changing readers' social behavior" (p. 257). This change in behavior may be attributed to increased levels of empathy, which can be positively attributed to narrative fiction (Alsup, 2015). Conceptually, the use of narrative YAL coupled with discussion-based learning can open the door for students to begin thinking about social justice issues.

When considering financial inequity, it is more critical than ever that we work on nurturing the empathetic reactions that young people have in response to people living in poverty. As Hill & Darragh (2012) discuss, poverty-based discussion is often divisive. The Reagan-era image of the welfare queen is pervasive, as reflected, for example, in US Senator Orrin G. Hatch's recent statement about "people who won't help themselves, won't lift a finger and expect the federal government to do everything" (Black & Sprague, 2017). The need for further discussion is exemplified by the choice of *$2.00 a Day: Living on Almost Nothing in America* (Edin & Shaefer, 2015) as the 2017 One Book Bakersfield. The book is being read at the local university as well as in Kern County High Schools and may begin to answer Hill and Darragh's (2012) call to "foster sensitive, constructive conversations on an issue that will not begin to go away until we have such discussions" (p. 86).

YAL is particularly well suited to initiate these sensitive conversations. When students identify with characters or situations portrayed in YAL, they may be able to extend those connections to their own lives, or at least begin asking questions about their own perceptions (Alsup, 2015; Alsup & Miller, 2014; Glenn, Ginsberg, Gaffey, Lund, & Meagher, 2012; Hayn, Kaplan, & Nolen, 2011). Additionally, as students use novels as entry points to discuss the politics of daily life and ultimately move toward action and social justice, they must think critically about the literature they are reading, which allows them to question both

their own and the characters' identity (Freire, 2005; Lewison, Flint, & Van Sluys, 2002). In our increasingly fragmented society, I believe the ability to think critically and the need to develop empathy for others must become our clarion call as educators. The use of YAL and activist-oriented curricula may be one way to move toward this goal. In the next section, I describe a curriculum and activist-oriented approach one teacher took and my methodology for researching the potential impact of such an approach.

What Does This Look Like?

Curriculum

The classroom teacher and I co-created a curriculum that adopted a critical literacy approach, defined by Lewison et al. (2002) as "(1) disrupting the commonplace; (2) interrogating multiple viewpoints, (3) focusing on sociopolitical issues, and (4) taking action and promoting social justice" (p. 383). Students in this class selected a social justice issue from a list of ten topics paired with young adult novels that touched upon or focused upon each issue. As Connors and Rish (2015) state, YAL may perpetuate ideologies situating teachers as power brokers. Providing students with choice was intended to partially alleviate that issue. Additionally, the student-centered curriculum of literature circles (Daniels, 2006) and individualized research distributed power within the classroom.

Prior to reading, the students watched Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's (2009) TED talk, "The Danger of a Single Story," to begin the work of disrupting the commonplace and interrogating multiple viewpoints. Students wrote in their online journals as a way of engaging with the TED talk before beginning to delve into their chosen social justice issue and novel. While reading the novel in literature circles of 3–5 people, students researched the social justice issue and identified an outside person or organization that was trying to solve the problem. Additionally, students responded to journal prompts each day while they were reading their novels. They had four weeks' worth of repeating entries, as follows:

> Monday: What character do you most identify with?
>
> Tuesday: What emotions did you feel reading this section?
>
> Wednesday: What aspect of this portion of the novel do you feel was most significant?
>
> Thursday: How do you feel the book is portraying social injustice?
>
> Friday: What would you do to solve your issue if you had all the power in the world?

After reading the novel and conducting the research, including contacting the person or organization they had identified, students were asked to develop and implement an action plan that addressed the social justice issue on which they were focused. The students had a great deal of latitude in developing and implementing these final projects, which resulted in various commitment levels to action. For example, some students chose to use social media to spread awareness among their peers at their school, while other students started clubs on campus or wrote letters to powerful, local, relevant authorities.

In our increasingly fragmented society, I believe the ability to think critically and the need to develop empathy for others must become our clarion call as educators.

Methodology

Research Purpose, Context, and Participants

This project's overarching goal was to identify how YAL influenced students' relationship with social justice issues. Specifically, the research explored a) the power of the novel as a source of knowledge, b) factors that impact students' reading experiences, c) the interactions students had with the texts in terms of their identification with the characters or issues, and d) their approach to taking action regarding social justice issues.

Data Collection

The data collected included ethnographic observations, journal responses, literature circle recordings, individual interviews, and a focus group interview. The project began immediately after Labor Day and continued until the semester was finished. The interviews occurred after students finished their novels. The interviews were transcribed, and all written material was initially coded (Saldaña, 2013) using NVivo. Utilizing the lens of sociocultural theory (Moje

et al., 2007) and identity (Beach, Johnston, & Thein, 2015; Gee, 2001; Glenn & Ginsberg, 2016), I looked for patterns throughout the data. The following section discusses Josephine, whose story addresses financial inequity.

Poverty and *Eleanor & Park*

In Rainbow Rowell's (2015) *Eleanor & Park*, Eleanor is an awkwardly dressed teenager who is desperately poor and made fun of at school. She meets Park on the bus on her first day, and after a rocky start, a romance blossoms. Eleanor has recently returned to live with her mother and abusive stepfather, Richie, after being kicked out for a year, and Richie continues to terrorize the family. Throughout Eleanor and Park's romance, Eleanor tries to hide the reality of her home life from Park and ultimately tries to keep Park at arm's length so he won't discover the depth of her struggles.

Josephine's willingness to see multiple perspectives to a story was critical as she entered this unit that exposed her to ideas that contradicted her understanding of the way things are.

While Rowell writes a beautiful love story, the nature of Eleanor's financial life looms over their futures and ultimately dooms this budding romance. The overwhelming poverty that Eleanor experiences removes most options that would allow for Eleanor and Park's relationship to continue.

While *Eleanor & Park* is typically billed as a romance, I have learned that taking a critical literacy approach and using a critical poverty lens to read this piece exposes a much darker component of the novel. The students who read this novel were asked to notice the ways that poverty was portrayed and to consider how they might potentially attempt to solve this social issue. Foregrounding this reading with a critical lens allowed Josephine, the student subject of this article, to "creat[e] and re-creat[e] fresh and unrehearsed opportunities to make discoveries about texts, about language, about the world, and about themselves" (Appleman, 2007). In a follow-up email, Josephine wrote that she saw poverty differently after reading "the part . . . that would talk about Eleanor and her normal feelings that everyone has, and then how poverty would get in the way of them." She explained that "[this part] made me feel different because it made me realize poverty affects all aspects of life, especially for teens." In essence, Josephine recreated her understanding of poverty through the text.

Josephine's humanization of someone in poverty through her self-identification may demonstrate learning through self-discovery, which may ultimately lead to future growth.. The following discussion explores Josephine's experiences and perspective changes throughout the course of reading the novel.

Can We Change the Single Story?

Josephine began this unit plan prepared to consider that her understanding of reality might be limited by her experience, as demonstrated by her reflection on Adichie's TED talk (referenced earlier). Josephine wrote:

> Chimamanda warns her audience that a single story can create stereotypes[.] That may be true, but incomplete. She warns that single stories can take away people's dignity and provide false representations of certain places or people. Her warning affected me greatly because I realized that for some things I only know a single story. She was not having a pity party for her or any other race, but she was saying how sometimes people's views on others are incorrect. She was not fighting for rights or against racism, but she was fighting against assumptions, stereotypes, and only knowing a single story. Her warning has the chance to make people realize that they can't assume things based off of one story. It has the chance to change people's point of views and make everyone realize that not everyone is the same. I believe Chimamanda is sending out the right message, and I, along with many others, can learn from her words. Although, a single story is sometimes all we are told, it is not all that there is.

Josephine's willingness to see multiple perspectives to a story was critical as she entered this unit that exposed her to ideas that contradicted her understanding of the way things are.

Josephine identified herself as a Republican and wrote in her journal that she agreed with the party's "views on welfare [and] so think[s] charities are doing just fine." When asked about her reasoning for choosing poverty as her social justice issue, she responded with the following ideas in her journal:

> I picked poverty as an issue because it seems to be the least controversial, meaning I had little chance of disagreeing

> with the point the author would be trying to get across. For example, I disagree with a lot of feminist views, not because I don't believe in gender equality, but I disagree with what feminists are fighting for. Choosing a book that I had a chance of disagreeing with would have made it possible for me to just get frustrated with it and not learn anything. With poverty, I found that I agree with most of what people argue for. I disagree with certain aspects, but I assumed they wouldn't be included in an English class.

This passage suggests that Josephine had a strong belief system and didn't expect or want to be challenged within an English class. Gee (2001) writes that "when a human being acts within a given context, others recognize that person as acting and interacting as a certain kind of 'person'" (p. 99). Josephine's institutional identity was that of a "good student," yet she experienced tension between her discourse identity at home and her affinity identity with the protagonist. This tension between the sociocultural values of home and those she was exposed to through the curriculum are interesting to observe.

I See Them as People Now

To me, the most powerful moment within this study was when I asked Josephine if the novel had changed the way she thinks or the way she feels about the issue. She responded by saying, "It's kind of weird because it changed the way I think and feel about specific individuals who struggle with poverty, but in general, like the overview of poverty, I kind of have the same idea of it, but I just look at individuals kind of different." When I asked her to clarify, her statement was, "I see them . . . as . . . I see them as . . . this sounds awful, but I see them more as like people now." The guiding factor in this shift can be attributed directly to her initial self-identification with the novel's protagonist.

While reading the novel, Josephine initially identified with the protagonist, Eleanor. In our one-on-one interview, Josephine told me that she also dressed oddly as a middle-schooler and that she could relate to Eleanor's experience as a new student who just did not quite fit in. She stated, "I did identify with Eleanor because in seventh and eighth grade, I had just moved here. I didn't know anyone and I have an interesting fashion sense, to say the least." Josephine also related the following story to me during our interviews:

> I remember in seventh grade on the first day, I was so nervous for lunch that my plan was actually to sit by the garbage can so no one would sit with me, and I remember I walked so fast after my last class to get to lunch so I could sit at an empty table. [That way,] if people sat there that was your choice, but they wouldn't be upset with me because I'd be there first.

Josephine's connection to the main character did not continue once the issue of poverty became more critical to the plot line. Her initial empathy for Eleanor conflicted with her more general thoughts on the poor, which tended more toward a "pull yourself up by the bootstraps" mindset. The following excerpt from our interview, which was conducted after she finished reading the novel, explains some of her attitudes and ideas concerning people who deal with poverty:

> So I think I can do things to help, but I can't stop . . . No one can stop poverty. That's what I think. Me and my parents don't like to give money to the people because we never know if they're being honest. We've done that before and it just goes bad, but you can give water bottles, food, and stuff. I feel like, especially with people on the side of the road, I'm confused because there's homeless shelters and stuff, so I don't know what to do about that type of thing. There's little things you can do though. If I had a business or something, I'd offer them jobs, but I don't have a business.

This statement highlights two important ideas. First, Josephine stated that no one can stop poverty. Since a key component of the unit is to develop an action plan to address the social justice issue the student chose, Josephine's belief that no solution is possible naturally hampered her ability to complete the unit. Students who choose complex issues like poverty may need the teacher's or fellow students' help in identifying less daunting components of the issue to enable them to develop an effective action plan. Second, Josephine's comment about the honesty of people asking for help highlights the conflict between her empathy for Eleanor and her perception of real people in poverty. Josephine didn't provide more details about her family's experience with giving money and "it just goes bad," but her past experience and her concern that people may be dishonest added to the difficulty of coming up with an effective action plan by ruling out the idea of giving money directly to people in need.

Transfer

While Josephine recognized that people who were poor did behave like "actual people" during the time she was reading the book and immediately after, when Josephine considered homeless people as a

component of her social justice issue, she did not extrapolate those initial feelings and apply them to the individuals she saw on the street. She acknowledged that there was a difference in how she viewed this: "It's kind of weird because it changed the way I think and feel about specific individuals who struggle with poverty, but in general, the overview of poverty, I kind of have the same idea of it. I just look at the individuals kind of different." Her surprise and dissonance, which she described as "weird," may have come from her sense of affinity with the protagonist in her role as an awkward high school student. In her one-on-one interview, Josephine stated, "I just saw her as a person because she was the main character in the story and it was like, 'Oh, that probably stinks.'"

Josephine had the ability to rely on her sociocultural understanding of what it means to be an awkward teen, which allowed her to identify with Eleanor, but her cultural experiences around poverty didn't allow her to fully identify with the protagonist.

Additionally, during the same interview, Josephine claimed, "At this school, there's poverty here, but nothing bad." This is an interesting choice of words. Had she said "that bad," it might have indicated that Josephine believed classmates living in poverty weren't as bad off as Eleanor, but Josephine did not qualify her statement. She simply said the poverty experienced at the school was not bad. While the school is located in a middle-income area and is not a Title 1 school, it is not a wealthy school. My conversations with other students in the class regarding the novels they had chosen revealed that there was indeed real poverty at the school, as evidenced through revelations that some students were living with more than 10 people in a house with three rooms. One might imagine such a circumstance would qualify as "bad" to someone with Josephine's upbringing, but I did not question her further on this statement.

In reflecting upon her interview response and comparing it with her journal responses, we see a correlation between who she knows and what she believes as well. In her journal response, she wrote, "The few kids I have met that are poor have been rude and nasty to me, so I never really sympathized." As a result of these negative interactions, Josephine had not had an opportunity to truly get to know someone who suffered from significant poverty and was unable to develop a nuanced understanding of poverty within her community. Josephine had the ability to rely on her sociocultural understanding of what it means to be an awkward teen, which allowed her to identify with Eleanor, but her cultural experiences around poverty didn't allow her to fully identify with the protagonist.

Whose Job Is It, Anyway?

In a conversation with her teacher, Josephine said that "her political views don't allow her to try to fix poverty, but she wants to shift the perception of poverty." Her experience with this book created productive discomfort due to her political stance and the issues that the book portrayed quite realistically. Through her reading, she came to care about these characters, yet her political beliefs, which likely influence her sense of identity (Gee, 2001, 2015), make it difficult for her to consider ways to take action to attempt to solve this issue.

Josephine experienced conflict when considering an action plan, as shown through her ongoing journal entries and interviews. Her feelings toward and lack of awareness about poverty as well as her perception of the government's role in our lives ran counter to her newfound empathy for Eleanor. This conflict is apparent in the following excerpts. Josephine's original plan was to hire people on the street to perform work that volunteers would typically do. When I asked her to clarify what types of jobs she meant and how it would work she said:

> Just easy things like cleaning up the community and stuff, but, if you provided, . . .you could get homeless shelters and whatever, you could get them involved so they could let people know, and then you could get the company to fund it. I think that's going to be the hardest thing, because I don't know. It would be good for a company's name but I don't know if they'd actually want to give that much money.

Her original intent was to start her own fictional company that would fund this work. When I asked her how she would make this work financially, her

response was, "I don't want to get money from taxes. I don't want that." This adamant refusal to try to get money from the government gives us a sense of the importance of self-reliance that is a part of her sociocultural understanding of society. She reiterated this belief several times while we discussed how she might achieve her goal of creating productive yet attainable employment for people in poverty. A different student might have planned to help people in poverty by informing them about available services, assisting them with accessing government assistance, advocating to government officials for policy changes to address poverty, or even raising money for direct assistance. Because of her sociocultural beliefs, however, none of these options were tenable for Josephine's action plan.

Her initial plan to help homeless people was to create a documentary, with the intention of changing people's perceptions of homelessness. Eventually, she came to see that as unrealistic in our one-semester timeframe, so she decided to write a book instead, although that was an equally daunting project in the course of a semester. She had also concluded that the only people who could be helped might be young adults or children. In the focus group interview, she stated:

> After that . . . I was going through and I was researching [how] to start the program, and I kept coming across statistics. It said that more children were struggling with poverty than adults, so I kind of changed my mind. I'd rather focus on children, and usually when adults are stuck in poverty, they just don't want to change their lifestyle. So it's easier to get to children. Then I was going to write a research paper and then put it places, but I just changed it to writing a book, and I'm still working on it.

The statement that adults "just don't want to change their lifestyle" is again indicative of the internal discomfort she experienced. Her word choice indicates the rationalization and justification she was making to maintain her view of homeless people or those in poverty. When one considers the reality that, according to the Arizona Department of Economic Security's (Wareing, 2007) report, 24.2% of homeless individuals are dealing with mental illness and 23% of the homeless population are veterans, Josephine's ideology becomes complicated; it is this information that may be missing from Josephine's inclusive experience. Additionally, her statement that adults don't want to change their lifestyle seems contradictory to her earlier statement that she wanted to "shift the perception of poverty." Josephine appears to be grappling with several ideological tensions, which may have paralyzed her ability to imagine an action plan and carry it out. Ultimately, a student's sociocultural identity may significantly impact the student's ability to follow through on an action plan.

How Can YAL Affect Perspective?

While Josephine's social perception of poverty is likely to remain a part of her core identity, in her final reflection on the novel, she indicates the power of YAL in her perspective change. She wrote:

> My feelings changed slightly, *only because of the book I read* [emphasis added]. I've never been really close to poverty, and I definitely never have been inside someone's head that lives in poverty, like Eleanor. . . . All I used to think is having a hard life makes you mean, but now I know what it really can be like.

The powerful impact of "being inside someone's head" is further explored through her earlier discussion of her action plan, in which she writes:

> People need to change their mindset on poverty and start thinking of those who live in it as people just like everyone else, instead of outcasts. In my documentary, I want to go to soup kitchens or shelters, and maybe a church, to ask about their stories on poverty. I think people's individual stories will make others realize just how similar we are. Just because they didn't get dealt a great hand doesn't make them so different from anyone else.

These written responses speak to the potential of YAL to shift sociocultural understandings. Josephine began this unit with a clearly entrenched sense of poverty, yet this novel simultaneously disrupted and affirmed those beliefs. In considering the differing aspects of identity delineated by Gee (2001), we might be able to understand how these competing ideas can co-exist for Josephine. What is important is that Josephine's previously held notions were challenged, and she was able to consider a new perspec-

What is important is that Josephine's previously held notions were challenged, and she was able to consider a new perspective through this approach to YAL.

tive through this approach to YAL. Helping a reader to "get inside someone's head" is a unique feature of engaging narrative literature. It is my hope that Josephine's productive discomfort and empathy will continue to manifest itself in her future encounters with people in poverty.

Success or Failure?

While Josephine identified quite strongly with the novel in the beginning, her ability to empathize and connect with the protagonist shifted as the realities presented in the novel began to conflict with her personal world view. The cognitive dissonance that Josephine experienced through reading this perspective on poverty created a sense of paralysis for her in that it did not allow her to identify a feasible action plan to address poverty and prevented her from making significant strides in her goal of raising awareness surrounding poverty. Her inability to complete the action plan does not mean that the curriculum was not successful, however.

Choosing a novel that takes an indirect approach to a difficult social justice issue may allow students to consider the more human aspects of the issue in ways that do not contradict their sociocultural ways of being.

Josephine complained about the limited time (one semester) the students had to complete this curriculum. When questioned about the effectiveness of the curriculum and whether or not she agreed that the teacher should continue with this curriculum, she said, "I do agree. I wish I didn't, but I think she should do it again. I just think there's people who tried really hard to go all out, and they didn't get it done, like me." This statement brought up some interesting questions. I wonder how she defined "going all out." Would it have meant generating a different plan to solve poverty issues, or would it have been more along the lines of finishing the writing of her book? I also wonder why she chose to focus on writing a book. Technically, it was the novel that changed her perception of the issue, so perhaps she wanted to share and spread that understanding with others. Or perhaps creating her book would have allowed her to process her own thoughts on the issue in a productive manner.

In considering Gee's (2001) identity framework, this novel created conflict between Josephine's institution identity as an honors student, her discourse identity as a member participating in her family's discourse of poverty, and her own affinity identity with Eleanor as the main character of the novel. The sheer complexity of these three competing ideologies may have been the root cause of her inability to create an action plan. In the end, her action plan may have been more self-reflective than activist-oriented, although this result could have had more long-term effects on her individual growth.

Classroom Recommendations

One of the most important aspects of this research is the way that the novel facilitated perspective taking. Part of the power of *Eleanor & Park* is the fact that the novel is not entirely focused on poverty. Since the dominant theme of the novel centers on an awkward love story, students who may hold a similar perspective to poverty as Josephine are less likely to erect barriers to the content right away. It was this sense of affinity with the protagonist that allowed Josephine to be comfortable with discussing a serious social issue despite the fact that it generated ideological tensions for her. Additionally, the fact that poverty ultimately resulted in the destruction of the characters' relationship demonstrates the significant hardships of poverty beyond food and shelter, which introduces a broader societal context of which students may not be aware. Choosing a novel that takes an indirect approach to a difficult social justice issue may allow students to consider the more human aspects of the issue in ways that do not contradict their sociocultural ways of being.

Teachers may be hesitant to discuss politics and policies that directly impact people of various socioeconomic statuses within their classroom. Because Rowell's depiction of poverty is not the primary focus of the novel, however, and since students have the power to consider what they might do to address this social ill, readers may feel more comfortable thinking about financial inequity in ways that move beyond welfare and social handouts. The freedom to consider other aspects of poverty may allow more reticent

students to develop independent opinions about the topic, which may lead to rich discussion. I recommend that teachers provide opportunities to discuss the nuances and impacts of poverty beyond food and shelter. Adopting a critical literacy approach (Lewison et al., 2002) to the reading of this novel also allows students to reflect upon their own belief system. The approach Rowell takes to storytelling may not be appealing for all students, however, and I recommend that educators explore Karen Jensen's (2014) Teen Librarian Toolbox and review the detailed discussion and extensive list of other YA novels that address various perspectives on poverty.

Teachers who implement this curriculum will find that not all students come to the same understanding of financial inequity, even if they all read the same book, particularly after considering the various identities that students maintain. Those students who have some prior understanding or experience with financial inequity are likely to respond differently to this novel and, based upon my study with other students, be more able to take action and move to the fourth step of Lewison et al.'s (2002) critical literacy approach. Having a sense of students' identities will allow the educator to evaluate the success of this work in the classroom.

Students will need support in identifying bite-size pieces of significant social issues such as poverty on which to take action. Had Josephine had more support, her action plan may have been more concretely developed, which may have positively impacted her sense of agency. It would have been useful to have her explore different effects of poverty on young people and consider ways to address those instead of poverty as a whole.

While Josephine experienced important ideological shifts through her self-identification with Eleanor, it is unlikely that all students will experience this same level of understanding. While Josephine's response immediately after reading the novel was that she saw individuals in poverty "as people now," her responses to interview questions a few weeks later indicate that this humanization did not transfer to all individuals (i.e., adults) in poverty. While her return to her earlier-expressed sociocultural understandings of poverty was somewhat disheartening for me, the knowledge that her perceptions about poverty had been disrupted is important. I do believe that it might have been possible to capitalize on Josephine's initial identification with Eleanor if we had managed to help her think about Eleanor's future as a runaway. If we had been able to think through the trajectory that Eleanor was most likely on at the end of the novel together, Josephine may have come to develop a more complex view of adults in poverty. Again, considering various identities in the classroom can allow educators to support their students as they grapple with ideas and concepts that may contradict their worldview.

[C]onsidering various identities in the classroom can allow educators to support their students as they grapple with ideas and concepts that may contradict their worldview.

While conducting this study, I was asked whether the classroom teacher and I had had any pushback from students because we focused on social justice issues. The answer is no. I believe this had to do with the teacher's willingness to accept multiple interpretations or readings of the novels, the introduction of intersectionality through Adichie's TED talk, and the wide choice that students had in both their topic of study (beyond financial inequity) and the design of their final action plan. The opportunity to allow students to experience different narratives without having an expectation about what students were to produce after reading may have encouraged wider perspectives than may have happened in a more traditional unit with predetermined outcomes for a novel reading.

That being said, the teacher has an important role in this curriculum. The teacher is a critical sounding board and mentor throughout the project. It is important to lay the groundwork of multiple stories as shown by Adichie's single-story message. Additionally, there should be checkpoints throughout the process that could include reading journals, project-management logs, small-group conferences with the teacher, and full-class presentations. The teacher should be prepared to offer suggestions for action plans to support students' work, especially if they intend to take it out of the classroom. Implementing this curriculum is difficult in some ways, but truly rewarding. As the teacher from this study wrote in a follow-up email message to me, "[The curriculum] really

opened my eyes to a whole new level of teaching and making it meaningful for students, which connects to my own teaching philosophy . . . 'educating the mind without educating the heart is no education at all.'"

Conclusion

Langer (2013) presents the idea that engaging literature might tap into differing cognitive functions necessary for intellectual development. Additionally, Ivey & Johnston (2013) write that "engaged reading offers the possibility of expanding the capacity for social imagination in the reader's own life, potentially changing readers' social behavior" (p. 257). I would argue that these concepts were borne out by this research, as demonstrated by Josephine, who came to identify those who suffer from poverty "as people." This curriculum showed how at least one student developed a more nuanced understanding of poverty through reading engaging literature, as Hill & Darragh (2012) suggest is possible.

Wolk (2009) writes that in a social-activist-oriented curriculum, "the process becomes part of the content" (p. 666). In order to generate the type of empathetic thinking necessary for social action (Alsup, 2013, 2015; Ames, 2013), the process was as important as, if not more important than, the final project, as demonstrated by Josephine's thinking. This curriculum followed the guidelines suggested by researchers, including Glenn et al. (2012), Stover and Bach (2011), and Glasgow (2001), in that Josephine had a choice in selecting her social justice issue; she paid explicit attention to the interplay between the issue, the text, and her own life through critical reading; and she researched resources from activist-based organizations. This lengthy and interwoven process allowed Josephine to move beyond reading the novel as a separate piece and then completing an isolated activity. Instead, the novel became one component embedded into a larger, blended unit designed to generate social responsibility, although her final move to action was difficult to achieve.

While addressing poverty and financial inequity may feel apart from the scope of the ELA teacher, as Jones (2013), Finn (2009), and Thein et al. (2012) report, not enough is being done to address social class in schools. This study shows the ways that educators can begin to break down the walls between people who have differing experiences of humanity. Josephine's years of experiences have led her to define poor people as "other," but reading this novel allowed her to break down the perception she has of an entire class of people in the course of a few weeks. If, as ELA teachers, we expect to contribute to a better future society where all people, regardless of social class, are valued, it is this type of work that must continue in classrooms.

Alice D. Hays *is an assistant professor of Education in the Teacher Education Department at California State University, Bakersfield, where she teaches credential and graduate courses in literacy across the content area, methods and strategies of teaching, and research methods. Dr. Hays taught secondary English language arts for 19 years in Arizona public schools, and her research interests focus on youth participatory action research, culturally sustaining pedagogy, and young adult literature.*

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Sarah **Hardstaff**

Whose War?

Symbolic Economies in Conversations about Conflict in Mildred Taylor's *The Road to Memphis* and Cynthia Voigt's *The Runner*

Young adult literature presents economic issues and themes in a number of ways, yet many critics and readers focus on the surface content, with questions of socioeconomic injustice at the forefront. Less common is an exploration of the ways in which economic ideas shape texts linguistically, working to reinforce or subvert the overt ideologies put forward by authors, narrators, and characters. It is important for students of all ages to question the ways in which texts are constructed and the ideologies they present. In a time of continuing economic uncertainty and inequality, it is also vital that students and teachers of the arts are aware of concepts from the sometimes inscrutable science of economics. I contend that the concept of the symbolic economy is underused in literary criticism related to children's and young adult literature, and so here I present a sample analysis of the underpinning economic logic in conversations about conflict in two young adult texts—Mildred D. Taylor's *The Road to Memphis* (1990) and Cynthia Voigt's *The Runner* (1985). In doing so, I also hope to offer new and interesting critical tools for classroom practice and further research.

Both Mildred Taylor's *The Road to Memphis*, set in 1941 and published in 1990, and Cynthia Voigt's *The Runner*, set in 1967 and published in 1985, are young adult novels from the United States. They have certain themes in common, presenting the anxieties of young people while their countries wage war and the difficulties faced by characters trying to come to terms with the history of race and racial conflict in the United States. Both novels present the types of uncertainty and struggles with self and society that are emblematic of young adult fiction, pinioning these representations to key events in US history.

The conversations that characters have regarding the conflicts they face provide them with a means of exchanging ideas with others and making deals on their own terms. In Taylor's novel, the legacies of World War I and the Great Depression are key factors in the characters' relationships with society, as is the anticipation of the war to come. For Voigt, the Vietnam War recalls a multitude of conflicts and occupations, as well as casting a long shadow elsewhere in Voigt's Tillerman Cycle series. In both series, war features as an intergenerational problem that brings into question the balance of rights and responsibilities and of risk and reward, while simultaneously highlighting conflict at home.

While these somewhat older texts are less likely to appear in present-day curricula, they are, I believe, unjustly neglected and still have much to teach us. As Michelle Martin (2017) writes, "[I]f you counted up *all* of the scholarship that has been written about, say, African American children's and YA literature, it would likely not equal the amount of scholarship that has been published just on *Little Women*" (p. 102). There is certainly room for more scholarship on Mildred Taylor, arguably one of the most important African American children's authors of the twentieth century, and Cynthia Voigt, a white author whose works often deal with the theme of racism and the social and economic exclusion it entails.

Economic Criticism

Economics is the "study of choice among limited resources" (Ainslie, 2007, p. 11). At its core, it is a study of human agency, of the choices we make and why and how we make them. Choice is a key concept in both mainstream economic thinking and alternative accounts, such as Marxism, feminist economics, and postcolonial economics, which often focus on conditions that affect the extent to which agents may act freely. Economics is also "concerned with . . . the production, exchange, distribution, and consumption of commodities" (Hausman, 2013). It deals with goods and services, along with factors such as work, money, and time, and the exchange of these, encompassing a range of day-to-day activities that are also represented in fiction.

Yet economics as a discipline is in crisis, increasingly abstract and separate from the concerns of everyday life. In *How Much Is Enough?*, Robert and Edward Skidelsky (2012) write of their intention "to revive the old idea of economics as a *moral* science; a science of human beings in communities, not of interacting robots" (p. 6, emphasis in original). It seems to me that young adult literature is particularly well placed to speak back to economics, providing as it does diverse explorations of character interactions, drawing attention to the moral and ethical frameworks that underpin them. Combining elements from both subjects could help young people to develop critical skills needed to understand and critique economic ideas and the stories we tell about ourselves.

Economic criticism is the study of literature through an economic lens; both economists and literary critics have engaged with this approach. There are various surveys of core economic principles that draw on examples from literature; see, for example, Milica and Aleksandra Bookman's (2009) *Economics in Film and Fiction*, intended to be used in introductory economics courses. Here, fictional texts are used to illustrate core economic principles in a way that is both fun and thought provoking. For instance, the section on banking asks students to consider the opportunity costs, or the benefits or profits that must be given up to acquire something else, incurred by using a magical bank (Gringotts) rather than a commercial bank (p. 176). There are also a number of literary studies that focus on economic themes, such as *The Great Recession in Fiction, Film, and Television* (Boyle & Mrozowski, 2013), *Crunch Lit* (Shaw, 2015), and *Economic Investigations in Twentieth-Century Detective Fiction* (Zi-Ling, 2015).

Many texts for young readers, including Taylor's and Voigt's, center discussions about money, family finance, labor, property, and so on. However, economic criticism can also work on a symbolic, metaphorical level: "[S]uch criticism usually begins by analyzing the actions and interactions of the characters—their exchanges, debts, purchases, losses, gifts, etc." (Osteen & Woodmansee, 1999, p. 36). What do characters gain, lose, or trade? What do they choose, and what are the limits to their choices? In what ways do they incur costs and debts? Rather than focusing on representations of money, the following text analysis explores other themes—war and racism—to show how economic ideas can be read symbolically into character interactions on any topic.

In addition to providing a vocabulary with which to analyze texts, the economic criticism approach also helps distinguish between surface and concealed ideologies. Peter Hollindale (1992) writes that "the conscious surface ideology and the passive ideology of a novel are [sometimes] at odds with each other, and 'official' ideas contradicted by unconscious assumptions" (p. 31). An example of contradicting ideologies can be found in a text that is central and foundational both for economics and children's literature, Daniel Defoe's (1719/2012) *Robinson Crusoe*, described as "a major progenitor of later children's literature" by Margery Hourihan (1997, p. 58) and seen by Maria Nikolajeva (2002) as the basic template for texts like Cynthia Voigt's (1981) *Homecoming* and Felice Holman's (1974) *Slake's Limbo* (p. 82, p. 110).

For economists, the character of Robinson Crusoe serves as a fundamental metaphor for the rational agent making choices, freed from messy social context on his desert island (Browne & Quinn, 1999, p. 134). Yet this is not how economic decisions are made by real agents or, indeed, by most fictional characters, enmeshed as they are in their context. Critics further point out that Crusoe is a typical economic agent only insofar as women, non-Europeans, people of color, the working classes, and children are excluded from this agency. Looking at the different ways in which agency is represented in fiction helps students to understand that economics has traditionally relied on a one-dimensional view. This kind of cross-curricular work can therefore help students develop the skills required

to identify and evaluate the ideologies underlying different disciplines.

Taylor's and Voigt's works also reveal ideological tensions, presenting conflict between the American ideal of the autonomous individual and the more complex relationships that characterize the singular life of a young adult character. In *Memphis* and *The Runner*, this conflict plays out against the backdrop of the threat of military conflict abroad and the toxic environment created by white supremacy at home. These themes provide the context for exchanges of information, ideas, and promises in conversations between characters. By looking at the transactional nature of these conversations, what is given and what is taken, we can see more clearly the social attitudes presented.

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"Fighting for nothing": Cassie and Mort in *The Road to Memphis*

Mildred Taylor's *The Road to Memphis* picks up the story of the Logans, an African American family living in segregation-era Mississippi whom most readers first encounter in Taylor's seminal novel, *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* (1976). The year is 1941, and toward the end of the novel, the characters hear of the Japanese army's attack on Pearl Harbor, an event that draws the United States into World War II. Cassie, the narrator and protagonist, finds herself in Memphis at the end of a difficult and dangerous journey. Having left the safety and comfort provided by adult members of her family in the earlier Logan books, Cassie now experiences firsthand the violence, humiliation, and institutionalization of Deep South racism in a way that feels starkly different and much more personal.

Shortly after hearing the news about the attacks on Pearl Harbor, Cassie finds herself in an argument with Mort, a journalist employed at a black newspaper office, about the anticipated involvement of the United States in World War II (pp. 229–232). Particularly striking in this scene is the language of "us" and "them," which slips between denoting an inclusive and shared national identity on the one hand and a racial identity on the other. Mort uses phrases like, "we'll . . . be at war," "our country," "we have to go fight" (p. 231). Cassie, on the other hand, is not invested in this idea of shared Americanness, instead positioning the war as a concern of white people; she says, "they're in a war" and talks about "that other war they had" when referring to World War I (p. 232).

James Underhill (2011), in a study of the rhetoric used by totalitarian states, comments on the "extent [to which] pronouns define our relations in spatial metaphors of inclusion, exclusion, proximity and distance" (p. 115). Amanda Greenwell's (2017) recent reading of Jessie Jackson's *Call Me Charley* (1945) similarly analyzes pronoun use in terms of inclusion and exclusion in the context of segregation in the United States (p. 102, p. 109). In *Memphis*, Cassie's use of "us" and "them" clearly creates space between her community and the nation as a whole, undoubtedly as a response to the barriers to shared American identity that have been placed in her way by white supremacy. It is only toward the end of the novel, after a reconciliation with Jeremy Simms (one of the series' few sympathetic white characters) and a growing awareness of her brothers' impending conscription, that Cassie begins to talk about the Japanese army as having attacked "us" (p. 288).

Closely connected to this picture of "us" and "them" presented by Cassie with regards to the war and the question of who should fight are the ideas of possession and responsibility. She mentions a series of things that are "theirs": restrooms, cafés, hotels, and hospitals. Possessive pronouns are used to imply differential levels of ownership or investment in a number of settings and, by extension, investment in American citizenship and identity. For Cassie, this sense of ownership extends to the war itself; it belongs to, and is the responsibility of, the white people. She therefore views the choice or obligation to fight in terms of possible future benefits: "[I]f we win, are we going to be able to . . . go to *their* hospitals?" (p. 231, emphasis in original).

This is in some ways an economic question: Why should there be equal exposure to risk when there isn't any likelihood of equal reward or even basic

rights? Is there a deal whereby society will change in recognition of the role played by black people in the war effort? In response to Cassie's insistent line of questioning, Mort can only offer "maybe not" as a response, in stark contrast to the repeated refrain of "Maybe one day" offered by Cassie's father throughout the earlier books in the series. Mort sees no basis on which the exchange proposed by Cassie could be guaranteed. Cassie's "if" questions are not purely theoretical, as her friend Clarence has just been turned away from a white-only hospital despite being seriously ill and wearing his military uniform. Notwithstanding Clarence's participation in the war economy as a soldier, he is barred from equal access to healthcare (see Hardstaff, 2018). The patterns of give and take implied in Clarence's relationship with the United States are severely imbalanced. While elsewhere in the novel, black characters express enthusiasm about the economic possibilities opening up due to the war, Cassie's view is shaped by Clarence's experience.

Even when there is no external war to fight, being a black soldier carries severe risks for Taylor's characters. In *Let the Circle Be Unbroken* (1981), secondary character Russell joins the army, stating that he has chosen this path because it is "better than starving" (p. 7), an analysis that condemns the paucity of economic possibilities in the land of opportunity. Furthermore, older characters worry that Russell's army uniform will be seen as inflammatory to "mean white folks" (p. 7), and he is eventually humiliated on the steps of the Jackson courthouse in a union-breaking scene that acts as a tableau of Depression-era Deep South concerns. Thus, Cassie's conversation with Mort in *Memphis* recalls the unjust treatment of black soldiers elsewhere in Taylor's series.

The mention of World War I, a war in which two of Cassie's uncles were killed while a third was injured, draws attention to an older, unpaid debt. In her conversation with Mort, Cassie talks about her Uncle Hammer and what she has learned from him about the previous war. She tells us that Hammer "[s]aid the white folks got free in Europe, but things stayed just the same over here for us" (p. 232). But as she points out, not only did things not improve after the last war, they got worse; Cassie refers here to the lynching of black soldiers, while earlier books in the series deal with the economic fallout of the Great Depression both for black sharecroppers and for landowners like Cassie's family. Now Cassie's generation is being called upon to do the same again, to engage in a one-sided deal that may benefit Europeans but brings no reward to the people Cassie is close to. As she says, "I just don't believe in fighting for nothing" (p. 231).

That both World War I and the ideology of Nazism feature heavily in this conversation is also significant in terms of bringing the reader's attention to the idea of war on multiple fronts, both at home and abroad, but also in both the past and future. Mort cites Hitler's ideas about race as incentive enough for black Americans to go and fight, but as far as Cassie is concerned, the same ideas shape her own country's practices and attitudes. Not only is the balance of risk and reward deeply unfair, but the incentive to fight presented by Mort is fundamentally paradoxical. For Mort, signing up is likely to be compulsory but also desirable, both to protect the United States and to combat the white supremacy of the Nazis. But in Cassie's view, the obligation to fight is an entirely coercive one, with no scope for free choice and no meaningful incentives on offer.

In World War I, [Cassie's] uncles paid with their lives and their family received nothing in return; in the run-up to this new war, her friend Clarence has become a soldier and yet cannot access emergency medical treatment. The system of exchange, of rights and responsibilities, between the United States government and its black citizens is rigged and broken.

In economic terms, Cassie is engaging in a cost-benefit analysis that clearly exposes Mort's more idealistic and perhaps more journalistic ideas about the war. Moreover, Cassie is arguing like the lawyer she hopes to become, making the best use of the information and experience she has. In World War I, her uncles paid with their lives and their family received nothing in return; in the run-up to this new war, her friend Clarence has become a soldier and yet cannot access emergency medical treatment. The system of exchange, of rights and responsibilities, between the United States government and its black citizens is rigged and broken. How can her brothers be expected to sign up for the same deal?

"Not your war": Bullet and Tamer in *The Runner*

Like Taylor's Logan novels, Cynthia Voigt's novel *The Runner* is part of a family series, acting as a prequel to the Tillerman stories. Readers of the other novels already know that *The Runner*'s main character, Bullet, dies while fighting in Vietnam. This novel deals with Bullet's final year at school before he drops out and joins the army. Many of the conversations that take place between characters in *The Runner* relate to the Vietnam War, as classmates express their anxieties about the draft and question the point of the war; the other main strand of discussion comes from the recent desegregation of Bullet's school. For example, Bullet's friend Tommy refers to this latter conflict as "the real war" (p. 187). Bullet himself is a white character who is racist, individualistic, and dismissive of the tendency of his peers to blame circumstances for their misfortune. He is also a gifted athlete.

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Athletics are one of the few activities at the school that have been formally desegregated, and it is in this context that Bullet gets to know his running partner Tamer Shipp, a black character who has been active in trying to break down some of the existing racial barriers at the school. Toward the end of the novel, Bullet makes a deal with Tamer (pp. 211–213). The exchange proposed by Bullet is that he will run in the relay race for an important competition if Tamer promises to keep out of the Vietnam War. On the face of it, this seems like a good deal, but there is something troubling about the way Bullet gives his orders. He tells Tamer, "Have another kid. Stay in school. Be a teacher. Get religion, whatever it takes. That one's not your war" (p. 212). The exchange sets up a false equivalency, whereby running as part of a team is seen as a concession that is equal to Tamer making significant life decisions in order to avoid the draft. Bullet's obligation to run is a bond that will last only a few hours, while Tamer's side of the deal, in effect Tamer's debt to Bullet, is long-term and ongoing. So Bullet "pays" with a few hours of his life to exert control over the rest of Tamer's. For a character so preoccupied with choice and its costs (earlier when talking to Tommy, Bullet reflects that his classmates "didn't like what the choices cost them" [p. 187]), he apparently has no qualms about making demands on Tamer. Admittedly, this is a somewhat unforgiving reading; we could conversely read Bullet's request as advice, as a gift to a friend rather than a debt to be paid. We learn in a later book in the series, *Come a Stranger* (1986), that Tamer has done what Bullet told him and has even named one of his children after him.

Then there is the question of ownership of the war. When Bullet says, "That one's not your war," Tamer asks if he has a patent on it, explicitly drawing the reader's attention to the multiple meanings of the words "your war," making this scene reminiscent of Cassie's conversation with Mort in *The Road to Memphis*. While Bullet intends the phrase to mean "priority" or "preoccupation" or "obligation" (in other words, "your problem, not mine"), Tamer's remark repositions it in terms of exclusive ownership.

The phrase "that one" clearly marks out multiple battlefields, and this is a recurring theme throughout the novel, as conflicts mentioned include the American Civil War, World War II, and even the Roman occupation of Britain. As in *Memphis*, parallels are made between Nazism and American white supremacy (Greenwell [2017] also notes similar allusions in *Call Me Charley* [p. 109]). When he finds out his employer Patrice is of mixed heritage, Bullet is confronted with the logical consequences of his feelings about black people. Patrice says, "When the Germans came, then my blood mattered . . . . And to be sent to a camp—I could not have withstood that, I think. Had I thought about it, about you, I would not have thought you felt like that" (p. 147). Bullet's history with Patrice—their shared workspace, joint labor, and meals together—signifies a choice made not from having access to perfect information, as economic choices are typically characterized, but rather a choice made through repeated actions and exchanges. The revelation of Patrice's Caribbean ancestry cannot undo what has already been done: "He knew Patrice, he'd worked

with him, eaten with him, he respected him" (p. 146). These past choices, Bullet realizes, can be repeated in the future through his partnership with Tamer.

In addition to these historical touchstones is Tamer's reference to the legacy of American slavery in his conversation with Bullet, raising questions of unresolved conflicts and unpaid debts stretching back through time and continuing to influence the present. But Bullet's phrasing, "your war", immediately focuses attention on an either/or conceptualization of conflict in this instance, referring to Vietnam on the one hand and the ongoing fight against racism on the other hand. By implication, then, the Vietnam War belongs to Bullet, while struggles for racial equality at home belong to Tamer. Bullet seems to abdicate any responsibility for the domestic future of the United States, shrugging off the burden of ownership of that war. In much the same way, Bullet has the opportunity to stay at home and avoid the draft by working on his family farm but finds that taking ownership of his family's property represents a debt to his father that he refuses.

When Bullet starts to present his deal, Tamer says, "You don't make deals" (p. 212). Even engaging in the exchange in the first place is out of character for Bullet and is presented as a one-off event. Bullet's agreement to join the race is costly, but the consequences of not making the deal seem almost trivial as far as Bullet's role is concerned. What would it matter if he didn't run in the race at all? This is the kind of speculative question that Voigt explicitly sets up throughout the novel as a whole, which, like Taylor's novel, is punctuated with questions and conditionals that elude easy answers. In this case, it seems that what Tamer gains from the deal might be more significant than it first appears. For Bullet to join a desegregated relay race represents a rare concession of his responsibility to other people and ultimately his responsibility to his country and society as a whole. It is this kind of concession that Cassie seeks, too, though she finds few are prepared to offer it.

Conclusion and Implications for Practice

In the analysis above, I have focused on the symbolic economies created by exchanges between characters, looking at issues such as ownership, cost, and risk. The extracts paired above both focus on the costs of war and racism. A whole-novel comparison could look at other shared topics from the novels using the same approach, topics such as interracial friendship, career choices, and violent/nonviolent resistance. I hope to have shown that economic criticism can be usefully deployed in readings of young adult texts, particularly those that explore multiple inequalities, both of economics and "ache-o-nomics," in the words of Virginia Hamilton's integration school story, *A White Romance* (1987, p. 14).

The readings offered here reveal ideological tensions around the idea of agency. While both writers value freedom of choice, the choices, opportunities, and obligations discussed by characters in *Memphis* and *The Runner* are embedded in the context of conflicts both at home and abroad. Agency, then, is not here shown as the straightforward acting out of preferences assumed by traditional economics. Rather, Taylor and Voigt depict choice and action as collaborative endeavors subject to the scrutiny and intervention of others, situated in time and space. Yet while Bullet, who is defeatist, prejudiced, and isolated, reflects that "you didn't choose the time you were born in" (p. 197), Cassie maintains instead her family's sense of agency and urgency, their ethic of interconnectedness, and their hope for the future: "We prayed for the days ahead. We prayed for all those we loved" (p. 283). As a philosophical question that is fundamental to many disciplines, students may be prompted to consider their own ideas about choices, what they cost, and how freely they are made.

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More recently published texts, even those retreading the same historical contexts as Taylor and Voigt, may well be more familiar and accessible for students. They also arise from different contexts: Taylor and Voigt are writing during the dawn of our current neoliberal era, looking back to *de jure* segregation that preceded a persistent *de facto* segregation. Now, 30 years later, racial inequality in access to

essential services and resources continues, as does the growth in economic inequality kick-started by Reaganomics; see, for example, Naomi Lesley's *Fictions of Integration* (2017) on unequal schooling and how this has been represented in young adult fiction. In this final section, I consider examples of contemporary American novels from different genres that reflect this troubling trend by revisiting historical segregation and/or focusing on social and economic exclusion; I will also briefly outline some economic themes that could complement classroom discussions.

The Hunger Games, Suzanne Collins (2008), Dystopia

The Hunger Games was published at the start of the current financial crisis, a global crisis that has led to increased uncertainty, inequality, and political destabilization, issues also covered in depth in the novel and its sequels. These texts may be particularly useful for students thinking about different ways of organizing society and the economy: command economies, capitalism, socialism, globalization, and so on.

As a philosophical question that is fundamental to many disciplines, students may be prompted to consider their own ideas about choices, what they cost, and how freely they are made.

Collins emphasizes both the power of individuals to bring about change and limits to their agency. The language of cost and choice is prominent throughout the series and applies to interpersonal relationships as much as wider socioeconomic concerns (see Flynn & Hardstaff, 2017). Students could consider the opportunity costs weighed by Katniss and other characters as they think through different possible actions and outcomes.

Brown Girl Dreaming, Jacqueline Woodson (2014), Memoir in Verse

The opening poem of Woodson's autobiographical verse novel, *Brown Girl Dreaming*, traces a family history from slavery to the Civil Rights era, concluding, "The stories of South Carolina already run like rivers through my veins" (p. 2). Krystal Howard (2017) has noted Woodson's emulation of Langston Hughes here in using "the metaphor of the river and its connection to the body" (p. 335). The most prominent economic metaphor of *Brown Girl Dreaming* is that of circulation; Woodson focuses on the movement of stories, people, rivers, and blood. She touches on lineage and movements in history, culture, and nature; the marching of soldiers and protesters; and movement through time and space.

At the core of Woodson's memoir is the act of remembering, which is represented as a type of collaborative labor dependent on "other people's bad memory" (Woodson, p. 18). The idea of witnessing and remembering as acts that require work speak to "the cultural labor performed by the confessional mode" (Howard, p. 338). Students could consider the different types of work both represented and realized by Woodson's memoir.

Lies We Tell Ourselves, Robin Talley (2014), Historical Realism

Talley's novel is set in 1959 and tells the story of one black girl and one white girl attending a newly integrated school. In economics, agents are assumed to have perfect information on which to base their choices, an assumption clearly brought into question by this novel, which is based around a series of lies. Sources of false information include the lies the child characters tell themselves and each other, the lies told by both black and white adults, and the dramatic irony created by having two narrators. Journalism adds another layer of distortion; as with *The Hunger Games*, choices are made under conditions of media scrutiny. Potential questions for students might include: What is the effect of the characters' conflicting beliefs? Are their beliefs the same by the end of the novel? What do you make of the interaction between "true" and "false" information in the fight to end school segregation?

Furthermore, Tahereh Mafi (2016), Fantasy

This middle-grade novel is set in a world where magic acts as raw material, finished product, and currency alike. Alkestrand and Owen (in press) write of the protagonist Alice:

> Alice is unwilling to use her own magic and unable to access extra magic outside of her abilities because her family has very little money . . . . In a society that gives the most social value to those who can use the most magic, Alice is perceived as without any social value at all.

Alice's dreams of "one day, someday" relate not only to completing her quest but also to gaining additional purchasing power (p. 63), in contrast to Taylor and Woodson's emphasis on "one day, someday" as the dawning of a more just society. Students could compare ideas of value in *Furthermore* and other texts, as well as consider different types of currency used in fantasy worlds.

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Sarah Hardstaff *is a PhD candidate at the University of Cambridge under the supervision of Maria Nikolajeva. Her current research focuses on the novels of Mildred Taylor and Cynthia Voigt, applying ideas from economic criticism and functional linguistics. This work is fully funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council UK.*

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Corinna Barrett **Percy**

A Hair Closer to Freedom:

Retellings of Rapunzel as Self-Rescuer

Over the last several decades, fairy tale retellings for children and young adults have become increasingly popular. These recent retellings often focus on the female heroine and her strength and have become an influential means for understanding different forms of femininity and the performance of expected gender roles. In this article, I look at the Grimms' (1812) fairy tale "Rapunzel" and three young adult retellings to examine how the character of Rapunzel evolves from an adolescent in need of rescue to a woman who is her own rescuer.

The three tales under analysis here are the Disney film *Tangled* (Conli, 2010), the graphic novel *Rapunzel's Revenge* (2008) by Shannon and Dean Hale, and the young adult novel *Towering* (2013) by Alex Flinn. I have chosen these three out of the myriad of "Rapunzel" retellings for several reasons: 1) they are all fairly recent, having been created in the last 10 years; 2) they represent a range of media, allowing us to view how "Rapunzel" has been represented in film, graphic novel, and novel form; and 3) all of these tales differ from the original Grimms' fairy tale in that they imbue Rapunzel's hair with special qualities. These qualities will receive special attention here as we examine the ways in which Rapunzel's hair helps shape her identity, autonomy, and performance of femininity.

In the Grimms' traditional tale, Rapunzel's hair serves as a symbol of oppression and is something she cannot control; her hair merely serves as a tool used first by the fairy and then by the prince to climb up the tower. In contrast, the three retellings of "Rapunzel" featured in this article all give Rapunzel's hair a special quality other than its beauty, a quality that not only aids her in becoming a self-rescuer, but also gives her the agency to fully participate in and embrace her coming of age.

Female empowerment is closely linked to the coming-of-age process experienced by Rapunzel, as each tale begins with Rapunzel as a young girl and ends with her development into a woman. Thus, it makes sense to view these tales through the lens of Lincoln's coming-of-age theory, which he outlines in his anthropological study, *Emerging from the Chrysalis* (1981). He includes three stages in a female's rite of passage: confinement, metamorphosis, and reemergence. The Rapunzels in these retellings experience similar stages, as each Rapunzel is confined in a tower, undergoes metamorphosis as she encounters dangers and adventures, and ultimately reemerges as a self-aware young woman. These retellings of the Rapunzel story, unlike the Grimms' version, imbue the main character with agency, manifested in her hair, that allows her to successfully navigate the coming-of-age process through which she learns to make her own decisions about performing expected gender roles and establishes her own identity.

The Stages of Coming of Age

Lincoln studied and described women's initiation rites among four different people groups—the Tiyyar from the southwestern tip of India, the Navajo from the southwestern United States, the Tiv from West Africa, and the Tukuna from the northwest Amazon. Though

the initiation rites among women in these four groups vary greatly in practice and symbolism, they share similar stages of confinement, metamorphosis, and reemergence. Young girls on the verge of puberty and womanhood are often confined or secluded from the rest of their community, whether for several days (the Tiyyar) or several months (the Tukuna). This seclusion is seen as a cleansing process that girls must undergo to transition from girlhood to womanhood.

After seclusion, the girls go through a process of metamorphosis. For example, Tiyyar girls are bathed, dressed, and ornamented by other women; Navajo girls run long distances and grind corn daily; Tiv girls are taken to get skin markings; and Tukuna girls are painted with black genipa dye from head to toe and adorned in ceremonial regalia. They are, in essence, physically changed to demonstrate that they have left girlhood behind.

After these rites or ceremonies are performed, the girls reemerge into their community, no longer seen as children but as women ready for marriage, childbearing, and motherhood. As Lincoln stated, "Initiation [is] the rite in which an immature individual is perfected and brought to adulthood" (p 15). These coming of age stages are helpful in studying works like "Rapunzel" and its retellings because they, too, are stories about transitions, moving from girlhood to womanhood, or from ignorance to knowledge.

The Grimms' Traditional Tale of "Rapunzel"

The Grimms' version of the Rapunzel tale is found in the Aarne-Thompson Index under type 310: "Maiden in the Tower." The categorization itself highlights that Rapunzel's defining characteristic is that she is confined, with no agency to save herself (Getty, 1997, p. 37). In the Grimms' (1812)[1] version of "Rapunzel", Rapunzel's mother craves the rapunzel leaf while she is pregnant. Her husband, not wanting her to suffer, steals the rapunzel from a garden. However, the owner of the garden, described as a fairy, does not appreciate the thievery. When she hears why the man has taken the rapunzel, she allows him to continue to do so with one condition: he must give her the child his wife bears.

Although Rapunzel's hair plays a functional role in the Grimms' versions (it provides the means for the fairy and then the prince to enter the tower), her hair is only described in a brief section and has no extraordinary qualities besides its length and beauty:

> When the fairy wanted to enter, she stood below and called out: "Rapunzel, Rapunzel! Let down your hair to me." Rapunzel had splendid hair, as fine as spun gold. When the fairy called out, she untied it, wound it around a window hook, let it fall twenty yards to the ground, and the fairy climbed up it. (Grimm & Grimm, 1812, para. 21–23)

No mention is made of how Rapunzel's hair came to be so long or whether it has any special powers, although many retellings of "Rapunzel" focus heavily on these aspects. In the Grimms' tale, all we learn is that her hair is as fine as spun gold and that it is beautiful, suggesting that a woman has no power or agency of her own except her beauty—and even that beauty is a tool to be manipulated by others.

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In the *Dictionary of Symbols* (1996), Chevalier and Gheerbrant explain that "hair is one of woman's main weapons and therefore the fact of its being concealed or displayed, plaited or hanging loose, is often the sign of a woman's availability, surrender, or modesty" (p. 462). Yet, despite the fact that the dictionary references hair as a woman's weapon, it is a weapon used only in terms of the male gaze. She is available to a man, she surrenders to a man, or she is modest because she has not been with a man. A woman's hair, or more broadly her beauty, may be considered a kind of weapon that she is sometimes able to wield herself, but it is more often used by others to manipulate or control her. This is an apt picture of Rapunzel's hair in the Grimms' tale—powerless except for the power it gives others over her.

Just as Rapunzel's hair is a weapon that she cannot fully utilize for herself, Rapunzel's sexuality and ability to bear children (traditional markers of coming

of age) are outside her control and understanding. After the prince visits her, Rapunzel asks the fairy, "Frau Gothel, tell me why it is that my clothes are too tight. They no longer fit me" (Grimm & Grimm, 1812, para. 35). Though she has participated in a sexual relationship, she is unaware of the possible outcomes of it and does not know that she is pregnant. Although she becomes a mother, historically an indicator of womanhood, she is still really a child without the knowledge and agency to fully embrace womanhood. In Lincoln's study, girls are confined, then go through a process of change to then be ready for marriage and motherhood—that is, they move beyond confinement to transition into maturity and accept womanhood for themselves. Rapunzel, in the Grimms' original tale, never moves beyond confinement and is therefore unable to transition into maturity, despite becoming a mother.

In contrast, in the three retellings of "Rapunzel" discussed here, the main characters successfully navigate the coming-of-age process, assisted by unique characteristics and qualities given to their hair. Their hair becomes a weapon and tool they wield themselves rather than a tool used against them by others. They are able to move beyond confinement in a way that the Rapunzel in the traditional tale never can. In the retellings, Rapunzel's hair becomes both a symbol and means of her own agency, allowing her coming-of-age process to unfold.

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Magic within and without: Rapunzel in the Disney Film *Tangled*

I will first discuss Disney's film *Tangled*, as it is perhaps the most well-known retelling of "Rapunzel" out of the three and at first appears the most similar to the Grimms' tale. Perhaps a film is not a piece of literature in the strictest sense, but it is nevertheless a text that can be viewed (or "read") and then analyzed in much the same way as traditional written literature. Though Disney films are often directed at children, they appeal to people of all ages, including young adults. Additionally, Rapunzel in *Tangled* is a young adult who embarks on a journey of self-discovery and empowerment that teen girls today can identify with.

In *Tangled*, Rapunzel's hair is the reason she is locked away in the tower, as Mother Gothel (the fairy figure in the film) craves its magical properties. She tells Rapunzel that she is her mother and that she is keeping Rapunzel safe from the cruel, selfish outside world. But despite her pretense at caring for Rapunzel's safety, "Rapunzel's value to Gothel . . . is her hair, not what she does or who she is. What she possesses signals her worth as another's desired possession" (Lester, Sudia, & Sudia, 2013, pp. 86–87). Ironically, however, the same magical properties that first cause Rapunzel to be subjugated and locked in the tower are also what ultimately give her agency and power over her own life.

At the beginning of the film, Rapunzel acknowledges her confinement and longs to explore the outside world; however, she also desires to be loyal to her "mother," truly believing that Mother Gothel has confined her for her own protection. But eventually the desire to explore overpowers her affection for Mother Gothel, leading her to the second stage in the coming-of-age model, metamorphosis. Metamorphosis can be equated with self-discovery, as it is a time of change and acknowledgement of identity. Although Rapunzel's metamorphosis begins in the tower, it can only be completed outside the tower walls, where she will be able to learn who she is—both her true identity as the lost princess and her inner identity as an empowered woman.

While Rapunzel's confinement and the fairy's use of her hair to climb the tower mirror the Grimms' version, *Tangled* begins to differentiate sharply from the Grimms' tale when the male protagonist comes onto the scene. In the Grimms' version, the prince calls to Rapunzel to let down her hair. She obeys the command, and he uses her hair as a tool to climb the tower. When the prince enters the tower, "Rapunzel was frightened, but soon she came to like the young

king so well that she arranged for him to come every day and be pulled up. Thus they lived in joy and pleasure for a long time" (Grimm & Grimm, para. 24).

Counter to the traditional tale, Flynn Rider (the prince figure in *Tangled*) does not use Rapunzel's hair as means to enter the tower, nor does he climb the tower in pursuit of a princess. In an act of desperation to escape the palace guards (he has stolen a valuable crown), Flynn climbs the tower by niching arrows into the cracks in the stone wall. When he reaches the top, Rapunzel attacks him with a frying pan, renders him unconscious, and then uses her hair to drag him across the room and tie him to a chair. Her hair becomes her strength and protection, a weapon used to subdue an intruder rather than help him enter. Instead of welcoming a strange man, she defends herself, first with one "feminine" tool (the frying pan) and then with another (her hair).

Flynn and Rapunzel strike a bargain, and she leaves the tower with him. But her first foray into the world is marked by distrust: she is wary of Flynn and his intentions, but she's also distrustful of herself as she vacillates between guilt for leaving Mother Gothel and joy in leaving the tower behind, between fear of the outside world and delight in its beauty. According to Kapurch (2015), "These awkward and hysterical expressions reveal the extent of Rapunzel's oppression in the isolated tower with a mother who denies her true identity" (p. 445). But while she is initially conflicted, Rapunzel eventually begins to embrace her own decision-making ability outside the tower, mirroring the transition from childhood to adolescence typical in Western society.

As children move into their teenage years, they become less reliant on their parents (or adult figures) and make more of their own decisions; by the time teenagers move into adulthood, they should ideally be self-reliant and responsible, making all of their own decisions. Rapunzel's decision to leave the tower is her first step toward adulthood, and she is able to make more of her own choices as she continues on her journey. Lester, Sudia, and Sudia (2013) noted:

> Rapunzel is clear-headed and head-strong even if she has not experienced life beyond the high walls of the tower prison. Once introduced to the possibilities of a whole new world beneath and beyond her seclusion in the tower, she makes choices and takes risks to discover her new world on her own terms. These moments reveal feminist potential as she does not define herself through the lens of her hair but rather uses her hair to experience life as she comes to know it. (p. 87)

Unlike the Grimms' tale, in which Rapunzel's hair serves only one purpose (to hoist visitors up the tower), Rapunzel in *Tangled* experiments with the many uses of her hair. Having used it as a tool to subdue a stranger, she now uses it to experience the outside world—like swinging from trees, among various other experiments. She continues to learn how to use her hair on her own terms and for her own entertainment, exercise, and delight.

Throughout her exploits outside the tower walls, Rapunzel illustrates that there is no one way to perform femininity; she cries, she is brave and daring, she fights when she needs to, but she also mothers, coddles, and heals.

Rapunzel learns that she has other tools and abilities at her disposal as well—intelligence, resourcefulness, and the art of persuasion, all of which she must use to rescue Flynn from a series of sticky situations. Despite being worldly wise, Flynn is the character in constant need of rescuing, and Rapunzel comes to his rescue, sometimes using her hair and sometimes using her brain as she talks her way out of treacherous situations. Again and again, the princess, not the prince, comes to the rescue.

The dangers Rapunzel and Flynn encounter serve not only to reverse expected gender roles, but also to further Rapunzel's coming-of-age process. Lincoln pointed out that some female rites of passage center on a cosmic journey, which liberates the initiate from the limitations of existence. He explained that a similar phenomenon to a cosmic journey

> . . . can be observed in the travels of students within our own culture after graduation from high school or college. The goal is not so much "to see the world," however much that is the stated intent, as it is to shatter confining restrictions, to win and exercise freedom *in general*, spatial freedom being merely the way in which this broader freedom is most easily demonstrated. If such travels involve some danger (as, for instance, travel by hitchhiking), so much the better, for the mastery of such dangers demonstrates the ability to deal with the dimensions of existence unlocked by the exercise of freedom. (pp. 96–97)

Rapunzel's leaving the tower gives her the spatial freedom that allows her to grapple with just enough danger to come into independence, demonstrating her continued metamorphosis as she moves from adolescence to adulthood. Throughout her exploits outside the tower walls, Rapunzel illustrates that there is no one way to perform femininity; she cries, she is brave and daring, she fights when she needs to, but she also mothers, coddles, and heals. In short, rather than adhering strictly to societal constructs, her behavior is fluid and ever-changing as she encounters different situations.

In *Tangled*, both Rapunzel and Flynn have a specific part to play in her "rite of passage." Their relationship rests on equal ground; she has saved him several times before, and now Flynn saves Rapunzel. It is not that one is stronger than the other, but they use what they have within their power (hair, cutting hair) to protect one another.

Although Rapunzel uses her hair as weapon, means of escape, and healing agent in *Tangled*, it ultimately remains the initial reason for her captivity. When Rapunzel discovers that her relationship with Mother Gothel is a lie, she confronts her: "You were wrong about the world. And you were wrong about me. And I will never let you use my hair again!" (Conli, 2010). But Mother Gothel has the upper hand, for she has Flynn, and he is injured. Rapunzel has been making decisions of increasing significance throughout the film, and now she is faced with the ultimate decision: fight to escape from Mother Gothel or stay behind and save Flynn with the magic from her hair. But before she can make a choice, Flynn makes the decision for her—he chops off her hair, simultaneously cutting off her power to heal him and the object of Mother Gothel's greed.

At first glance, the cutting of Rapunzel's hair is problematic, as it is an act done to her by another person, rather than her own volition. Indeed, in the Grimms' version of the tale, the fairy cuts off Rapunzel's hair as punishment for seeing the prince and to prevent her from hauling the prince up the tower. But the two incidents are distinctly different. The fairy's reaction is one of anger and selfishness, whereas Flynn's action is one of affection and self-sacrifice. And while Rapunzel does not make the decision to cut her hair, it may still be an essential step in her coming-of-age process. Lincoln noted that in some female rites of passage, "It is not a case of *either* men *or* women being in charge of the ceremony, but both sexes having responsibility for specific parts of the rite" (pp. 92). In *Tangled*, both Rapunzel and Flynn have a specific part to play in her "rite of passage." Their relationship rests on equal ground; she has saved him several times before, and now Flynn saves Rapunzel. It is not that one is stronger than the other, but they use what they have within their power (hair, cutting hair) to protect one another.

As Rapunzel weeps over Flynn, his wound now dire, she realizes that her tears contain the same healing power as her hair. Thus, we learn that Rapunzel's healing gift comes *not* from her hair but from herself, the ultimate reversal of Chevalier and Gheerbrant's (1996) observation that women's hair is their strength. With or without her hair, Rapunzel's strength comes from within. With the cutting of her hair, Rapunzel's coming-of-age is complete, for she is able to reemerge from the tower and enter into a connection with her true family. Her reemergence as an adult is not based on her readiness to bear children, but instead on her knowledge of her true self and true identity. She has discovered her inner strength, now no longer burdened by her hair.

A "Lasso-Toting" Heroine: Rapunzel in *Rapunzel's Revenge*

Another retelling that transforms Rapunzel's hair from an object used to manipulate her to her own tool and weapon is *Rapunzel's Revenge,* a graphic novel set in the Old American West. I analyze this text because, much like in *Tangled*, the Rapunzel character encounters dangers and adventures in her journey of self-discovery while using her hair as a tool to navigate her situations. In addition, this retelling portrays Rapunzel's hair in a way that imbues Rapunzel with agency, strength, and, in this case, a fiery personality: her hair is red. Even the title of this work (*Rapunzel's Revenge*) suggests that this version does *not* tell the story of a passive woman.

At the beginning of the novel, the Hales' Rapunzel lives in a fancy house surrounded by high walls. She, like *Tangled*'s Rapunzel, believes Mother Gothel to be her real mother, but Mother Gothel is a supervillain akin to a cattle baron. The magic Mother Gothel possesses in this version is the power to transform land into either fertile gardens or sterile wastelands. Through this power, she controls her "kingdom" and subjects who rely on her vegetation for survival.

Early in the story, Rapunzel learns the truth about her identity and rebels. In response, Mother Gothel punishes Rapunzel by growing "a creepy tree, with a hollowed-out room high up, perfect for imprisoning a trouble maker" (p. 24). Mother Gothel visits Rapunzel occasionally and provides her food via her magic. It is this vegetative magic that makes Rapunzel's hair grow so long. Here, as in *Tangled,* readers are given an explanation for Rapunzel's long hair, unlike in the Grimms' tales. It is also interesting to note that here Mother Gothel is the source of magic, unlike *Tangled*, in which the source of magic is Rapunzel.

Rapunzel's life with Mother Gothel and her entrapment in the tree comprise the confinement stage in her coming-of-age process. Although her metamorphosis begins when she first learns the truth about her identity and rebels, she remains in captivity for several years. Eventually, Rapunzel grows bored and fantasizes about how to escape (p. 29). She puts her hair into two braids and explains, "To keep from going batty, I made use of my dratted hair" (p. 30). The panels accompanying these words include her using her hair as a jump rope, a swing, a whip to kill spiders, and a lasso. Just as in *Tangled,* Rapunzel uses her hair to her advantage, not as a form of oppression. She never lifts Mother Gothel up to her prison with her hair, instead ultimately using it to escape by lassoing a neighboring tree and swinging to freedom. Later, she even uses her hair to wrangle a wild boar, tame it, and ride it through the forest.

Not once does Rapunzel state that she is waiting for someone to come save her, nor does she dream of a "prince." In fact, it is a prince-type character who shoots her new pet boar, hindering her travel through the woods. He is portrayed as egotistical, claiming he is an "adventuring hero" (p. 40). He interrupts Rapunzel when she tries to speak and tells her:

> I was getting so bored watching the workers farm my fields all day. So I left behind the civilized comforts of Husker City, following tales of a beautiful maiden trapped in a high tower. . . . I can't actually rescue her, of course. The word is she's Mother Gothel's pet and I won't risk crossing the old lady. But I can tell her I'm going to rescue her. She's bound to be too naïve to know the difference, and it'll be such fun in the meantime! (pp. 40–41)

Disgusted with him, Rapunzel points him to the tall tree and tells him that the maiden is slightly deaf, so he'll just have to yell as loud as he can for a while. Thus, the first man Rapunzel meets proves to be an annoyance and hindrance, not a help, and someone to be ridiculed rather than relied upon. She disproves his thought that she is naïve by deftly outwitting him. She continues her metamorphosis into adulthood not by signaling to the first man she meets that she is available for marriage and childbearing but by using her brain and making her own decisions.

In *Rapunzel's Revenge*, Rapunzel is the epitome of cunning and high spirits, and throughout her actions of cunning, her hair is her tool, her weapon, and her strength.

Additionally, this Rapunzel's hair is not blonde, as is often depicted (due to the Grimms' description of it being as fine as spun gold), but red. Redheads are often portrayed as impassioned people, as their blazing hair is often meant to represent their fiery personalities. In *Rapunzel's Revenge,* Rapunzel has just such a personality. Through the course of the graphic novel, she becomes a "lasso-toting, justice-seeking" young woman who helps people who are oppressed by Mother Gothel, and her long braids lend themselves well to her active lifestyle (Printz, 2010, p. 20). Her braids are not used to lift people up to her tower, but rather as a tool for herself in her many adventures. Throughout the graphic novel, Rapunzel uses her hair as a whip, lasso, and rope as she fights off villains, escapes from Mother Gothel's minions, saves a town from a rabid wolf pack, catches a ferocious lake creature for food, and aids her real mother in escaping from the mines. She does much of this with her sidekick and later love interest, Jack, who sometimes helps her but who most often needs saving himself.

Rapunzel's escape from the tree and many risky adventures in the graphic novel coincide with Lin-

coln's statement of coming of age: she gains spatial freedom and learns to master the dangers she encounters as she navigates the stage of metamorphosis and moves from adolescence to adulthood. Walter Benjamin (2006) stated, "The wisest thing—so the fairy tale taught mankind in olden times, and teaches children to this day—is to meet the forces of the mystical world with cunning and high spirits" (p. 375). In *Rapunzel's Revenge,* Rapunzel is the epitome of cunning and high spirits, and throughout her actions of cunning, her hair is her tool, her weapon, and her strength.

Clothing in *Rapunzel's Revenge* also plays a large part in her character and her performance of expected gender roles. When she is trapped in the tower, she wears the same dress for four years, which literally deteriorates into rags. As the story progresses, her clothing is not focused on beauty but rather practicality. She starts in the worn-out dress and moves to a white shift over green long johns provided by Jack. When she first puts them on, Jack exclaims, "AAAH! You're in under clothes!" (p. 49). But Rapunzel is not concerned much with how she looks but rather with how her clothing affects her movement. She would have preferred trousers for riding, but as she can only find the long johns, she makes do. She is not a damsel in distress; thus, the story does not linger on her beauty but focuses on her actions.

Towering (2013) at first seems to have a traditional take on gender roles, though it is a modern retelling of "Rapunzel" (with cell phones and the Internet).

Later, Jack gives her a cowboy outfit, complete with trousers, boots, vest, gloves, hat, and a belt to hang her lassoing braids on. When he hands her the new clothes, he states, "The present's really for me. If I have to see you in that getup another minute I might scratch out my own eyeballs" (p. 80). After changing into the new outfit, Rapunzel emerges and asks, "So what do you think? Are your eyeballs safe?" And Jack can only answer, "Whoa" in surprised approval (p. 80). Jack's reaction to her in the cowboy outfit suggests that what looks most beautiful on Rapunzel is not what Old West society expects her to wear (i.e., frilly dresses), but instead what suits her own tastes and needs. Instead of being mutually exclusive, beauty and practicality go hand-in-hand, as evidenced by Jack's "Whoa" when he sees Rapunzel in her practical cowboy outfit. The cowboy outfit also allows her to move freely during her many adventures, and each adventure is a stepping stone she crosses over on her way to rescue her mother and on her journey of self-discovery.

The last outfit Rapunzel wears *is* an elaborate dress. Though she looks beautiful in it, as noted by the astonished Jack, Rapunzel feels awkward. It is significant to note that she wears the dress as a disguise to get into Mother Gothel's party—once again, usefulness, and not beauty, is the focus. At the end of the novel, when Mother Gothel uses her growth magic to entrap Rapunzel in long vines (after she has chopped off Rapunzel's braids), Rapunzel uses the same scissors to cut off the bottom of her dress and escape said vines. The dress that was once a tool for her entry into the party is now a hindrance, so Rapunzel frees herself from it. The style of her clothes is always subordinate to the utility they provide. Printz (2010) noted that the Rapunzel we see on the cover of the graphic novel is wearing the iconic cowboy outfit "not because it makes her the most beautiful, but because it makes her the most heroic and gives her somewhere to hang her most viable weapon at hand—her long hair" (p. 23).

Rapunzel allows neither her clothing nor her hair to dictate her actions; rather, she uses both as tools to navigate the world on her terms—much like Rapunzel in *Tangled*. Even after Mother Gothel cuts off Rapunzel's hair, divesting her of her main weapon, Rapunzel maintains her bravery and cleverness, highlighting that neither her hair (nor her appearance) defines her; rather, she consistently defines herself. She is able to succeed, despite not possessing any magic as Mother Gothel does, because she uses her intellect and fortitude. Her metamorphosis into a self-aware young woman allows her to reemerge, out of Mother Gothel's grasp, as a strong and intelligent heroine who saves her real mother and claims her true identity.

Quiet Power: Rachel in *Towering*

The final "Rapunzel" retelling I will discuss is *Towering*, a young adult novel by Alex Flinn. This retelling was selected because it illustrates how the fairy tale can be reiterated in a modern setting with a teenage heroine who must take initiative to save herself and

those she loves. I discuss this retelling last because it deviates the most from the original tale, and the heroine undergoes the most dramatic change of the three. *Towering* (2013) at first seems to have a traditional take on gender roles, though it is a modern retelling of "Rapunzel" (with cell phones and the Internet). Rachel, the Rapunzel figure, stays in a tower hidden in the woods next to a lake because the woman she calls Mama (even though she knows she is not her real mother) is trying to protect her. At the beginning of the novel, Rachel is completely cut off from the outside world, technologically and otherwise. She is told that her real mother was murdered and that she must remain hidden if she does not want to meet the same fate. The novel is told in chapters from alternating perspectives, voiced by Rachel and Wyatt, the "prince" figure.[2]

Like Rapunzel in *Tangled*, Rachel's only encounter with the outside world is through Mama. She is completely unfamiliar with modern technology and only knows about relationships based on the books she has read, such as *Little Women* and *Wuthering Heights*. Because most of the books she reads are over a hundred years old, her understanding of identity and femininity is based on traditional patriarchal concepts. She wears a white dress, which suggests her innocence, and flimsy shoes. She is pale and beautiful and at first appears to be timid. She has literally been in the confinement stage all her life, which causes her to be ignorant of the outside world.

Similar to the Rapunzel characters from *Tangled* and *Rapunzel's Revenge*, Rachel's hair possesses a unique quality: it grows at an abnormal rate. Unlike the traditional Rapunzel tale, Mama does not use her hair to reach the tower but instead uses the stairs. Far from benefiting from Rachel's hair, Mama actually keeps Rachel's hair cut above her waist because she fears that the people who murdered Rachel's mother wish to harm Rachel or use her for her hair. Mama is not depicted as an evil character in *Towering*, another reason why *Towering* is the farthest removed from the original tale, and she willingly provides Rachel with the things she asks for. Although Rachel does not view Mama as her captor, the traditional tales and stories she has read lead her to believe that someone will come to set her free. Thus, she waits patiently, day after day, far from hating her life, yet convinced there is more for her than life in the tower.

One day, Rachel's hair begins to grow at an even faster rate than normal. She wonders if, perhaps, it is for a reason, and she begins to take initiative. When her hair is long enough to reach the ground from her window, she cuts it off and braids it into a rope, hiding it under her bed. Her decision to save the rope without Mama's knowledge is the first step she takes into the metamorphosis stage. Previously, she has never disobeyed Mama or gone against her wishes. Her decision to follow her intuition and act for herself launches her on a journey of knowledge and self-awareness.

Meanwhile, Wyatt has been hearing Rachel singing from her tower as he passes through the woods and eventually comes in search of her. When Rachel spies him from her window, her first thought is he has come to free her; however, as she watches him approach, she witnesses him fall through the ice on the lake. Realizing that her rope of hair is the only means to rescue him, she uses it to lower herself to the ground and save Wyatt from the freezing water. This is the first time she has ever left the tower.

Though Rachel initially believes she is the one who needs rescuing, she in fact rescues Wyatt. She moves away from the traditional idea of femininity found in her books and acts in accordance with the situation at hand. Zipes (1986) stated:

> In the fairy tales for younger readers the most noticeable change in the narratives concerns the heroine who actively seeks to define herself, and her self-definition determines the plot. As she moves to complete this task, traditional fairy tale topoi and motifs are transformed to indicate the necessity for gender rearrangement and the use of power for achieving equality. (p. 14)

Within the confines of her tower, Rachel remains passive, but when the plot pushes her into action, she begins to understand her strength. As stated earlier, Lincoln noticed that in female rites of passage, both men and women were often responsible for specific parts of a rite. In Rachel's move away from confinement into the first tentative steps of metamorphosis, not only does she save Wyatt, but he also assists her, helping her climb back into the tower after the rescue. Thus, Rachel and Wyatt begin their relationship on equal ground.

Besides Rachel's magically growing hair, she also possesses tears that heal, establishing early on in the novel that her power goes much deeper than

her hair—quite unlike the traditional Rapunzel tale in which her hair forms the sole basis for her identity. Rachel and Wyatt also discover that they possess some sort of telepathic bond by which they can hear one another's thoughts. Their relationship is not based on the patriarchal standards of Rachel's old novels but instead on how they can help one another. As she begins her journey in her metamorphosis stage, she redefines what she views as femininity based on the needs at hand and acts accordingly.

Rachel begins to view her hair as essential to not only her identity but also her role as a rescuer. Ultimately, her hair allows her to move into the world to attain spatial freedom and realize her role as a rescuing agent, even as she encounters danger in the process.

After rescuing Wyatt, Rachel decides to remain in the tower for safety; both she and Wyatt want to discover who might be hunting her before she emerges for good. They later discover the key to the mystery: two town men, Carl and Henry, grow a psychedelic drug called rhapsody, which quickly addicts its users. They lure teenagers with the drug and then kidnap and imprison them underground as slaves to continuously manufacture the drug. Rachel is the key to a prophecy that will end the drug trade, which is why Carl and Henry are after her.

Rachel remains in the tower until—once again—she discerns that Wyatt is in trouble, this time via their telepathic connection. Her reason for leaving the tower is distinctly different from that seen in *Tangled* and *Rapunzel's Revenge*. While the Rapunzel in *Tangled* leaves out of curiosity and a desire to see the world, the Rapunzel in *Rapunzel's Revenge* leaves out of sheer boredom and later helps people along the way. Both initially leave for their own interests and desires; however, Rachel leaves her captivity out of a self-sacrificial desire to save another.

Discerning that Wyatt is in trouble, she once again frees herself from the tower via her rope of hair. During this time, Rachel's hair begins to grow faster and faster, and she recognizes that her hair grows when she needs it. Just as her hair grows to serve her needs, she becomes more knowledgeable, self-aware, and bold as situations dictate. Though "Mama" is afraid that Rachel's hair is a curse (it is the reason her safety is at risk), Rachel begins to view her hair as essential to not only her identity but also her role as a rescuer. Ultimately, her hair allows her to move into the world to attain spatial freedom and realize her role as a rescuing agent, even as she encounters danger in the process.

Although at the onset of the novel Rachel believed that someone would come to free her, she ends up being the one who frees herself, rescues the imprisoned drug workers, and heals Wyatt once again with her tears. Wyatt's selflessness allows her to fulfill what she sees as her destiny, and together they form an equal partnership. Rachel's journey through the novel—being confined in the tower, venturing out into the world, and reemerging as she learns the truth about her past and identity—allows her to transition from a naïve adolescent to a strong, self-aware young woman. Unlike the Rapunzels in *Tangled* (2010) and *Rapunzel's Revenge* (2008), who are outgoing and quite daring, Rachel remains quiet and shy at the end of the novel, even after her acts of bravery and courage. However, her shyness does not take away from her inner strength or her willingness to act when needed.

Happy Endings: Self-Discovery and Feminine Power

Though each of these retellings concludes with a typical "happy" ending as in the traditional Grimms' tale—Rapunzel and Flynn get married in *Tangled*, Rapunzel and Jack kiss at the end of *Rapunzel's Revenge*, Rachel and Wyatt are dating and attend school together in *Towering*—the stories differ from the traditional tale because the Rapunzel character makes her own decisions and discovers that her identity lies in more than her hair.

In *Tangled*, Rapunzel learns that her healing abilities come not from her hair but from within herself. Even with her hair shorn, she retains the essential elements of who she is: her strength, her agency, and her ability to heal. In *Rapunzel's Revenge*, Rapunzel uses her hair to her advantage, rather than allowing others to dictate her behavior or use her hair as a tool against her. Her fiery red hair, as well as her wardrobe, are tools that are fully in her control and that she can wield as practicality and individual circumstances

dictate. In *Towering*, Rachel's hair at first appears to be a threat, but it ultimately serves her in times of need and empowers her to follow her intuition, take initiative, and become a rescuer.

In each of these three retellings, the unique qualities attributed to Rapunzel's hair help transform her hair into a tool. With the aid of her hair, she learns to navigate the world, overcome obstacles, and transition from childhood to adulthood. Each version of Rapunzel uses her hair to aid her through the stages of coming of age as she moves from a naïve girl in confinement, takes her first steps toward metamorphosis and self-awareness, and finally reemerges as a strong and knowledgeable woman who knows the truth about her past and embraces her newly discovered identity.

Even when her hair is cut off, which occurs in all three retellings, Rapunzel remains smart and independent because her identity, while shaped by her experiences with her hair, is ultimately not dependent on her physical characteristics. These tales suggest that modern retellings of "Rapunzel" for children and young adults frequently resist the concept of the female as a passive character and shift the power back to Rapunzel by redefining her hair and her sense of self. While the Grimms paint Rapunzel as a passive character who is only acted upon, Disney's, the Hales', and Flinn's Rapunzels are all very active. They are strong, adept, and clever. By retooling Rapunzel's hair as an asset instead of a form of oppression, these stories allow Rapunzel to develop and utilize the feminine power within herself. They are not just the "Maiden[s] in the Tower," but young women who escape from the tower by themselves.

Though the *Dictionary of Symbols* (Chevalier & Gheerbrant,1996) stated that the cutting of hair equated "a loss of power" (p. 462), Rapunzel is still Rapunzel whether her hair is 20 yards long or cropped close to her head. Her power is not in her hair, but resides within herself. The themes of self-awareness, cleverness, autonomy, and feminine power found in these retellings of "Rapunzel" are important for teenage girls and educators of teenagers, as they highlight the potential that these traits lay within us all.

Endnotes

1. The Grimms wrote two versions of "Rapunzel" (1812 and 1857). In this article, I reference the 1812 version because it includes Rapunzel's pregnancy, a marker of womanhood that coincides with my analysis using Lincoln's coming-of-age stages; the pregnancy is omitted from the 1857 version.
2. Wyatt has a traumatic past of his own, which he escapes by fleeing to the small upstate New York town, coincidentally near Rachel's "protective" prison.

***Corinna Barrett Percy** is a PhD candidate in English and the Teaching of English at Idaho State University. She is currently working on her dissertation project, which centers on masculinity and patriotism in World War II literature by and about American Indian, Japanese American, and African American soldiers. She has a background in late-nineteenth-century to the present American literature, with a focus on writers of color, ethnicity, gender, and the texts of war. She has taught courses in composition, gender in literature, and ethnicity in literature. She has recently published the article, "Reformers, Racism, and Patriarchy in Maria Amparo Ruiz de Burton's* The Squatter and the Don" *in* The Explicator.

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Bryan **Gillis**

Understanding and Connecting Our Ways of Being in the World:

Promoting Sensitivity and Understanding in Classrooms with Undocumented Latinx Students

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/publications/the-alan-review/the-alan-review-columns/.

"*When those who have the power to name and to socially construct reality choose not to see you or hear you . . . when someone with the authority of a teacher, say, describes the world and you are not in it, there is a moment of psychic disequilibrium, as if you looked in the mirror and saw nothing. It takes some strength of soul—and not just individual strength, but collective understanding—to resist this void, this non-being, into which you are thrust, and to stand up, demanding to be seen and heard.*"

—Adrienne Rich (1996)

Coming to America

Millions of undocumented Latinx[1] people, the majority of whom emigrated from Mexico and Central America, currently live, work, and attend schools in the United States. According to the Pew Research Center, 11.7 million immigrants (28%) living in the United States in 2014 came from Mexico, and almost half entered without documentation (Barrera & Krogstad, 2017). The National Center for Educational Statistics reports that from 2004–2014, the percentage of Latinx students enrolled in public elementary and secondary schools in the United States increased from 19 to 25. It is estimated that by 2026, this number will increase to almost 30% (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2017).

Poor living conditions and desperate circumstances in their home countries, as well as the apparent promise of better pay and a higher standard of living in the United States, motivate many Latinx people to cross the border. For most, entering the country without documentation is perceived as the only viable option. First, such immigrants may not possess the knowledge or resources to pursue legal channels, such as hiring an immigration service or obtaining an immigration visa (not that either of these options guarantees legal entry). Perhaps more significant is the number of US border patrol agents who work on or near the Mexican–US borders compared to the vastness of those borders. These wide open, unpatrolled spaces create the illusion of ease of entry. This hope for a better life causes many Latinx people to hire human smugglers, or coyotes, who promise to get them into the United States safely—for a hefty fee, of course. Coyotes are always on the lookout for new customers, some even advertising that for one fee, their clients will be allowed three attempts. Recently, coyotes in some Central American countries began telling potential customers that the United States would grant them amnesty upon entry (Lovelace, 2014).

Teaching in America

Prior to becoming a university professor, I spent 23 years living and teaching in a school district of 15,000 students in Phoenix, Arizona, that was predominantly (70%) Latinx. My sons attended the schools where I taught, our family often attended classmates' family functions and birthday parties, and we invited my sons' friends into our home. I still keep in touch with a great number of my former middle and high school students, many of whom were, and shockingly still are, classified by the Unites States government and referred to in public circles as illegal immigrants.[2] One example of such a student is chronicled in a short documentary entitled The Life of an Undocumented High-School Senior (https://www.theatlantic.com/video/index/516900/the-life-of-an-undocumented-high-school-senior/). This is the story of Ilse Cruz, a high school senior who was brought to the United States by her mother when she was four years old. The film portrays Ilsa's struggles as she tries to navigate the process of becoming a US citizen.

My family is not Latinx, and therefore I am not qualified to speak on a personal level as to how it feels to be viewed by others as an *illegal*. However, it is clear from what my former students share with me, what I observed for 23 years in that school district, and what I currently witness as a teacher of future teachers that these students often feel isolated and disenfranchised. Many lived and still live in fear that they will be arrested and forced to leave the United States. This was especially true in Arizona, where, for decades before his arrest and conviction, a Maricopa County sheriff named Joe Arpaio practiced calculated acts of racial profiling, sending out patrols whose sole purpose was to target undocumented Latinx people.[3] This fear continues to be felt today, given the Trump administration's September 2017 announcement that the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) policy will be phased out. Established by the Obama administration in June 2012, DACA allowed many young people who entered the United States as undocumented, often referred to as Dreamers, to receive a renewable two-year period of deferred action from deportation and to be eligible for a work permit. As of 2017, approximately 800,000 Dreamers were enrolled in the program created by DACA (Glum, 2017).

All of this is important context, but this is not an article about politics, despite the fact that education is undeniably political. Common Core Standards, mandatory state testing, teacher evaluations, school funding, and yes, undocumented immigration are issues that have been initiated, are magnified, and/or are controlled in some way through political processes. The purpose of this article is to promote sensitivity and understanding in classrooms with Latinx students, specifically classrooms that are nurturing undocumented students. All educators share a responsibility to create school social environments and provide educational curricula that serve to treat all students fairly and equitably regardless of race, social class, socioeconomic circumstances, gender, sexuality, religion, belief, disability, or any other characteristic of background or group membership. We have no control over when or how students come to our classrooms, but we do have an obligation to make our classrooms safe and productive.

All educators share a responsibility to create school social environments and provide educational curricula that serve to treat all students fairly and equitably regardless of race, social class, socioeconomic circumstances, gender, sexuality, religion, belief, disability, or any other characteristic of background or group membership.

Disconnected School and Home Communities

Creating a safe, nurturing environment for every student can be a daunting task, especially when we consider the chasm that often exists between the funds of knowledge of the employees of school communities and those of the inhabitants of the school's surrounding home communities. School communities tend to be relatively homogenous groups—predominately white and female—which creates an ethnic gap between teachers and many of the students they serve (Hogg, 2011). Teachers in these environments tend to recall and draw on knowledge and experiences of white middle class children much more frequently. Due to these conflicting funds of knowledge, which

do not fit the traditional context of the school system (Irvine, 2003; Rosebery, McIntyre, & Gonzalez, 2001; Velez-Ibanez & Greenberg, 1992), Latinx students are marginalized and held to lower expectations. When a teacher's life experiences do not match those of a student's, or when students' experiences do not match those of other students within a given population, underlying differences or misunderstandings about "our ways of being in the world" (Gee, 1996, p. viii) surface, creating learning and relationship problems. Thus, success for marginalized students often comes at the expense of their cultural identity (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986).

Young adult literature (YAL) that portrays the undocumented Latinx experience is a powerful tool that has the potential to move teachers and students toward a better understanding of each other's ways of being in the world.

These differences are exacerbated when school districts engage in the politicization of education through the inclusion and/or exclusion of specific academic curriculum. As Miller, Beliveau, Rice, Destigter, and Kirkland point out in *Narratives of Social Justice Teaching* (2008), "Teachers teach in pre-assigned classroom spaces, social spaces which are highly politicized (albeit mostly unseen) as competing national and local agendas vie for ownership over curriculum and textbooks" (p. 2). One large-scale example of this occurred in 2012, when acting Arizona Superintendent Tom Horne ordered and was successful in imposing a ban on a Latinx Ethnic Studies Program in the Tucson Unified School District (http://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/08/us/08ethnic.html). Parents, community members, educators, and many others protested the ban, and it wasn't until five years later, in August 2017, that a federal judge overturned the ban, stating that it was motivated by racial discrimination and violated pupils' constitutional rights (Harris, 2017).

Connecting School and Home Communities

As John Dewey observed, an effective school "is realized to the degree in which individuals form a group" (1958, p. 65). An inclusive school–home community connection is established and maintained when cultural awareness, empathy, and understanding for everyone are valued. In order to create this type of community, several key factors must be considered. The administration's leadership style, the school's goals and values, the faculty's teaching and classroom management methods, and the extent of participation of students and parents or guardians in the planning and decision-making processes all contribute to the creation of a school community (Schaps, 2005). Each of these factors has a major impact on students' learning and ethical, social, and emotional development.

The quality of teacher–student relationships is critical. When teachers connect with their students on meaningful levels through understanding, awareness, and sensitivity for feelings and experiences, they become positive role models, thus enhancing students' self-esteem and providing greater contextual and interactional opportunities (Walker, 1987, p. 11). This "dynamic cultural match between teacher and student" has the potential to enhance students' academic and socio-emotional growth (Genzuk, 1999, p.10).

Students' interpersonal relationships—personal connections that allow them to learn more about each other—are equally important. For example, within my school community, a lack of understanding and sensitivity existed not only between Latinx and non-Latinx students, but also within the Latinx community itself, primarily due to differences in family histories. Consider the following combinations of family origin stories: a) Parent/s and student were born in the United States, b) Parent/s and student were born outside the United States, c) Parent/s were born outside the United States and student was born in the United States. My Latinx students were cognizant of these family history differences and typically treated each other with varying degrees of respect based on an individual's origin story. Students who were born in the United States often demonstrated exclusionary behaviors toward undocumented students.

Young Adult Literature as a Means to Promote Understanding

Young adult literature (YAL) that portrays the undocumented Latinx experience is a powerful tool that has the potential to move teachers and students toward a better understanding of each other's ways of be-

ing in the world. The literature that adolescents are exposed to in middle and high school provides them with opportunities to process the complexities of lived experiences that differ from their own in the safety of their own hearts and minds. YAL not only motivates teens to read, it also enhances their comprehension skills and allows for critical text-to-text, text-to-self, and text-to-world connections.

The two novels featured in this column are unique and particularly powerful. The protagonists in both stories are teens who were born and live in Juárez, Mexico. In each story, the teens try to help loved ones leave Mexico in order to gain entry into the United States. *Saint Death* (Sedgewick, 2016) and *Disappeared* (Stork, 2017) are excellent fictional, yet realistic, portrayals of the lives of empathetic characters who seek better lives in the United States.

Saint Death by Marcus Sedgewick (2016) (http://www.marcussedgwick.com)

Arturo lives in a small shack in Anapra (https://www.bing.com/images/search?q=anapra+juarez&qpvt=anapra+juarez&FORM=IGRE.), one of the poorest neighborhoods on the outskirts of Juárez, Mexico (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ciudad_Ju%C3%A1rez). Just outside of Arturo's neighborhood lies a fence, and when he looks through that fence, he can see the United States, *El Norte*. But for Arturo, El Norte seems like an impossible destination when he considers how difficult it is to make an honest living in Juárez. His life consists of working at the auto shop while trying to steer clear of gang members and the cartel, who have claimed Juárez for their own. As the novel begins, readers are immediately thrust into Arturo's world when he witnesses a neighbor being kidnapped from his home by a local gang. Soon after, Arturo's childhood friend, Faustino, whom Arturo hasn't seen in a year, shows up at his shack asking for Arturo's help. Arturo is shocked to learn that Faustino now has a gun and sports a tattoo on his arm that represents his allegiance to a local gang.

Arturo understands the monetary temptation of working for a gang, but he is hesitant to get involved in any plan that involves gangs or the cartel. However, when Faustino tells Arturo that he "borrowed" 1,000 dollars from a gang boss in order to purchase safe passage to the United States for his pregnant girlfriend Eva, Arturo reluctantly agrees. The money must be replaced within 36 hours, or Faustino, and most likely Arturo, are as good as dead. Faustino's plan is to take advantage of Arturo's card-playing skills. Arturo will go to the place in Juárez where the men play Calavera (https://marcussedgwick.me/2016/09/22/calavera/) for money and use his card-counting skills to win the thousand dollars for his friend.

Throughout the story, Arturo and Faustino are observed by Saint Death (Santa Muerte), the holy patron and folk saint to rich and poor, prostitute and cartel boss, criminal and police chief (Woody, 2016). Santa Muerte watches impassively as corruption, the drug trade, human trafficking, and the effects of social class inequalities engulf the people of Juárez. Will Santa Muerte come to Arturo's rescue if he prays hard enough, or should he just rely on good luck? Will she simply watch as Arturo heads toward an unhappy ending, or will she save him?

The adolescent characters are trying to survive in an environment in which most adults in the United States could not.

Saint Death is not a novel for the faint of heart. The story contains strong political and social themes as well as a fair amount of violence. The adolescent characters are trying to survive in an environment in which most adults in the United States could not. The urgency and panic that Sedgewick creates are palpable, largely through his brilliant use of language that feels simultaneously lyrical and harsh. *Saint Death* paints a crystal-clear picture of why so many Latinx people sacrifice so much to cross the border into the United States.

Disappeared by Francisco X. Stork (2017) (http://www.franciscostork.com/index.php)

Sara is a newspaper reporter in her native Juárez, Mexico. After her best friend is abducted by a local gang, Sara begins writing a column that features stories of young girls who have been abducted. One day, she receives an encrypted email in which the sender threatens to kill Sara and her family unless she stops writing about the abductions. Instead, bolstered by the hope that she may find her best friend, Sara decides to begin an investigation into who sent the email.

Sara's brother, Emiliano, is a star soccer player

on his school's team. He is also an entrepreneur who runs his own folk-art business. Emiliano uses his bicycle to transport works created by neighborhood artisans to local shopkeepers to sell. The shopkeepers pay Emiliano a commission on each sale, which he shares with the artisans. His dream is to earn enough money to take his mother and sister to the United States, away from the dangers that surround them in Juárez. Emiliano's determination to achieve this goal is evident, but one distraction has the potential to derail his dreams. Her name is Perla Rubi, and Emiliano has a huge crush on her.

Perla Rubi seems to like Emiliano as well, and to his surprise, she invites him to a party at her ostentatious home. During the party, Perla Rubi's father asks to meet with Emiliano à la the opening scene in *The Godfather* (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fmX2VzsB25s) and offers to help him with his business—an offer that promises to make Emiliano four times the amount of money he is making currently. This is an offer Emiliano can't refuse. It is then that Emiliano learns that Perla Rubi's father is an attorney for the cartel.

Sara's and Emiliano's alternating points of view provide readers with tremendous insight into their motivations. Sara's journey reads like a mystery/thriller with new secrets hiding around every corner. Emiliano's story is a sociological study that focuses on his emotional and moral struggles. *Disappeared*, like *Saint Death*, evolves into a story about sacrifice in the name of helping a loved one. Emiliano helps Sara flee to the United States in order to save her from the cartel that she is trying to expose. Once there, the two are separated, and Sara's story line disappears. Will she find safe haven in America? Will Emiliano survive in the desert, return to Juárez, be captured, or follow Sara? *Disappeared* addresses the themes of poverty, power, political corruption, greed, and love with both realism and sensitivity. Most important, the story immerses readers in Sara and Emiliano's worlds, allowing them to experience the plight of those who cross borders with the hope of a brighter future.

I asked the author, Francisco X. Stork, what inspired him to write *Disappeared*:

> I started with the idea of writing a survival story about a brother and a sister crossing from Mexico into the desert of the American Southwest, but I soon became interested in the characters, in their sadness about leaving the culture they loved and the world they were leaving behind. This was happening around the time when the presidential elections incited and revealed a surprising amount of hostility toward the undocumented Mexican immigrant. I always knew the hostility was there, but the force of it and the extent of it were a shock to me. The falsehoods and partial truths with which Mexicans were being portrayed saddened and angered me and pushed me to write a story that portrayed the complexity of Mexican society in a way that reflected my own experience. The "disappearance" of thousands of women from the streets of Ciudad Juárez is like a microcosm of the love and sadness that I feel for Mexico.
>
> I was born in Mexico. My mother was a single mother. My adoptive father, Charles Stork, married my mother and brought me to El Paso, Texas, when I was nine years old. We lived in Ciudad Juárez for six months while my mother's visa was approved. And then growing up in El Paso, my life always included Ciudad Juárez. At that time, Ciudad Juárez and El Paso were like one big city; people traveled back and forth to shop, to get haircuts, go to the doctor. When I was in high school, many of my Friday nights were spent in the bars of Juárez. I think all of these different elements came together and coalesced inside of me when I was writing *Disappeared*. The story of Sara and Emiliano is personal in the sense that it comes out of emotions that are deeply felt and concerns that are existentially meaningful to me. But the story is not about me. *Disappeared* is the story of Sara, a young journalist who believes the truth matters, and about Emiliano, a young man who discovers a world that is a mixture of good and evil and who must choose to live in this confusing mix in a way that makes sense. (Stork, personal communication, November 26, 2017)

Connection and Understanding through Critical Reflection

"some people,
when they hear
your story,
contract.
others,
upon hearing
your story,
expand.
and
this is how
you
know."

—nayyirah waheed

The social context within classroom settings that discussions of young adult literature create has the potential to engage students in the academic content, thus allowing them to more easily transfer and utilize new academic information (Genzuk, 1999). This

social context also makes them feel more welcomed, affirmed, respected, and valued. The following critical discussion activity is adapted from the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) document, "Social Justice Teacher Education Activities/Assignments" (NCTE Conference on English Education, 2009). The activity consists of several thought and discussion prompts designed to create opportunities for students to connect with the lived experiences of characters in each story once that story has been read.

Directions

Each prompt should be treated as an extended journal entry or extemporaneous writing exercise. Once students have completed a prompt response, they orally share their responses in groups of two to four while the teacher facilitates, moving from group to group. These small-group discussions can then grow into large-group discussions. Each time a prompt is completed, small-group discussions should take place before the next prompt is given. Note: If students choose not to respond to one of the personal connection portions of any prompt (for reasons other than lack of background or experience), allow this, as refusal is a student's right. However, do give them the opportunity to explain why they refused.

Small-Group Thought and Discussion Prompts

1. Select a character from the novel and describe his/her background, belief system, and principles. How do you think that character arrived at these belief systems and principles? Do any of your selected character's values compare to yours? Explain.
2. Describe an episode in the novel when your character feels helpless, oppressed, desperate, or when they oppress or make someone else feel helpless. Has this ever happened to you?
3. Place yourself in your chosen character's environment. Select two to three specific situations in the novel (student or teacher may select) and describe how you might have responded differently than your character in each situation. Provide reasons for your responses.
4. Connect two to three situations from the novel with real-world issues and events. If you have experienced or witnessed similar situations to those portrayed in the novel, feel free to share.

Follow-Up Activity

Encourage discussion about current perceived injustices, and give students space to voice them. Ask students to role-play scenes that involve an unjust act against someone (e.g., discrimination or bullying based on social class, national origin, language, ethnicity), and then discuss possible solutions to each situation.

Final Thoughts

In order to create safe classroom spaces, educators must take the time to foster empathy among their students. Promoting and nurturing understanding, awareness, and sensitivity to others who have had vastly different life experiences are paramount to this effort. Young adult literature that respectfully portrays the experiences of undocumented Latinx adolescents in ways that enable readers to experience verisimilitude and create opportunities for text-to-text, text-to-self, and text-to-world connections is a powerful tool toward that goal.

Promoting and nurturing understanding, awareness, and sensitivity to others who have had vastly different life experiences are paramount to this effort.

Notes

1. *Latinx* is a gender-neutral term that refers to individuals with cultural ties to Latin America and individuals of Latin American descent. The "x" replaces the standard male "o" and female "a" endings used in the Spanish language and is intended to be more gender inclusive. The term is being used more frequently in the United States and is "part of a linguistic revolution that aims to move beyond gender binaries and is inclusive of the intersecting identities of Latin American descendants. In addition to men and women from all racial backgrounds, Latinx also makes room for people who are trans, queer, agender, non-binary, gender non-conforming, or gender fluid" (Ramirez & Blay, 2016).
2. The term *illegal immigrant* is considered insensitive by many. Several news organizations, including the *Los Angeles Times* and the *Associated Press,* have banned the use of the term, saying that it "lacked precision and broadly labeled a large group" (Guskin, 2013). I choose to use the term *undocumented people*, which both the *Times* and *AP* have used for several

years. Some news organizations are now using the term *unauthorized* in place of *undocumented*.

3. Arpaio was recently pardoned by President Donald Trump.

***Bryan Gillis** is an associate professor of English Education and Literacy in the Bagwell College of Education at Kennesaw State University. He teaches courses in educational foundations, curriculum and assessment, language arts and reading methods, classroom management, and young adult literature. Bryan's roles in the Secondary and Middle Grades Education Department have included Field Experience Coordinator and Undergraduate Program Coordinator. He is currently the Executive Director of the Kennesaw State University Conference on Literature for Children and Young Adults and Editor of ALAN Picks, the ALAN online young adult literature review site. Bryan has coauthored two books*, Chris Crutcher: A Stotan for Young Adults *and* Sexual Content in Young Adult Literature: Reading between the Sheets. *His publications have appeared in* Teacher Education Quarterly, Voices from the Middle, Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy, The ALAN Review, *and* SIGNAL.

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Victor **Malo-Juvera**

Who Decides What You Can Teach?

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/publications/the-alan-review/the-alan-review-columns/.

In my time as a classroom teacher in the Miami Dade County Public School system, I taught books such as *Speak*, by Laurie Halse Anderson (1999), and had in-depth discussions with students about date rape and dating violence; *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*, by Sherman Alexie (2007), where we interrogated issues of colonialism and racism; and *Geography Club*, by Brent Hartinger (2003), through which we examined homophobia and homophobic bullying. Although these novels have been frequently challenged and banned elsewhere (Peters, 2016), I was never in fear of being forbidden to teach any text. Many teachers today do not enjoy similar rights to choose texts, and every year at the ALAN Workshop, I have discussions with public school teachers who are not allowed by their administrations to teach certain texts. Why is it that I was able to choose texts while many of my colleagues across the country are not? The answer is both simple and complicated: academic freedom.

Academic freedom is a wide-ranging concept that operates both at the university and K–12 levels, and in the most general ways refers to the protections that professors, teachers, students, and institutions (such as universities and public schools) are afforded from external censorship. These protections are rooted in the Germanic concepts of Lehrfreiheit and Lernfreiheit, which describe the freedom of the teacher and of the student in academic pursuits; in America, however, academic freedom is based in constitutional law, contract law, and academic custom (Euben, 2004). The basis for an individual's academic freedom stems from the First Amendment's ban on prohibiting free speech and in a cultural belief in the intellectual freedom of teachers and students that is often described as the right of "faculty members . . . to speak and write as they please without interference from the university, the state, or the public [and] the right of students to engage in discussion without fear of reprisal" (Wood, 2009).

The study of academic freedom encompasses many fields, including law, library science, and education, and there is even a scholarly journal dedicated to the topic, the *Journal of Academic Freedom.* Although there are many facets to academic freedom—including the protection of speech outside the classroom, the right of teachers to bring in guest speakers, and the right to criticize policies and superiors—this article will focus on how academic freedom relates to public school classroom teachers and their ability to choose curricula, especially as it relates to English language arts teachers choosing texts and topics.

Current legal precedents for academic freedom related to teachers' right to choose curricula are heavily influenced by the landmark supreme court decision in *Hazelwood v Kuhlmeier* (1988). In this case, the principal of Hazelwood East High School in St. Louis County, Missouri, removed a page from the school's student newspaper because he deemed two articles that addressed divorce and student pregnancy objectionable (Moshman, 2009). The students sued, arguing that their First Amendment rights had been

violated. The initial court ruling found in favor of the principal, but the Eighth Circuit Court of Appeals reversed that decision and found that the principal's actions violated the students' freedom of speech. The case went to the Supreme Court, which overturned the appeals court 5-3, reaffirming the principal's right to censor what was considered to be official school speech. The court concluded in its opinion that educators, in this case the school principal, "do not offend the First Amendment by exercising editorial control over the style and content of student speech in school-sponsored activities" (Hazelwood v. Kuhlmeier, 1988, p. 273). This court ruling was decisive because it found that "the curriculum, and all speech associated with it" were "a domain largely outside the scope of the First Amendment" (Moshmann, 2009, p. 33), effectively placing the final say on all curricular decisions in the hands of school administrators and/or school boards.

Court cases involving academic freedom specifically related to English teachers are few, but the verdicts are not promising for those looking to deviate from a proscribed reading list. One such case was *Minarcini v Strongsville City School District* (1976), where the Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals found that school boards had the right to ban texts from being purchased by school libraries or assigned as reading in classes and that school boards could prohibit teachers and students from simply discussing the banned books; on the other hand, the court ruled that the school board could not remove texts from the school library (Algeo & Zirkel, 1987). Thus, once a book has entered a library, it is more difficult for it to be removed; unfortunately, the same does not hold true for texts in classrooms and curricula.

Other cases have reinforced the power of school boards to be the ultimate decider in curriculum, and courts have found that they can create reading lists and forbid teachers from deviating from them as long as no "systematic effort was made to exclude any particular type of thinking or book" (*Cary v Board of Education*, 1979). School boards can also require prior approval of all curricular materials used in classes, providing "the board does not create a curriculum that favors a particular race, religion, or political preference" (Algeo & Zirkel, 1987, p. 180). Thus, although commonly thought of as an individual's right to free speech, academic freedom is strongest when exercised by institutions such as school boards or universities; however, there is one group that can override them: state legislatures.

A recent example of a legislature dictating curricular policies to a school district was the Arizona legislature's ban on Ethnic Studies programs, accomplished through Bill 2281 and signed into law by Arizona Governor Jan Brewer (R) in 2010. The bill specifically targeted a Mexican American Studies program offered by the Tucson Unified School District; it banned districts from offering courses that: 1) promote the overthrow of the United States government; 2) promote resentment toward a race or class of people; 3) are designed primarily for pupils of a particular ethnic group; and 4) advocate ethnic solidarity instead of the treatment of pupils as individuals. School districts that were found to be in violation of the law would face losing up to 10% of their state funding. After seven years of court battles in which lower courts found in favor of the state, Bill 2281 was ruled unconstitutional in 2017 by the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals, with Judge A. Wallace Tashima finding that the "enactment and enforcement" of the law were "motivated by racial animus" (Depenbrock, 2017).

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The ability of state legislatures to influence curriculum by punitively withholding educational funding is not limited to K–12 schools, as state universities have also been targets. When the South Carolina legislature did not approve of the University of South Carolina, Upstate's use of *Out Loud: The Best of Rainbow Radio* (Madden & Chellew-Hodge, 2010), a queer-themed text assigned as common reading in first-year seminars, they voted to cut $17,142 from the university's budget. The South Carolina legislature similarly cut $52,000 from the College of Charleston's budget because it used an LGBTQ-themed graphic novel *Fun Home* (Bechdel, 2007) as its first-year summer reading selection. The legislature was unequivocal in voicing

the punitive nature of its actions, as representative Gary Smith (R), who proposed the budget cuts, said, "One of the things I learned over the years is that if you want to make a point, you have to make it hurt" (Leichenger, 2014).

Unfortunately, this type of legislative aversion to LGBTQ issues is nothing new, as seven states have laws that prevent or dictate how educators can address LGBTQ issues in classrooms. These laws, commonly known as "no promo homo laws," are currently in effect in Alabama, Arizona, Louisiana, Mississippi, Oklahoma, South Carolina, and Texas. The laws have varying impacts: mandates in Alabama and Texas related to sexual health education require students be taught that being gay "is not a lifestyle acceptable to the general public"; Arizona's law bans instruction that "portrays homosexuality as a positive alternative life-style"; and South Carolina's law relegates discussions of homosexuality to discussions of sexually transmitted diseases (Lambda Legal). Although not aimed specifically at English language arts teachers, these laws often have the side effect of effectively censoring queer texts from English language arts classrooms.

[I]t is apparent that academic freedom functions only in areas where legislative bodies have not found cause to intercede, and even then, it functions much more vigorously as an institutional right for school districts and school boards than it does for individual teachers.

Legal challenges to these types of laws have been less successful than the fight against Arizona Bill 2281. Utah had a similar law that effectively silenced "virtually any discussion of LGBT topics" (Thoreson, 2017). Although a challenge to the law had been filed by Equality Utah, lawmakers repealed the no homo provision in 2017, effectively ending the legal challenge to it. Thus, there have been no court rulings to contradict the power of states to censor or dictate how LGBTQ issues are addressed in public schools.

Although state legislatures wield considerable power of curriculum, citizens can also dictate curriculum through ballot initiatives. An example of ballot initiatives dictating not only curriculum but even teaching methods was California's Proposition 227, which made English-only instruction the only type of instruction that Limited English Proficient students could receive. This proposition passed in 1998 with the support of 61% of voters and was in effect until it was repealed in 2016, this time by California Proposition 58, which passed with 74% approval. During the 18 years the ban was in effect, courts consistently found Prop 227 constitutional despite it being challenged as unconstitutional through lawsuits filed by teachers unions, parents, and bilingual education supporters such as the Mexican American Legal Defense Fund and the American Civil Liberties Union (Jorsett, 2002). Thus, it seems that curricular decisions can be made by almost everyone except individual classroom teachers.

Beyond having a say at the ballot box, Florida citizens now have direct access to challenging any type of curriculum through Florida HB 989, which was signed into law by Governor Rick Scott (R) in 2017. This law allows Florida residents, regardless of whether or not they have a child in public schools, to object to a school's use of "specific instructional material"; furthermore, it requires that school boards "hold at least one open public hearing [per public objection][that] must be conducted before an unbiased and qualified hearing officer who is not an employee or agent of the school district" (Florida Senate, 2017, p. 5). Thus, the law removes final say on curriculum from school boards, as the arbiter of these challenges would be "an unbiased and qualified hearing officer who is not an employee or agent of the school district" (Florida Senate, 2017). Exactly what constitutes an unbiased and qualified officer is mysterious, but the position has been described as "a kind of literary officer" who "would hear the parent's concerns and make a determination about if the book [or other challenged materials] can stay" (Magnoli, 2017). The law was developed by the Florida Citizens' Alliance, a conservative group that supports teaching intelligent design as part of science classes and whose co-founder, Keith Flaugh, has argued that much of the literature taught in schools is pornographic, including "*Angela's Ashes*, *A Clockwork Orange*, and books by author Toni Morrison" (Allen, 2017).

Taken together, it is apparent that academic free-

dom functions only in areas where legislative bodies have not found cause to intercede, and even then, it functions much more vigorously as an institutional right for school districts and school boards than it does for individual teachers. Teachers are not entirely without recourse, though, as some public school teachers are granted varying degrees of academic freedom as a contractual provision negotiated through collective bargaining.

Teachers Unions and Academic Freedom

Teachers unions are best known for negotiating salaries, healthcare, performance evaluations, layoff procedures, and due process rights; however, academic freedom provisions are often an important part of contractual negotiations. Recent attacks on teachers unions have been highly publicized, as both conservative and liberal politicians have sought to impose more charter schools across the country and to pay teachers according to their students' test scores. But how has the push to privatize public education affected academic freedom for public school teachers?

To answer this question, it is important to begin with a survey of collective bargaining rights across the country. At the current time, 28 states have "right to work" laws, which prohibit unions from requiring membership from the employees who are covered by their negotiated contracts. In other words, under these criteria, unions are allowed to collectively bargain contracts for all employees, but all employees are not required to join the unions, effectively reducing the amount of dues paid to the unions, concomitantly reducing the unions' power both in negotiations and politics. Beyond right to work laws, which are clearly intended to weaken the power of collective bargaining, five states have made it illegal for teachers to collectively bargain: Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Texas, and Virginia (Lubin, 2011). Thus, in these states, teachers have virtually no individual academic freedom. Considering that tenure has been eliminated for teachers in Kansas, North Carolina, and Florida, and that efforts are underway to weaken tenure in many other states, it is easy to conclude that academic freedom is on the endangered list and may already be extinct in many states.

On the other hand, teachers in states where unions are able to collectively bargain may have more established and formal academic freedoms. I taught in the Miami-Dade County School system (Florida is a right to work state), where teachers' contracts were negotiated by the United Teachers of Dade (UTD). Although the school board reiterated its control of curriculum in the preamble to academic freedom: "[T]he Board has the authority to establish educational policy and the guidelines for utilization of instructional materials of any nature in classroom presentation" (UTD, 2015, p. 138), our contract had what would be considered a very strong academic freedom clause that guaranteed "freedom in classroom presentations and discussions" and the ability to "introduce political, religious, or other controversial material" when teachers deemed it appropriate. Furthermore, teachers were "guaranteed freedom of choice and flexibility with respect to teaching styles and methodology" and were allowed to express "personal opinions on all matters relevant to the course content," as long as they clearly indicated they were sharing personal opinions. Finally, teachers were "not to be censored . . . on the grounds that the material discussed and/or opinions expressed are distasteful or embarrassing to those in authority" (UTD, 2015, p. 138).

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This provision was part of the culture of schools in the MDCPS system and allowed teachers to have control over most curricular choices. Typically, departments would develop a vertically integrated curriculum, choosing common texts for grade levels while still allowing teachers to add individual titles at their professional discretion. The system worked so well that Artie Leichner, First Vice President of UTD from 2005 to 2013, could not recall any instances where conflicts over English teachers' textual choices led

to filed grievances. On the other hand, how teachers tested students became a contentious issue, as many principals urged or even tried to require teachers to use assessments that mirrored state standardized tests. In instances where teachers and administrators were in conflict, the academic freedom provision proved invaluable in protecting teachers' right to choose the way they assessed student learning.

Other teachers unions have similar provisions, including the United Federation of Teachers in New York City, whose contract details the process through which conflicts between teachers and administrators over curriculum and textbook selection are handled; the Chicago Teachers Union contract, in which principals are encouraged to "consult with grade level representatives and/or department chairs . . . to determine the selection of texts and instructional materials" (CTU, 2016, p. 44); or the Clark County Education Association contract for Las Vegas teachers, which stipulates that teachers have the discretion to use supplementary materials, though the contract does recognize the principal as the instructional leader of each school.

The seat at the table myth turned out to be exactly that, a myth, as during the Obama presidency, teachers unions suffered major setbacks in relation to organizing, evaluation, pay raises, and tenure across the nation.

Beyond negotiating for contractual academic freedom, local, state, and national unions have been instrumental in fighting legislative infringements on teachers' rights. For example, the California Teachers Association filed and lost a legal challenge to Proposition 227 and also played a critical role in successfully fighting plaintiffs in the Vergara case, which sought to erode tenure. The Florida Education Association filed a lawsuit against its state's teacher evaluation system (*Cook v. Stewart*, 2014), and the Florida Education Association House of Delegates recently voted to initiate a legal challenge to Florida HB 989. Unions also stand up for teachers when their individual academic freedom is violated; an example of this was the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) filing a lawsuit against Mayor Rahm Emmanuel's "handpicked" Board of Education for firing a teacher after she criticized school leadership for failing to provide adequate services to special education students (CTU, 2017).

The Seat at the Table Myth

During the Obama presidency, teachers unions were often at a crossroads. Many members supported the overall goals of the Obama agenda, but most were opposed to his Department of Education policies that supported the corporatization and privatization of public education. Although the Federal Department of Education did not punish states by threatening to withhold funds, it achieved much more by using the lure of billions of dollars through its Race to the Top initiative. This competitive $4.35 billion grant award program, started in 2009 during the midst of the recession caused by the housing bubble crisis, was used to cajole states into adopting educational policies such as eliminating bans on or increasing charter schools, evaluating teacher performance according to student test scores, and embracing the Common Core State Standards. (For an in-depth examination of the policies advocated for in Race to the Top, see Diane Ravitch's [2013] *Reign of Error: The Hoax of the Privatization Movement and the Danger to America's Public Schools*.)

During this time, some union members argued that they could not support a president whose agenda was so anti-public education, while others, including national, state, and local union leaders, contended that supporting the Obama administration would get teachers a "seat at the table" during educational reform talks. There was a real backlash to this; the most notable example could be the 2010 election of Karen Lewis as president of the Chicago Teachers Union. Karen Lewis, a science teacher who was unabashedly anti-Obama in terms of educational policy, defeated incumbent Marilyn Lewis, who had embraced the seat at the table myth and refused to be critical of Obama's education policies. Since taking over the CTU, Karen Lewis has become nationally renowned for battling Mayor Rahm Emmanuel (D) by fighting school closings, battling against charters, and leading the CTU on its 2012 strike.

The seat at the table myth turned out to be exactly that, a myth, as during the Obama presidency, teachers unions suffered major setbacks in relation to organizing, evaluation, pay raises, and tenure across

the nation. Furthermore, well-respected *Washington Post* education columnist Valerie Strauss (2017) has argued that the Democrats and the Arne Duncan years set the stage for a Betsy DeVos-led Department of Education.

Saving Academic Freedom

The Power (or Not) of the Vote

For teachers interested in retaining or gaining a say in curricular decisions, the most important thing to do is to vote. In all elections. Not just in presidential years. Unfortunately, teachers do not vote. Yes, citizens who are employed as teachers go to the voting booth, but the vast majority of them do not cast their votes as teachers, because many mirror a large part of the general population who either vote strictly down the ticket along party lines or who are issues-voters, choosing candidates based on single topics, such as abortion, gun control, gay rights, or immigration. Could you vote for a candidate who agreed with you completely on educational policies but who disagreed with your view on one of the above issues?

Both major political parties seem to have decided that the teacher vote, if it exists at all, is not worth courting. Republicans, many of whom have backed various forms of vouchers and elements of privatization since the infamous *Nation at Risk* report was released in 1986 (even though most of its assertions were debunked in *The Manufactured Crisis* [1995]), seem to have written off teachers as potential supporters. This is confirmed somewhat by numerous studies that show that educators in general are members of one of the most liberal professions. Verdant Labs' (2016) study based on political donations found that teachers are predominantly Democrats (79%) and that English teachers are the second most Democratic of all teacher types (97% Democrat), eclipsed only by health educators (99% Democrat). A similar study that also used donations to political candidates as a metric found that academics are second only to the entertainment industry in being liberal, which is traditionally associated with Democrats (Kiersz & Walker, 2014). Many Democrats also appear to have noticed these patterns and may have concluded that teachers are going to vote for them regardless of what type of educational policies they adopt. This, too, is supported by research that found that, in the 2016 election, education ranked as only the 8th most important issue for voters (Pew Research Center, 2016).

Can Anything Be Done?

The first step for many teachers will be to get involved with local unions. I do not advocate for being a dogmatic cheerleader for whatever your union is doing, but I do encourage readers to become part of the conversation, and when issues related to academic freedom arise, speak up. When your union is considering endorsing a candidate who does not value public education, refuse to support that endorsement. Moreover, fight against it. If you are in a state that outlaws collective bargaining, get involved in protests that support public education, such as the Moral Monday protests in North Carolina, or join an NCTE special interest group working for students and teachers, such as the CEE Commission on Social Justice in Teacher Education Programs, who at the 2015 NCTE Annual Convention in Minneapolis led a demonstration on the exhibition floor protesting Pearson's role in the corporatization of public education.

[R]emember that it is easy to speak up against those you see as your opposition. What is needed at least as much is for all educators, teachers, administrators, and professors to find the courage to speak out against those they see as their allies but who do not have the best interests of public education at heart.

Resist. Yes, now that President Donald J. Trump is in office, many educators are speaking up loudly against Betsy DeVos, against policies that threaten undocumented students, and against the censoring of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention from using words such as "evidence based," "diversity," and "fetus." However, remember that it is easy to speak up against those you see as your opposition. What is needed at least as much is for all educators, teachers, administrators, and professors to find the courage to speak out against those they see as their allies but who do not have the best interests of public education at heart. This will become critical as the 2020 election

looms closer with each passing day. Will educators support presidential candidates just because they are not "the other guy"? Or will they demand a candidate who actually has a pro-public education platform?

Conclusion

Academic freedom is not just about teaching texts that deal with topics that some may find offensive; it is about deciding who has a say in what is best for students. Should it include a classroom teacher? A school principal? A politician who has never taught? A textbook company whose main goal is to reap profits? If you believe that children are individuals whose needs should be known when making curricular decisions, then the answer is clear. There are myths, rhetoric, and millions of dollars in potential profit that motivate those who support standards, curricula, and tests developed far removed from the students who will be subjected to them. Without all educators, both in public schools and in the professorate, becoming active opponents to these forces, not only will teachers' freedom to choose curricula and materials become endangered everywhere, but public education as we know it today may be changed irrevocably.

Victor Malo-Juvera *is a former middle school English language arts teacher who is now an associate professor of English Education at the University of North Carolina Wilmington, where he teaches courses in young adult and multicultural young adult literature. He has appeared on NPR's* All Things Considered *to discuss his research on young adult literature and rape myths. His work has been published in journals such as* Research in the Teaching of English, Teachers College Record, Study and Scrutiny: Research in Young Adult Literature, Journal of Language and Literacy Education, *and* SIGNAL.

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Lotta **Larson**
with
Shelbie **Witte**

The Beyond Books Project:
Preparing Teachers and Students for a World of (In)Equities

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/publications/the-alan-review/the-alan-review-columns/.

The main force pushing toward reduction in equality has always been the diffusion of knowledge and the diffusion of education.

—Thomas Piketty

Piketty's assertion as an economics scholar aligns well with our belief in the power of education. This issue of *The ALAN Review* focuses on the complexities of economics and the ways in which the economics of the world are reflected in the young adult literature (YAL) we share with our students. While economics and inequities may be directly mentioned or discussed in texts, most of our understanding of the influence of economics and equity in YAL occurs indirectly through our understanding of the setting, the characters' lives, and events that surround those lives. To help our students better understand the complexities of equality and the economic disparities that exist in our world, we often turn to texts as a framework for discussions and inquiry.

On a recent campus visit to Kansas State University, I was drawn to Lotta Larson's work with texts wherein she incorporates the types of knowledge diffusions that we need in order to fight against inequality. The Beyond Books project, developed for use with preservice teachers, highlights the ways in which we can use traditional and nontraditional texts, coupled with digital and online resources, to enhance learning experiences for students in the classroom. Through this project, students integrate "texts" in all forms to highlight inequities in localized and global dimensions. As a professor at Kansas State University, Lotta teaches in the literacy program as well as the Master of Arts in Teaching program in literacy and technology integrations.

The Beyond Books Project

by Lotta Larson

The theme of this issue hones in on socioeconomic issues and inequities around the world. Over the past 20 years, income inequalities have drastically increased throughout the world, and family life has become progressively disparate with respect to socioeconomic status (e.g., Fingerman et al., 2015; Pew Research Center, 2016). Our classrooms brim with students representing diverse ethnic and linguistic backgrounds, along with disparate socioeconomic situations, family structures, rural and urban upbringings, etc. In the United States alone, over 15 million young people (21%) live in families with incomes below the federal poverty threshold, with the highest poverty rates existing among African American, Latinx, and American Indian youth (National Center for Children in Poverty, 2017). Current trends in YA literature mirror these economic and social inequalities, as marginalized and diverse voices are gaining representation in the field. Furthermore, there is a surge in both fiction

and nonfiction books that tackle issues related to the current political and socioeconomic climate, including the Black Lives Matter movement or migration and refugee experiences (Roback, 2017).

As a teacher educator, I recognize the importance of preparing new teachers who understand content and pedagogy. Even more important, I strive to prepare teachers who are responsive to the unique needs of their students and able to develop strong connections between students' experiences and academic outcomes (Darling-Hammond, Wei, Andree, Richardson, & Orphanos, 2009). Through the Beyond Books project, I encourage my students (preservice teachers) to walk in someone else's shoes and use YA literature as a springboard for conversation about sensitive topics like race, social and economic inequities, and political controversies.

In addition to using YA literature, the Beyond Books project integrates digital tools and multimodal literacies. The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) (2008/2013) recognizes that "literacy has always been a collection of cultural and communicative practices . . . . As society and technology change, so does literacy" (n.p.). However, since new technologies demand new literacies, traditional literacy instruction is no longer sufficient (International Reading Association, 2009; Leu, Kinzer, Coiro, Castek, & Henry, 2013), nor is the idea of limiting the act of reading to experiences where the endpapers truly signify the end. In other words, today's students deserve opportunities to move beyond books to unearth multiple, and multimodal, layers of information while gaining diverse perspectives. While the Beyond Books project can support almost any topic or theme, it is particularly effective in addressing matters of diversity, race, and economic disparity. Simply put, it helps learners place themselves in someone else's shoes.

I started the Beyond Books project over a decade ago to help prepare teachers to orchestrate literacy instruction in which books serve as a portal for diverse, multimodal explorations. Originally, the idea was to pair twin texts—fiction and nonfiction texts about the same topic (Camp, 2000)—with a related website "for the purpose of opening a new gateway to learning" (Hancock, 2004, p. 356). In response to the need for more participatory, diverse literacy experiences, the Beyond Books project has evolved over the years. Rather than passively consuming information from books and online sources, I now nudge my students to produce, share, and co-create information with authentic audiences through the use of digital tools. While the primary focus remains on the literature, the online resources extend content in diverse, multimodal formats.

Classroom Applications

So, what does this look like in the classroom? In truth, I tweak the project every semester to address current topics and meet the needs and interests of individual students. Obviously, this holds true when working with adolescents, as well. Below, I share two variations of the Beyond Books project, one in which students engage in literature response projects and another in which they participate in global collaborations. No matter the version, the basic components remain the same:

Rather than passively consuming information from books and online sources, I now nudge my students to produce, share, and co-create information with authentic audiences through the use of digital tools.

1. **Introduce:** Explain that the Beyond Books project focuses on literature but extends print-text reading to include multimodal experiences. Show and discuss examples of twin texts (books from different genres on the same topic) coupled with websites, digital tools, or apps that further help readers gain information on the topic.
2. **Model:** Share a Beyond Books project to demonstrate how students can explore twin texts and websites. Select a theme that relates to current units of study or a topic in which students have expressed particular interest. Examples of twin texts and related websites can be found at ReadWriteThink.org (search: Beyond Books).
3. **Differentiate:** If teachers or students are new to integrating reading experiences and technology, begin by simply reading fiction and nonfiction books and viewing related websites. Gradually move from consuming information to creating, sharing, and

collaborating in online environments. Consider the unique needs, interests, and background experiences of your students by adjusting genres and online resources as needed. Create your own rules!

4. **Consider Technology Tools:** Don't let limited technology resources constrain your Beyond Books aspirations. Many collaborative tools are free to educators (e.g., Edmodo, Smore, VoiceThread, Skype, Google Classroom, etc.). Although it helps if every student has access to a laptop or other device, it is not a necessity. Shared Internet experiences only require one computer and one projector. Similarly, groups of students, or an entire class, can engage in a collaborative global partnership. It doesn't have to be an individual experience.
5. **Share:** Regardless of whether students create a traditional book report or engage with others on a global scale, pinpoint opportunities for sharing students' work. Ideally, the audience will contribute feedback and unique perspectives. However, it's always a good idea to start small—perhaps within your own classroom or building—and gradually seek audiences or partnerships far beyond classroom walls.

Example 1: Literature Response Projects

To learn about the worst economic downturn in the history of the industrialized world, my students are captivated by Karen Hesse's free-floating verse in *Out of the Dust* (1997) and the compelling photographs in Russell Freedman's *Children of the Great Depression* (2005). These fiction and nonfiction books are paired with the History Channel website (http://www.history.com/). Here, students listen to President F. D. Roosevelt's 1935 fireside chat radio broadcast on the New Deal Programs (http://www.history.com/topics/great-depression/speeches/franklin-d-roosevelt-on-new-deal-programs?m=52af5724c3c2e&s=undefined&f=1&free=false) and view authentic photographs of soup kitchens and bread lines (http://www.history.com/topics/great-depression/pictures/soup-kitchens-and-breadlines). The students also listen to National Public Radio (NPR) interviews with survivors of the Great Depression (http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=97468008). In response to the literature and NPR voice recordings, my students write their own scripts in which fictional characters account for diverse experiences in the 1930s. They garner historical facts along with fabricated details from the books and websites to create believable characters and settings. Some characters tell tales of desperate situations and living conditions, while others face fewer difficulties. To reach a larger audience, the interviews are recorded and shared as VoiceThreads (https://voicethread.com/).

Another example takes a close look at the impact of poverty on children's chances for future success. Here, we read *The Other Wes Moore: One Name, Two Fates* (Moore, 2010), which follows the true opposing narratives of two men who happen to have the same name but grow up under very different circumstances. As explained by Wes Moore himself, "The chilling truth is that his story could have been mine. The tragedy is that my story could have been his" (p. xi). *The Serpent King* (Zentner, 2016), in which three fictional high school seniors struggle to find their way in the face of economic inequities, also depicts how being born into particular circumstances influences an individual's path in life. To gain further background knowledge, students watch the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) "NewsHour" segment *Land of the Free, Home of the Brave* (https://youtu.be/YnQwTS-K6jI), study the Pew Research Center's report *America's Shrinking Middle Class* (*http://assets.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2016/05/Middle-Class-Metro-Areas-FINAL.pdf*), and complete the interactive, online PBS quiz *Are you in the American middle class?* (http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2016/05/11/are-you-in-the-american-middle-class/). In response to the literature and news clips, students write, produce, and share their own news segments in which they conduct interviews with someone who represents a different economic background than their own.

A similar example works to broaden students' understandings and perspectives of the American Civil Rights Movement as students read *The Watson's Go to Birmingham—1963* (Curtis, 1995), a cogent work of historical fiction, and the picturebook *The Other Side* (2001), in which Jacqueline Woodson's lyrical words come to life through E. B. Lewis's beautiful illustrations. They also read Ruby Bridges's autobiographical account, *Through My Eyes* (1999). Several websites enhance understanding of the topic, including that of the National Civil Rights Museum (https://www.civilrightsmuseum.org/), where visitors can conduct a virtual tour of exhibits and galleries.

To help students make connections between the Civil Rights Movement of the past and current events, I ask them to read and respond to news blogs such as *Huffington Post* (https://www.huffingtonpost.com/) or *BuzzFeed* (https://www.buzzfeed.com). Keeping past struggles for civil rights in mind while reading about National Football League player demonstrations, recent cases of police brutality, or the proposed changes to immigration policies helps students examine their own beliefs while considering new, or different, perspectives. In addition to sharing opinions and engaging in blog discussions, I encourage students to write to their local newspapers or contact their congressional representatives (https://www.house.gov/representatives/find/). Helping students find an authentic audience elevates their own learning as they broaden perspectives and engage others in conversation about important topics.

Example 2: Global Collaborations

In addition to creating response projects, my preservice teachers engage in global collaborations with ninth graders in Sweden who are studying English as a foreign language. Given that online experiences are already pulling the world closer together, we must focus on learning opportunities across space, time, and diverse cultures. Connected learning occurs when teachers and students use new literacies and common online tools that afford them abilities to collaborate and communicate on a global scale (Lindsay, 2016).

After learning about World War II through nonfiction texts and websites, the Swedish students and the preservice teachers in the United States read *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas* (2006) by John Boyne. In this work of historical fiction, two boys, a son of a Nazi officer and a Jewish boy in a concentration camp, form a deep friendship. To extend the reading experience, the two groups discuss the book in Edmodo blogs (https://www.edmodo.com/). Here, the preservice teachers post discussion prompts, teach vocabulary words, and guide the Swedish students in online learning activities to build additional background knowledge and language (e.g., Scholastic's interactive online WWII activities at http://teacher.scholastic.com/activities/wwii/). By reading and responding to literature, the Swedish students improve verbal and written communication skills in English. The preservice teachers in the United States learn how to instruct English language learners while gaining important experience in online teaching.

The blog also serves as a platform for discussion of online texts, including articles from *National Geographic Kids* (http://kids.nationalgeographic.com/), *Time for Kids* (https://www.timeforkids.com/), and *DOGOnews* (https://www.dogonews.com/). These articles address current topics of global interest or concern (e.g., politics, environmental issues, migration, sports, etc.) at a language level appropriate for English Language Learners. While the preservice teachers in the United States have much to teach their Swedish students, they also have much to learn. Peeling back preconceived notions about the Vikings, Pippi Longstocking, and Ikea, they learn about a country with little income inequality and where *all* students receive free lunches and college tuition but, on the other hand, pay very high taxes. They learn about a country that has traditionally dealt with few racial contentions but is now debating and reacting to a recent influx in immigration (Swedish Institute, n.d.). The future teachers have described this as an eye-opening experience. Both groups learn how to use digital tools to communicate and socially construct knowledge while gaining global competencies (Larson & Brown, 2017). Of course, configurations of online literature discussions vary, as do the digital tools used to collaborate (Larson, 2009). To form a suitable partnership, teachers may turn to services such as ePals (www.epals.com), a global community where educators can connect with classrooms from around the world.

Given that online experiences are already pulling the world closer together, we must focus on learning opportunities across space, time, and diverse cultures.

Moving Forward

To prepare teachers for a diverse and changing world, we need to offer opportunities for walking in someone else's shoes. Considering the complex, multimodal texts students encounter, both in print and digital form, their skills and strategies must expand beyond

those sufficient for traditional print-text reading (Serafini, 2015). Learners need skills to evaluate real and "fake" news; collaborate and communicate across time and space; and decipher a deluge of economic, societal, and environmental concerns and inequities. Today's students have a right to "literacy instruction that embeds critical and culturally sensitive thinking into print and digital literacy practices" (International Reading Association), 2009, n.p.). NCTE (2008/2013) agrees that teacher preparation programs must require training in the integration of technology and literacy instruction. However, technology in and of itself won't make a difference unless teachers offer students augmented opportunities to engage in authentic learning experiences in which they can learn *with* the world rather than *about* the world (Lindsay, 2016/2017). By engaging my preservice teachers in this project, I hope that they, in turn, will design authentic learning opportunities for their future students. The ideas presented in this article are mere suggestions, limited only by the imaginations of educators. I encourage you to share your ideas!

Learners need skills to evaluate real and "fake" news; collaborate and communicate across time and space; and decipher a deluge of economic, societal, and environmental concerns and inequities.

Lotta Larson *(@lottalarson2) is an associate professor in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at Kansas State University, where she teaches literacy-related courses to graduate and undergraduate students. Her research explores how new literacies and digital tools promote literacy instruction, online experiences, and global collaborations. Her recent work appears in the* Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy, The Reading Teacher, Educational Leadership, *and* Kappa Delta Pi Record. *A former sixth-grade teacher, she enjoys working with (and learning from) students and teachers. She can be reached at lottalarson@ksu.edu.*

Shelbie Witte *(@shelbiewitte) is the Kim and Chuck Watson Endowed Chair in Education and an associate professor of Adolescent Literacy and English Education at Oklahoma State University, where she directs the Oklahoma State University Writing Project and leads the Initiative for 21st Century Literacies Research. Her research focuses on the intersection of 21st century literacies and pedagogy, particularly at the middle level. She is coeditor, along with Sara Kajder, of NCTE's* Voices from the Middle.

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Kayla **Cagan,** Love **Maia,** and Lilliam **Rivera**

What We Have and Who We Are: (Socio)Economics and Identity

A Collaborative Conversation

From the Editors: In this collaborative conversation, we are excited to feature the voices of three YA authors whose books explore how (socio)economics and personal identity are inherently connected. We are grateful for their candor and sincerity as they share how their own experiences of growing up and of writing have helped to shape their perspectives on this important—and too often neglected—topic.

As to process, we generated and sent a series of questions to each author. We compiled the responses into a single document and then sent the compiled version back and forth to authors to solicit questions, elaborations, and revisions until all were satisfied with the resulting piece. We hope that in reading this piece, you gain an appreciation for the ways in which these authors, through their words, shed light on how our identities are connected to the (socio)economic world in which we live.

How do you view the relationship between (socio) economics and identity?

Kayla: We're inseparable from this relationship from the minute we're born. I compare the relationship to the weather. When it's a nice, temperate day, we notice it less. When it's stormy, temperamental, or painful, we are controlled by it.

Love: Where you come from and how you grow up are going to be a part of your identity, but your background doesn't have to define you. For people who don't grow up with money, the additional struggles we face build character, but they can also break us down. There are so many children in our country living in poverty, and they have to fight harder. Even in the womb, they already have a higher risk of forming health issues, and a higher mortality rate follows them throughout their lives. I don't know if being very wealthy also strongly affects a person's identity, but this is where we really have a responsibility as writers to share as many characters and voices from different backgrounds as we can—to expose readers to different socioeconomic experiences, so we can each say we *do* have an idea of what it must be like to come from a background different than our own.

Lilliam: For me to be able to answer this question, I have to turn to my own personal experience growing up in the South Bronx, New York. My parents left Puerto Rico, a colonized territory of the United States, to avoid a grueling life working in the sugar plantations. They were able to secure an affordable apartment in a recently built housing project where I spent most of my childhood. Even at a young age, I was acutely aware that Manhattan was an island only meant for a select few who could afford it. Although a short train ride allowed me access to visit, I knew well enough that there were economic obstacles that kept me apart from the city.

There are certain preconceived notions based on where I'm from, expectations that continue to

follow me throughout my adulthood. My last name adds to the assumption. Being a light-skinned Latina allows me some privilege, but stating where I'm from will always be tied to my identity and how others perceive me. There is a saying that you can tell where a person is from by the shoes they wear. This is so tied to socioeconomics and identity. Are you supposed to be here? Do you belong? The answers to these questions dictate how a young person navigates spaces that were never meant for them.

Is there something unique about the influence of (socio)economics in the development of* adolescent *identities?

Love: Adolescence is challenging and confusing, even heartbreaking at times. I don't think we should be afraid to go to dark places and reflect that experience as much as we can in our writing, and that absolutely includes exploring the struggles of poverty as it hurts children's health; stunts their educations; and affects their futures, their role models, and their overall outlooks on the world. If we don't address these struggles somewhere in our writing, those kids simply won't bother to read.

Lilliam: An article by Richard Kahlenberg published in *The Atlantic*—"Why Did It Take So Long for Class-Based School Integration to Take Hold" (https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2016/07/why-did-it-take-so-long-for-class-based-school-integration-to-take-hold/489863/)—argues that the biggest predictors of academic achievement are the socioeconomic status of the family a child comes from and the socioeconomic status of the classmates in the school she attends. The article cites a landmark study done in 1966 by Johns Hopkins University sociologist James Coleman. In an interview, Coleman states that "a child's performance, especially a working-class child's performance, is greatly benefited by going to a school with children who come from educationally stronger backgrounds."

Although there is no denying that segregation in education plays a huge role in shaping a young person's identity and success, the article goes on to state how class is an even bigger predictor of success or failure for a child. Growing up in a housing project, there was no doubt that my family would not be able to afford college. Although that didn't stop me from being the first to attend, it was the lack of information available at my public high school that limited my choices. There was limited access. I am certain my experience is not unique.

Kayla: Material objects are physical examples to kids. There are teens who get the new cars dressed with red ribbons for their 16th birthdays versus the kids who share their family cars versus the kids who save and scrimp for their own cars versus the kids who have never considered having a car because they didn't believe that was an option. There are the kids who depend on free lunches for a meal during the day, the kids who have extra cash to blow for lunch off campus, and the kids who are somewhere in-between; they all know the difference if they are around each other. For some, this is motivation. And for some, this creates a feeling that they're never going to level up. And there will be those in-between, who live in that temperate zone. And I think these differences inform what they believe they are capable of being, doing, and dreaming.

How do (socio)economics impact the identities of the characters in your fiction?

Lilliam: What excites me about writing young adult literature is being able to capture the galvanizing moments in a young person's life. There is the first kiss. The first day of school. The first moment you feel shame. In my novel *The Education of Margot Sanchez* (2017), I not only wanted to write a coming-of-age story about a young girl forced to work at her father's supermarket over the course of the summer, I also wanted to write about how Margot struggles with class. She is the "great brown hope" for her family, and with that comes desperation to fit in with her private school environment. To do so, she denies traits that make her unique. All the while, her parents' supermarket in the South Bronx is witnessing the encroaching effects of gentrification. How does that benefit, or not, her family's livelihood? I wanted Margot to open her eyes to inequalities even when privileged; although she

wears the right clothes and attends the right school, she still witnesses how fragile her position is in those spaces.

Whether I'm writing a dystopian short story or a contemporary young adult novel, I'm always exploring how race and class intersect.

Kayla: Money and class have always affected my characters, whether in my first novel, *Piper Perish*, or in my plays. Usually it is a change in status that forces my characters—YA and new adult (in their early 20s)—to examine who they are and how they live their lives.

I grew up in a lower-middle socioeconomic class, but I also had wealthy and middle-class extended family nearby. I never felt solidly in one class or the other. While my mom was struggling to make ends meet and literally keep a roof over our heads—and her pride intact—I would visit my grandparents' condo where there were endless snacks and air conditioning. My mother had a very complicated relationship with her own parents, and taking any money from them was very difficult for her, even though we needed it at times. She always felt that debt came with a higher price than just interest. I'm sure I have inherited that from her. I hate owing money. I'm scared of owing money. And my characters often share these feelings, too.

Love: My characters usually tell me who they are, but I do find that I tend to end up with a group of characters from different socioeconomic, racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds in my stories. I think it's because that's the way I see the world and also because that's the world I want others to see.

What role might story play in helping readers rethink their understandings of themselves and others relative to societal assumptions of social class identities?

Kayla: Stories create empathy. We don't all have the financial problems of a king or a homeless person, but stories help us *imagine* lives not our own. If we, as readers, can put on the velvet slippers of one character or go barefoot as another, we can become open and tolerant to a world we may not understand or appreciate. I believe that.

All of this being said, when we write or read a "rags to riches" story, we have to be careful that we don't equate riches with happiness and rags with sadness. When we see someone's departure from wealth, it should not always be as a "fall" into poverty or the sad result of learning a hard lesson. To see stories of people who manage to live in both abundance and scarcity is essential to a well-rounded and compassionate view of others and ourselves. I want to write and read more stories dealing with class and finances, especially in YA.

Love: With all due respect to publishers, most of them aren't desperately searching for the next book about a poor, minority teen. Even though socioeconomic status and race usually go hand-in-hand in the United States, publishers are often afraid to buy a story on the topic if it isn't coming from a well-known author. This creates a greater challenge for us as writers. We have to fight to see that different races, ethnicities, socioeconomic statuses, cultures, sexual identities, and other diverse identities that represent young readers are folded into the stories we tell, whatever those stories may be.

I remember watching a movie based on a popular fiction novel and being so pleasantly surprised and proud to see multiple supporting roles played by Black actors. The movie had quite a few characters of color. The book had none. But why? Why didn't that author create a fictional world that reflected the world we actually live in when it comes to race and ethnicity? Especially since the main theme of the story was poverty and a battle between rich and poor.

I'm not saying your main character can't be a rich, white, straight male. There's nothing wrong with that. He will represent one group of readers. Even as a woman of color, I don't feel pressure to make all of my main characters minorities or to avoid writing about wealthy people. But we need to expand our readers' viewpoints and help our young people think not only more deeply within themselves, but more deeply outside of themselves.

Lilliam: I think reading young adult novels allows instructors to create discussion points for adolescents. At a recent teaching conference I attended, one of the moderators created a lesson plan by

using nicknames. In my novel, the character's nickname is Princesa. How does Margot navigate her world when her nickname implies royalty? How does a privileged Latina view social justice and gentrification in a neighborhood her family owns a business in? These are great starting points in a class environment for young people to begin looking critically at the role that class and race play in realistic situations.

Love: All authors should take the time to develop diverse groups of characters when they write. By experiencing the life of a character who is different from ourselves and living vicariously through the descriptions we read of their lives, we begin to see ourselves as more similar than different. You need only read current news stories to see where America is failing when it comes to accepting each other's differences. As authors, we have the power to open our readers' minds. When words on a page combine with our own expanding imaginations, our compassion for others grows. The more we're exposed to as human beings, the more likely we are to be understanding and accepting of one another. If we don't make a conscious decision to address the economic struggles so many in our country face in our written work, we do a disservice to the young people who read our art.

As authors, we need to challenge ourselves, and we need to relate to the endless diversity of our readers' individual worlds, because each reader is so absolutely diverse. We all own the responsibility to at least attempt to write from a variety of economic viewpoints in the characters we develop. People fully accept feature films with minority main characters and openly embrace music by and about minorities who grew up impoverished, yet young readers will often pass by the book about the Latina girl from the low-income family.

While it's crucial that young readers learn about each other, it's also so important for them to discover themselves. Everyone needs characters they can personally relate to so we don't grow up feeling inadequate. While I liked my white Barbie doll just fine as a little girl, I treasured my Black Barbie. She showed me I was beautiful. Books hold this same power.

How have (socio)economics shaped your own identity as a writer?

Kayla: My mom struggled as a small business owner of a ceramics studio. She was the closest role model I had of artistic grit. She didn't quit until her passion did, and that made me believe I could survive as an artist, too. I could be in the theater, I could write, and it didn't matter if I was dirt poor. In high school and in college, I had a variety of friends. I didn't feel competitive, but I did feel jealous occasionally of the richer ones. They had their BMWs, but I had my Tennessee Williams, and that was my way of feeling full.

In my senior year of college, two things happened. One, my grandparents, who had more money than my mom and me, paid for me to go on a theater internship in New York City. That money served as a tool to help me unlock my future and experience a world bigger than my own. It changed the course of my life. The second thing that happened was that I won three writing prizes from a college literary journal contest. Altogether, the prize money totalled $250. This made me feel legit in a way I never thought I would. It's shallow, but that financial prize made me feel "real" and recognized. It reminded me so much of the Marge Piercy poem, "For the Young Who Want To," that hung over my desk for years. The prize money became an external validation for me, and I was encouraged to keep writing.

In my early 30s, when my husband and I had no savings, I convinced myself that failure wasn't an option, which I now think back on as totally nuts. I couldn't afford to fail, which also meant I often stopped myself from writing because, let's face it, you can't fail if you don't start. So I used economics as an excuse and a way to avoid my fear of not being "the perfect writer," whatever the heck that is. I was afraid of writing something that nobody would respond to; there would be no audience or readership, and then I would feel like I "wasted" all this time writing when I could have had a second job, another "real" job, or something else that would seem worthy of my time. Time became a kind of currency for me. How much is my time worth, and is it useful to use my time writing?

So now I write full time and take on side gigs when I need to, because I decided my time *is* worth it. Not having much money has taught me how to endure the harder times when they come up. Having enough money in my life, especially from writing, has made me eternally grateful that I keep getting to do what I love to do. The financial reward of my work allows me to keep growing and writing. That's priceless to me.

Lilliam: At a recent school visit in the South Bronx, I was able to walk into a massive school that, when I was young, I would pass by with fear. The school seemed so daunting and impersonal. When I walked through the metal detector, I kept imagining what it must be like for a young person to have to do this every day. But what happened in that classroom reminded me why I must continue writing for young people. The high school kids were eager to find ways to publish their own writing, just like every other kid. The only difference is that they believed that they needed permission to do so. My goal is to take away the invisible barriers that inhibit some kids from creating and pursuing their dreams.

Love: Socioeconomic status, however you define it, has nothing whatsoever to do with your dreams, your goals, your strengths and weaknesses, or what you can accomplish. Sure, having money might give you a better shot at your dreams. If you come from very little, you need to dream bigger and push harder. But chasing our dreams as we grow up and continuing to fight for them endlessly into old age is something we should *all* be doing. Having money might give you an advantage in a situation, but it might not. Every soul on this earth will have a unique life experience. I don't care where you come from, it's where you're going that matters. Where do you want to go, and how are you going to get there?

***Kayla Cagan** is a former Texan and New Yorker now living in Los Angeles. She is currently working on the sequel to* Piper Perish*, which comes out in Fall 2018, and several plays and monologues with Applause Books, due out in 2017–18. When not reading and/or writing, she's walking and chasing the world's funniest chihuahua, Banjo.*

***Love Maia** is an author and musician with a passion for diverse characters and sad stories. A full-time college student, she's spent the last few years living abroad in Australia, Costa Rica, China, and now Colombia, but often misses her hometown of San Francisco. Love feels honored to know her novels* DJ Rising *and* DJ Ice *have gone beyond telling a story of overcoming life's struggles through music to also making meaningful statements about socioeconomic status in America and the impossible obstacles our dreams may one day help us overcome.*

***Lilliam Rivera** is the author of* The Education of Margot Sanchez *(Simon & Schuster, 2017). Originally from the Bronx, New York, Lilliam currently lives in Los Angeles where she is completing her second novel,* Dealing in Dreams*, forthcoming by Simon & Schuster.*

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